Choice and constraint: Using SFL genre theory to teach primary-grade students to write arguments about literature

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Abstract: This paper offers a description and analysis of a genre-informed intervention that supported elementary-grade ELs to write arguments in response to narrative text. Instruction engaged students with the target genre's purpose, structure, and some key language features. The analysis offers an examination of the classroom discourse and materials, as well as the students' written responses. The paper offers evidence that lessons often supported students to actively engage in classroom conversations that highlighted some of the natural constraints and choices consistent with the target genre. The student writing samples provide evidence that young students are capable of writing analytical responses to literature with support. Students were able to write in ways that served the purpose of the genre and are highly valued in ELA classrooms. In addition, the analysis found significant variety among the student products: they took varied evaluative stances in response to prompts, modified their interpretations of character attitudes using nuanced lexis, and provided differing, but relevant evidence in support of their claims. Many students were likewise able to provide elaborated analysis of evidence from literary texts in a variety of ways.

Keywords: argument, genre theory, systemic functional linguistics, literary response

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1. Introduction

The ability to make effective written arguments is an essential academic skill, a point usually made in regard to secondary and post-secondary education. But the teaching of argument writing is becoming increasingly important in the elementary grades as well, particularly in the United States' (U.S.) context of accountability. The widely-adopted Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association for Best Practices, 2010) place a particular emphasis on argument writing, requiring students as early as age six to write general opinion pieces, and to write subject-specific arguments by 12. Such standards are part of a larger culture of assessment and curriculum devoted to the teaching and production of argument writing, such as the SAT, and Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs.

Yet argument writing is something students of all ages struggle to accomplish (NAEP, 1999; 2002; 2011). And classroom teachers often feel ill-equipped to support them for this complex task (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Gilbert & Graham, 2010). One of the challenges classroom teachers face is the lack of sufficient tools at their disposal. Research and teachers have rightfully expressed resistence to formulaic approaches to writing instruction, such as the "five paragraph essay" (Wiley, 2000). Writing instruction work more specific to the argument genre has offered a general foundation, such as Toulmin's model (1958/2003). In simplified terms, an argument can be described as a text that: presents a *claim* and supports it with both *evidence* and *rationale* (or *warrants*). Such functional labels offer purposeful support and have translated into classroom resources for argument writing (Hillocks, 2011). However, these general terms and approaches do not account for disciplinary differences, for arguments can vary significantly in purpose, structure, and the language features. In particular, what it means to "analyze" is often hard to articulate (Moore, Schlepperell, & Palincsar, 2018) for the ways of reasoning vary in different disciplines.

Tools and research from applied linguistics and genre theory offer constructs for understanding, and teaching, different kinds of written arguments. Specifically, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1985/1994), a meaning-based theory of language developed specifically for connecting language form to meaning in social context, offers theory and analytical tools for recognizing grammatical choices as they relate to meaning, at different levels: word-, sentence-, and text-levels. Descriptions of genres informed by this theory (Martin & Rose, 2008) offer a highly-developed set of analytical frameworks for describing the ways language is used to achieve social goals. These tools can be used to articulate the social purpose, structures, and language features of different genres, which can inform writing instruction.

This article reports on a design-based research (DBR) project (Brown, 1992; McKenney & Reeves, 2012) where university researchers and elementary school teachers from an urban-fringe district in the midwestern U.S. collaborated on ways constructs from SFL might support English Learners' (ELs) learning of language while

learning content. We designed and implemented units of instruction that engaged elementary students in analytical conversations about text (Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014), but also introduced specific argument genres in response to literature and science texts. In response to literature, students wrote in the *character analysis* genre (Christie & Derewianka, 2008), a form of response to narratives common to the secondary grades. The genre is an argument, as it expects students to make interpretations about or evaluations of characters in stories while often engaging with ethical or social issues. Lessons and materials offered opportunities and support for making interpretations and evaluations about characters, as well as tools for structuring and planning their responses.

The aims of this study are to: 1. explore the ways in which genre-based instruction engaged students with the constraints and choices of the genre as they planned their written responses; and 2. describe the features of written responses, and consider the ways their responses demonstrated variation. The study examines data from two classrooms that implemented instruction that engaged 4th and 5th grade students in the writing in the *character analysis* genre. The analysis attends to the writing process (and instruction) and product in equal measure. First, the paper examines the ways in which genre-based instruction supported and constrained student choice-making as students planned their written responses. Then, the paper examines students' written responses, examining if and how students were able to write effective arguments in response to grade-level literature. The writing analysis offers a *stage analysis* of one full class set, highlighting patterns that emerged in writing, with particular attention to variety present in the responses. The analysis also offers a fine-grained *register analysis* of the structure, tone, language features, and cohesion of one representative student response.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Genre as goal-oriented social action

Traditional, formal views of genre often treat texts as static, rigid products operating outside of social context, and sometimes paved the way for prescriptive instruction that unnaturally limited student choice and voice in their writing. However, contemporary genre theory treats genres as forms of social action—patterns of language used in order to achieve some purpose in social situations (Bazerman, 1988; Devitt, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2008). Devitt's description is apt: "Studying genre is studying how people use language to make their way in the world," (2004, p. 9). Upon this fundamental agreement, there are three main branches of genre theory and research, that of Rhetorical Genre Studies (formerly known as New Rhetoric) (Freedman & Medway, 1994; Miller, 1994), the "Sydney School" genre theory based on SFL and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2003; Swales, 1990).

Built upon varied theoretical foundations, these camps have varied ways of examining patterned ways people participate in the world, underscoring different features while working with different populations. Genre scholars in the ESP tradition has focused on supporting non-native English speaking graduate students into the structures and language features of academic writing, often informed by analyses of large corpora of student writing; much of SFL-based genre research has focused on the writing produced by elementary and secondary school students, especially in Australia; scholars of RGS have emphasized the social contexts in which genres are enacted, often employing ethnographic methods, often informing college composition pedagogy. (For more thorough summaries, see Hyon, 1996 and Wingate, 2015.) The instructional intervention and analysis presented here is primarily rooted in SFL-based genre theory and research, but work from RSG theory has likewise influenced the RQs and analysis, presented here in that order.

The SFL model of genre offers a robust way of thinking and set of tools for learning and participating in new genres. It is rooted in the notion that language is constructed in context, which is recognized by the theory at two levels: culture and situation. To map language patterns at the level of culture, SFL offers its notion of *genres,* characterized as "staged, goal oriented social processes" (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 6). Genres are not static and rigid; they are patterns, or "recurrent configurations of meaning in a culture … that … enact the social practices of a given culture." As a "goal-oriented" construct, analysis of genre aims to make explicit patterns in the social function of texts. Making the social purpose of texts in school is helpful, for research has demonstrated that teachers failed to recognize distinctions between writing tasks, referring to all student writing as "stories" (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 18).

This notion of genre also attends to patterns in structure—as a "staged" process, meaning that it often takes multiple steps to accomplish a particular goal. So, SFL genre analysis is also concerned with describing those steps that writers and speakers often make in order to achieve particular goals. With these tools, we could make explicit some of the structures or stages of types of arguments in different subject areas. It's important to note, however, that our project adopted the stance that genres are dynamic and should be modified for the users' intended purpose. For that reason, we made significant modifications to the target genre in response to our students' needs and feedback from teachers.

Making expectations and common features of genres explicit—while offering students opportunities for meaning-making and choice—promotes a more equitable form of instruction, for a better understanding of school genres can help students make their way through the often-opaque academic world. SFL scholar Mary Macken-Horarik (2002) argued that marginalized students (including ELs) fare better within a "visible curriculum": "[S]tudents need explicit induction into the genres of power if they are to participate in mainstream textual and social processes within and beyond the school" (p. 17). This theoretical foundation positions students as active participants in the processes of school, the actors making meaning as they learn to write in new genres.

2.2 Register as language in context

The ways in which students use language to convey their ideas in their writing is likewise important. SFL offers useful metalanguage in this regard as well. The context of particular situations influences *how* a particular genre takes shape. These variations can be described as the register, defined by Halliday (1978) as "a set of meanings that is appropriate to a particular function of language, together with the words and structures which express these meanings" (p. 195). *Register analysis* is concerned with describing the language features of a text and how they fit with the particular situation. SFL's notion of *register* systematically considers a situation through the variables: the *field* (the content being communicated), *tenor* (tone of language depending on relationship of participants) and *mode* (form—written or spoken, whether accompanying other semiotic resources, etc. …). In response to these variables, an adept writer makes language choices to fit the situation and achieve their goal. As these variables are multifaceted, so are the functions of the meanings a writer conveys. Simultaneously, a text:

- presents an idea or message (the *ideational meanings*)
- attends to the relationships of the participants in the exchange (the *interpersonal meanings*),
- uses language to guide the reader through the text and make it cohesive (the *textual meanings*).

SFL offers many analytical tools for describing patterns of meaning and illuminating language choices through *register analysis*. By studying register features of genres as they are realized in different situations, scholars can identify specific ways of using language that are supportive of accomplishing the genre's goal (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Rothery & Stenglin, 2000).

2.3 Research basis

In the past three decades, applications of both *genre theory* and *register analysis* have deepened understanding about texts that students encounter and produce in school. In the 1980s, Martin and colleagues trained their *genre* lens on Australia's primary schools and began mapping the genres of student writing by examining more than 2,000 texts produced by students. Subsequent work has developed detailed, functional descriptions of common school genres, their purposes, and structures (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Christie, 2012; Martin & Rose, 2008). *Register analyses* of school genres have deepened knowledge of those genres. Christie and Derewianka's *School Discourses* (2008), also based on analysis of a large corpus of texts, further developed and refined descriptions of the purposes and structures of school genres, highlighting how some of the common language features connect with the genres' social purposes. Scholars in the U.S. have likewise provided rich descriptions of discipline-specific texts, making the types of challenges they might pose to inexperienced readers more explicit (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008).

SFL researchers in the U.S. have made headway in demonstrating the potential of *genre theory* to support students' writing in varied subject areas, from elementary school to university contexts (de Oliveira & Iddings, 2014). In the Boston area, for example, Maria Brisk and colleagues have reported on a project with predominantly Spanish-speaking primary grade students in which researchers and teachers use SFL concepts to support students to write in different expository genres. Brisk, Hodgson-Drysdale and O'Connor (2011) introduced students in pre-K through grade 5 to the *report* genre, its purpose and general structure, prior to asking students to write their own reports describing an animal. This project has spawned other reports on the use of SFL in similar ways to support students' writing in different genres, such as Pavlak's (2012) unit teaching students to write biographies, and Brisk and Zisselsberger (2011), which supported kindergarten students to write fictional narratives. Work from this project demonstrates that SFL can be applied in culturally- and linguistically-sensitive ways (for example, students could choose to write a *report* in Spanish).

Schleppegrell (2013) presented evidence in support of the explicit teaching of genre- and subject-specific language features to ELs. Central to her work is the notion that SFL offers teachers and students a *metalanguage,* a language for talking about language and how it shapes meaning. Moore and Schleppegrell (2014) provided evidence of teachers and students using metalanguage to make inferences about characters' attitudes as they read, as well as to explore patterns of language and discuss an author's purpose(s) in literary texts. The lessons and conversations reported there were often in support of the kind of writing lessons analyzed in this paper. In addition, Schleppegrell and colleagues (Schleppegrell et al., 2014) provided an example of how their SFL-based genre approach modified SFL's description of the *historical recount* genre to support students' responses to meet their curricular goals in ELA by adapting the description to help students write about events in a story. It demonstrated that SFL genres can be adapted to suit different learning contexts and pedagogical goals. More recently, Symons (2017) also examined the ways in which SFL-based metalanguage could support students' selection and evaluation of evidence when writing arguments in response to scientific information about an environmental dilemma.

2.4 Extending research: exploring constraint, choice, and variety

This body of research has demonstrated the potential of SFL as an instructional tool. However, it doesn't come without risk, for rhetorical approaches to language instruction can often be implemented in prescriptive, rigid ways counter to the theoretical underpinnings (Lefstein, 2009). Scholars have raised concern about the potential harm that SFL-based genre approaches might cause students: the descriptions of genres sometimes characterized as reductionist and rigid, and potentially harmful to students' writing (Freedman, 1993). Nelson and Flores (2015) offer a critique of language instruction that emphasize appropriateness of language use (in which SFL genre theory and applications might be categorized), raise important concerns and risks: seemingly innocent descriptions of language use hold the potential to be

prescriptive, unwittingly reinforcing racist values that marginalize students of color or linguistically-diverse students.

The research from SFL-based genre theory has emphasized the specification and descriptions of genre forms over the writing process and context in which writing is produced. A greater emphasis on the ways in which SFL-based genre instruction is implemented in K-12 classrooms by teachers and students is needed. Is the writing instruction generative and supportive of students' own meaning-making, or is it prescriptive? Likewise, greater attentiveness to the writing students produce as a result of SFL-informed writing instruction is warranted. Are students meeting their goals in writing—and meeting the expectations of the genre? Is there coherence and variety in the writing?

Calling upon complementary theory from the work of RGS approaches to exploring genre can offer powerful constructs for shifting the analytical lens. That is, researchers using SFL genre theory could benefit from training their analytical focus to the contexts of writing creation—the classroom and the interactions that support it. Of particular relevance to this task is Devitt's (2004) consideration of genre and its relationship to creativity, the ways in which genres can enable and constrain choices in writing. Genres constrain people "because they are functional and make rhetorical sense," and also because "general etiquette constrains people if they want to belong to a group" (p. 148). Likewise, genres offer choice, for "not every aspect of every text is specified by any genre," and within "any genre, there is a great deal of 'free variation'" (p. 149). Importantly, rejects the dichotomous relationship between constraint and choice and the idea that "constraint is bad and choice is good" (p. 139.). Instead, she takes a dialectical stance, that constraint and choice are necessary, positive components of the genre. This idea informed the creation of analytical constructs for examining classroom discourse: *natural constraints* and *natural choice*. However, as teachers we often make pedagogical decisions to further constrain tasks or writing as a means of scaffolding learning (such as creating a graphic organizer with a particular amount of space for writing). Again, such moves are not necessarily good or bad, but they are outside of the realm of natural constraints of the writing genre, and were thus labeled *unnatural constraints*. These constructs, and how they informed analysis, are discussed in more detail in the Methods section.

This paper applies these constructs as a means to explore *how* the genre-based approach enabled and constrained student meaning-making by examining the classroom discourse. The paper also seeks determine if and how the instructional approach supported students to write responses to meet their goals and the expectations of the genre, and if they did so in varied ways. Research methods and findings were guided by the following research questions (RQs):

1. In what ways did classroom conversations and instructional materials engage students with potential constraints and choices of the genre, its purposes, structure, and language features?

2. What are the features of responses written by primary grade students who participated in the lessons? In what ways were their responses varied/similar?

2.5 Character Analysis Genre

Reading and responding to literary texts can pose significant linguistic challenges to students. Literature, even in the elementary grades, often presents complex and abstract ideas and is often written in equally complex and abstract language. In later grades, students are expected to respond to literature in analytical ways. However, the curriculum of primary grade students is not always in alignment with these challenging tasks. Instead, young students are more often asked to respond to literature in writing in the form of *personal responses* (how they *feel* about a story or character), or *reviews* (or "book reports") (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Martin & Rose, 2008). Not giving young students opportunities to analyze literature is a disservice to young people, a cruel if unintentional duplicity that denies many students the keys to success in subject English" (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 93). Young students are hungry to engage in high-order thinking, forming opinions and arguments about texts and topics. For this reason, our project chose to support students to write in the *character analysis* genre (a member of the *literary response* genre family).

Purpose and Structure

The purpose of the *character analysis* genre is to explain how a character changed and why, or to evaluate a character's words or actions for a particular purpose (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Rothery, 1996). The structure of *character analysis* is likewise important. Christie and Dreyfus (2007) found that effective reading responses (such as *character analysis*) "organize and marshal information about the texts to be responded to, in such a way that a clear focus is offered and pursued in an orderly manner" (p. 246). Christie and Derewianka (2008) describe three stages to *character analysis: character presentation, character description,* and *character judgment*. However, our project made modifications to these stages for our context, offering more specific support, as outlined in Section 3.2 and in Table 1.

Register Features

The *character analysis* genre calls for a range of specific linguistic moves by the writer. First, students need to respond to literature in ways that align with the analytical nature of the genre, and do so in ways that present opinions and evaluations in an authoritative voice. Rothery and Stenglin (2000), who analyzed literary analyses written by high school students for a standardized exam in Australia, reported that the most successful writers of literary analyses were able to evaluate texts and make judgments about characters and their actions, while struggling writers responded to texts in more personal ways. Christie and Derewianka (2008), using Appraisal analysis (Martin & White, 2005) describes highly-valued ways of reporting characters' attitudes in

successful *character analyses,* noting that *Appreciation* (of a character's traits, for example) and *Judgement* (of a character) are particularly important. These evaluations are often realized by an evaluative lexis.

In addition, students are often expected to evaluate a specific character, but also provide *elaboration* by relating their evaluations to a more general topic, which "by implication at least, often leads to reflection about life" (Christie & Derewianka, 2008, p. 71). As students evaluate characters in texts, successful students often utilize "showing" verbs (such as *This illustrates, This proves,* or *This shows*). In doing so, students present more impersonal evaluations of the characters while also discussing what the texts reveal about the characters. By beginning their evaluation with *This*, referring back to what they have presented as evidence for their claim, the writer's opinion is presented in a way that removes the writer from the equation. These "showing" verbs "represent strong propositions of a kind that do not admit qualification or challenge" (p. 74). As such, writers can present very "scaled up" opinions of characters and texts while seeming objective rather than emotional. Likewise, writers may employ verbs of thinking, feeling, and perceiving to convey their text-based inferences about a character's internal reaction to external events. These features guided the development of instructional materials described below as well as the register analysis of student writing reported in this paper.

3. Methods

3.1 Setting

Research was conducted in one large, urban school district in the midwestern U.S. During the three-year project, researchers and approximately 40 teachers and literacy specialists collaborated on ways SFL might support ELs in grades 2-5 to learn about language while learning content. The iterative development of materials was conducted in five elementary schools that serve large proportions of bilingual students, many of whom enter kindergarten with limited English. More than 90 percent of the children speak Arabic as a first language. However, many of the students have exited ESL status, having demonstrated adequate literacy proficiency on the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA). All classes reported here were mainstream classes and lessons were implemented during their literacy block. Each of the schools utilized a reading program common in the U.S. Much of the lessons developed were in response to schools' requests: an increased focus on reading comprehension of different genres, and argument writing. More than 90 percent of students in these schools qualified for free or reduced lunch, indicative of lower socio-economic status. This analysis focuses on two classrooms in separate schools, one 4th grade and one 5th grade class.

The 4th grade teacher was in her fourth year of teaching, and at the time of implementation, she had participated in the project for approximately 18 months. During that time, she participated in professional development workshops offered by

the research project. She was introduced to SFL metalanguage and how it could support student reading comprehension and writing. She demonstrated skill and enthusiasm for the SFL-related work, and co-planned the unit of instruction implemented in the 4th grade classroom. In the 5th grade classroom, I served as a teacher-researcher in 5th grade classroom in order to pilot the *character analysis* unit. I taught all of the lessons for the unit, both reading- and the writing-focused lessons; the class's teacher of record was present in the classroom and offered instructional support and feedback. It was common practice for a researcher to co-plan or co-teach with classroom teachers so as to pilot materials, and also capture video to be used as professional development workshops with additional teachers. The two teachers of focus are relative experts. The selection of these two teachers is intentional, for it offers opportunities for understanding features and results when the lessons are implemented in ways that align with the theoretical foundations and principles. More detail regarding data selection and methods addressing potential bias are described in detail in section 3.4.3.

3.2 Instructional Context

Prior to the writing-focused lessons, students did multiple readings of narrative texts, and engaged in reader response and close reading activities. The 4th grade students read *Pepita Talks Twice / Pepita Habla Dos Veces* (Lachtman & Delange, 1995), a story of a young bilingual girl who grapples with the benefits and tensions of being able to speak English and Spanish. The 5th grade students read a short story *George and the Cherry Tree,* a story based on the fable of George Washington cutting down his father's cherry tree, and deciding whether to tell the truth about it. During many of these activities students had conversations about how characters' actions or speech implied feelings, and engaged in evaluative conversations about the characters. Constructs from SFL offered students with robust tools for doing this work. Specifically, teachers and students discussed the *polarity* of characters' attitudes (using the terms *positive* and *negative*) as well as the *force* of those attitudes (using *turned up* and *down*). The concepts were represented in an "Attitude Line" (See Figure 1), which often became an important scaffolding artifact for supporting classroom talk around text.

In this example, the attitude line presents different positive attitudes about soccer, demonstrating how language can amplify and soften attitudes. While examining the attitudes presented in the narrative texts, students collected evidence relevant to a focal question, and generated their own opinions both orally and in writing prior to the writing-focused activities described below. Detailed descriptions and research findings from the reading activities were previously reported (Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014).

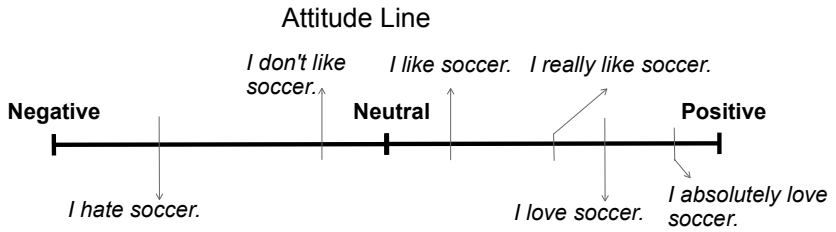

Figure 1. Example of the "Attitude Line," a classroom artifact representing the polarity continuum.

For students, we defined *character analysis* as: "interpreting and evaluating what a character does, says, thinks and feels." We also provided a more general social purpose for the genre: "To learn more about the characters and ourselves." For each stage, we provided a description of its function or purpose, and also highlighted some common language features. As previously mentioned, we generated these stage labels collaboratively with teachers, in response to formative data collected as part of the research process. Table 1 presents the stages, definitions and language features presented in classroom materials.

Table 1. Stages of Character Analysis Presented to Students

Stage label	Purpose/function	Language features
Claim	Makes a careful judgment about the character and briefly gives a reason	Often uses a being process Might use "because" to introduce your reasons
Orientation to evidence	gives information about what's going on in the story so the evidence will make sense to the reader	Circumstances of time and place Doing processes help to tell what was going on in the story.
Evidence	Uses words from the story to prove your claim	Often uses a doing or saying process to show something about the character Has quotation marks around it At least one full sentence
Interpretation	TELLS what the author SHOWS in the story (especially feelings)	If your evidence uses *doing* or *saying* to show, you will choose a *being* or *sensing* process to help you tell your reader what it means.
Evaluation	judges the character based on prompt. This is your chance to explain the position you chose in the claim!	Often uses "This shows" to connect evidence to your claim Often uses a "because" word to help explain WHY it proves your claim.

The teachers introduced the genre and its purpose to students explicitly. We actively engaged students with the genre through a "scramble" activity that provided students with slips of paper with portions of a model text written. As each stage of the genre was introduced, students searched for the text that best served the function and had the linguistic features of that stage. Students were asked to justify their choice, discussing why it (and not other pieces of text) served the function of the stage and fit with the model text they were assembling. Students pasted the pieces together, creating a cohesive example of a character analysis model.

For the writing portion of the unit, the teacher briefly reviewed character analysis and its stages and presented the *character analysis* graphic organizer to the students (see Appendix A). The handout had been slightly modified with text-specific questions to support students' responses (see Appendix B). As students used the organizer to plan their writing, students shared their writing and engaged in a feedback session with peers and the teacher, altering their ideas in response. After completing the organizer, they paired up with a classmate, who was instructed to take an opposing stance and debate the evidence and argument. Students considered those ideas before creating a final draft in paragraph form.

3.3 Data Collection

An initial analysis of all sets of writing across grades 2-5 (16 total sets) informed the selection of data reported here. The criteria for selection, informed by the dual aims of the research, were: 1. complete video data of the writing instruction lessons[1]; and 2. class sets of writing that were independently constructed with instructional support.[2] This process narrowed the data down to three classrooms (one 2nd, one 4th, one 5th grade), mainly due to the limitation of only partial video records of the others. The 2nd grade classroom was ultimately excluded from this analysis because the developmental features of early primary students' arguments differ from those of older elementary students (Christie, 2010).

The relevant video and observation logs thus consisted of the 4th grade teacher's implementation of the *Pepita Talks Twice* unit (three 60-minute lessons) and a set of 4th grade papers written in response to the story (26 total). The 5th grade teacher's implementation of lessons about *George & The Cherry Tree* (five 45-minute lessons), and totaled 23 written. Any papers that were deemed incomplete or illegible were excluded from the analysis (4th: 4; 5th: 0). Data were selected and analyzed in order to pursue two related lines of inquiry (RQs 1 & 2). The Findings section reports on video data from both classrooms; the written analysis reports on the 4th grade papers only. An overview of the data and analysis is described below.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1. Classroom video and materials

The first step was to identify *episodes* (Lemke, 1990) of classroom talk relevant to RQ1. Informed by Lemke's (1990) definition and Gibbons' application (2006), episodes are

defined as "a unit of discourse with a unifying topic and purpose" (Gibbons, 2006, p. 95). The criteria for selection were: 1) the teacher or students explicitly discussed the target genre, its purposes, stages, and language features; 2) reading-focused lessons focused on particular parts of text that might narrow evidence or were addressing a skill relevant to the writing; or 3) classroom conversation focused on the target genre explicitly. This process yielded 54 episodes. Next, the video recordings were reviewed in order to identify additional relevant episodes perhaps not noted in the observation logs, and also to exclude any episodes not germane to the study. A total of 64 total episodes were identified.

Each episode was then coded: by classroom participation structure and the concepts related to *constraints* and *choice* outlined in Table 1 and generated elaborated, analytical notes guided by the following questions:

- In what ways do the activities, materials, or discussion enable student choice in writing and/or constrain it?
- In what ways were the students and/or the teacher making meaningful observations about the genre, its purposes, stages, and language features?

The elaborated analytical notes were then coded using Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to identify emergent patterns. Each of these patterns is reported in the Findings, sections 4.1.1. through 4.1.4. I then chose representative episodes for each emergent pattern, and analyzed each using Martin and White's *engagement* framework (2005). This analytical tool enabled me to further elaborate on the specific ways in which the language used by the teachers enabled choice and constraint. Specifically, the framework offers the theoretical concepts of *dialogic contraction* and *expansion*. An utterance that is *dialogically contractive* "acts to challenge, fend off, or restrict the scope of alternate positions," whereas an *expansive* utterance "actively makes allowances for dialogically alternative positions and voices" (p. 102). For example, a teacher telling students that a claim "often uses a being process" to make a judgment of a character is dialogically expansive, whereas saying that their claim "needs a being process" is highly contractive.

3.4.2. Student writing

The papers were first analyzed by closely looking at the schematic structure of the texts produced, or a *genre stage analysis* (Martin & Rose, 2008). After all writing had been labeled by schematic structure, I made analytic notes on each piece of writing, focusing on the function and features of the writing overall as well as the individual stages. This process generated notes about the perceived successes and struggles of students' writing to advance through these stages and write in the target genre. These elaborated analytical notes were then coded using Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to identify emergent patterns. For example, analysis of students' evaluations identified different ways students successfully elaborated on those evaluations (such as making connections to abstract concepts like what it means to be a "good kid"). The distributions of the data across these categories were tabulated and are

reported in the Findings as a means of representing the variety and similarities in student writing.

A formal scoring guide was also used to systematically evaluate each stage of each piece of writing. The scoring guide articulated the features of each stage at differing proficiency levels: successful, partially successful, and unsuccessful (Appendix C). To ensure reliability of the scoring, the written responses were independently scored by two raters. The scores were then compared using Cohen's Kappa analysis (1960), a robust measure of agreement for categorical variables. The analysis resulted in a κ *value* of .709, considered substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

For a fine-grained examination, a *register analysis* (Martin & Rose, 2003) was then applied to one of the student responses that exhibited the most common patterns exhibited in the *stage analysis*. Of central importance were the ways in which attitudes were presented in the student writing. For this task, we analyzed the *appraisal* resources students used, categorizing the types of attitudes presented (appreciation, judgment, or affect) and also the *force* of those attitudes (amplified or softened). I also examined the sentence structure using a theme/rheme analysis (a resource for looking at textual cohesion, how writers connect ideas from one sentence to another) (Christie' & Derewianka, 2008). Lastly, I conducted a transitivity analysis, looking at how the *participants* and *processes* of the texts conveyed the writer's ideas as they progressed through the stages we presented. The overall purpose of this close analysis was to illustrate whether and how students in primary grades were able to write in the appropriate register of the genre, and relate those ideas to the features of *character analysis* described earlier. To ensure reliability of this analysis, a graduate student familiar trained in SFL register analysis conducted the same analysis to corroborate findings (available in supplementary materials).

3.4.3. Methods for minimizing bias

Having served as both a teacher and researcher for this study, I employed methodological approaches to minimize problems of bias and to build validity (or trustworthiness) of the analysis. First, the initial analyses of my classroom teaching were conducted by one of the project's co-principal investigators, serving as a form of "investigator triangulation" of the videotaped observations. Similarly, another graduate student working on the project also participated in the initial analysis of the student writing.

An additional approach was to collect data from the 4th grade classroom. Applying the constant comparative method to data from both classrooms enabled me to "test provisional hypotheses against at least one other case" (Corbin & Strauss, p. 298). Generalizations about the data (particularly the classroom implementation) were supported by instances that surfaced in both settings. Throughout the analysis, I was careful to present evidence from both classrooms when illustrating findings. In addition, I searched for "deviant cases" and included examples in the body of the findings. For example, the construct of "unnatural constraint" enabled me to systematically identify

ways in which our implementation of the lessons deviated from our intentions by unnaturally prescribing student writing. Such findings were given prominence in the reporting of findings (see section 4.1.4.). All of these efforts, as well as my attempt to be explicit and transparent in the analytic methods applied, build the trustworthiness of this work. Additionally, both the stage and register analyses applied to student writing were conducted by multiple researchers, further establishing reliability and trustworthiness.

4. Findings

The first section will report findings pertaining to RQ1, a qualitative analysis focusing on the implementation of the lessons. The analysis describes patterns identified across the instruction in both the 4th and 5th grade classrooms. The second section of the findings will report on the full class set of writing produced in the 4th grade classroom. This analysis will describe patterns and features of the students' writing that emerged in the *stage analysis*.

4.1 Classroom Implementation

Many of the classroom conversations highlighted natural constraints and choices relevant to writing the character analysis genre. However, the teachers and materials also imposed some unnaturally rigid constraints on students as they wrote. These are discussed in detail below.

4.1.1. Supporting students to select varied, relevant evidence and form interpretations

One constraint of the genre is that students need to reference the text in providing evidence to support their claims; they cannot only argue from their own experience. To support students in responding to this constraint, the SFL reading activities placed an explicit focus on select portions of text that directly and indirectly developed characters. The same occurred in the 4th grade's engagement with *Pepita Talks Twice*. Children used the terms "turn up/down" and "positive/negative" narrowly and purposefully—to analyze Pepita's growing frustration, realized in the various forms of the abstract participant "the grumble" in the early parts of the story, as well as in the construal of Pepita's relief at the end of the story. Figure 2 offers a classroom artifact that was co-constructed during the conversation. Students had collected language that showed Pepita's feelings and made arguments for the placement on the attitude line.

The activity (and analogous ones in the 5th grade class) generated examples of relevant, potential evidence to support possible claims in response to the writing prompt were highlighted. The activities therefore constrained students by focusing their attention on particular language that could serve as evidence, but also offered students multiple *choices* for selecting evidence to support their claims.

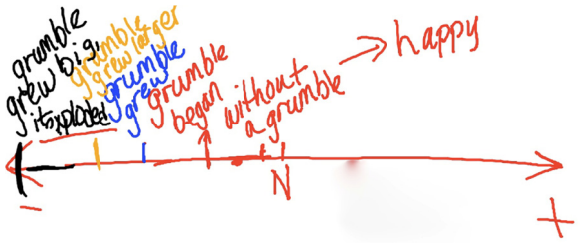

Figure 2. Attitude line co-constructed about Pepita Talks Twice.

In addition, the ways in which students talked about the evidence often aligned with the purpose of the genre: to make careful judgments about characters and to learn from their experience. The teachers solicited multiple interpretations of the language and asked students to elaborate with justification. Episode 1 is an excerpt from a conversation about Pepita's "grumble." The teacher has engaged students in discussion about the quote "She did it without a grumble," asking them to interpret Pepita's feelings. Using the "attitude line," she asks them to identify this evidence/text as presenting a positive, negative, or neutral attitude). The student, Zaineb, has just indicated that the language should be on the negative side of the line, but close to neutral.

Episode 1:

1. Teacher: Ok, in the negative part, but closer to neutral. Ok, why would we, why would you put "without a grumble" here (pointing to the mid-point of the line)?
2. Zaineb: Because, uh, she's feeling uncomfortable, but not like THAT uncomfortable.
3. Teacher: So why do you think she's uncomfortable when it says "without a grumble"?
4. Zaineb: 'Cause when people asked her to do things for them she didn't mind, but she was starting to get a little, like, she was okay with it.

The teacher asks where "okay" would go on the connotation line, another student responds "neutral" and another student argues that it could go a little to the positive. *The teacher marks each point on the line.*

5. Teacher: Can we all agree it's more neutral?
6. Multiple students: Yeah.

This conversation aligns with both the natural choices and constraints of the genre. The teacher's line of questioning supports student choice by allowing for multiple interpretations, but also reinforces a constraint of the genre by prompting students to support interpretations with text-specific rationale. And while there is room for multiple interpretations, the teacher pushes for some general consensus ("Can we all agree it's

more neutral?"). Literary interpretations are not wholly subjective, for they need to be substantiated with the text and rationale. At the same time, interpretations are not rigid, but open for disagreement, something reflected in the classroom conversation. While the teacher is front-and-center as the facilitator, students actively participated in generating the interpretation. After discussing "the grumble grew," students even corrected the teacher's placement of the text on the attitude line, arguing that it should be placed closer to the negative pole because the word *grew* "turned [her frustration] up" (made it more extreme).

Small group conversations likewise exhibited natural constraints and choice that aligned with the genre's purpose. One small group had a discussion about the meaning of "Pepita shut the gate firmly behind Lobo and hugged him." The sentence refers to the fact that Lobo, Pepita's dog, had nearly been hit by a car. She chose to speak Spanish, and call him by his name, and he responded, running out of the road. During the activity, they were asked to generate ideas about what Pepita was feeling at this point in the story, and also determine whether those emotions were implicitly "shown" or explicitly "told" in the text.

Episode 2 presents the conversation between students Tarik and Nada:

1. Tarik: "[S]hut the gate firmly." Like, worried?
2. Nada: Yeah, like, she was probably worried.
3. Tarik: She was worried he was going to come out. . She was worried he was going to get out of the gate. What else do you think she feels?
4. Nada: I think she feels like happy because he didn't get hit by the car.
5. Tarik: No, that's in that one (pointing to another piece of text).
6. Nada: Yeah! She hugged him!

Tarik disagrees and they go to the text to investigate. Tarik concedes that happy is a relevant interpretation.

7. Tarik: What else do we think he felt besides happy? I mean SHE felt besides happy? . . . Maybe . . . maybe she felt grateful?
8. Nada: Yeah.

The students provided multiple interpretations (lines 4-6), disagreeing quite vehemently before returning to the text to review the evidence in context (lines 6-7) to justify their interpretations. As the discussion progressed, they generated multiple and refined interpretations of the text (line 2: "worried;" lines 4 and 7: "happy;" line 7: "grateful"). Their interpretations were constrained by the text at hand, but they generated different choices of evidence from which to select, depending on the claim they were seeking to support. But the conversation also highlights choices inherent in the genre: one can have differing, but defensible interpretations of textual evidence in support of varied evaluative stances.

4.1.2. Use of structural labels underscored the ways stages relate, supporting text cohesion

Another constraint of the genre is that the stages are not conceptually separate; there has to be cohesion across the text as students develop their claims and supporting evidence. Classroom conversations, particularly during feedback sessions as students filled out the graphic organizer, emphasized the inter-dependence of the stages, highlighting their function in the overall purpose of the genre. This was evident as students iteratively developed their own claims and identified evidence to support them, the first steps to planning their responses. In episode 3, the 4th grade teacher suggested different claims that students could make and prompted students to choose portions of the text that would serve as evidence to support them.

Episode 3:

1. Teacher: So if I said she felt OKAY in the beginning of the story, she didn't mind helping people, which one of these do you think I would use (holding up text evidence discussed earlier)? If I said she was feeling OKAY.
2. Dalia: "Without a grumble."
3. Teacher: Oh! "Without a grumble!" Very good! ... What if I said she was REALLY mad? In the beginning Pepita was REALLY mad, because she was helping everybody. Which one do you think I would choose?
4. Dalia: The very last one ("grumble grew so big it exploded").

The exchange between Dalia and her teacher highlights a natural constraint of the genre: the evidence must "match" the claim. At times, perhaps this natural relationship is presented in unnatural ways, for the teacher suggests "which one" piece of text would support the first example, when in fact there may be several quotations that could support the same claim. As students wrote, the teacher emphasized this point again, in a less rigid way. After individually conferencing with a student, she shared with the rest of the class how one student changed his claim in response to his evidence. Initially, after drafting his claim, he had selected evidence that did not quite align with it. This same type of revision occurred in the 5th grade class. These revisions to text after writing claim and evidence suggests that some students were carefully considering evidence and the impact it had on their claims. Not only does this reflect the constraints of the genre (claim-evidence connection), but it also supported an iterative development and recasting of text-supported claims, as sometimes students changed their claim in light of thinking about the meaning of the evidence.

The classroom conversation also highlighted the way selection of different evidence influenced the shape of the stage preceding the evidence (the *orientation to evidence* that would contextualize the evidence). In the 5th grade classroom, the teacher engaged students in a "pre-writing" task aimed at supporting them to contextualize their evidence. He asked students to generate lists of important events that had occurred prior to the evidence they selected. Many students generated more events than would

be necessary to include. The teacher put one such list on the overhead and asked the student to share her evidence, which was "'I can't tell a lie,' he cried out. 'I cut it with my ax.'" In episode 4, the teacher commended the student on the list but said, "she has to make this into one or two sentences." He prompted students to work together to narrow it down.

Episode 4:

1. Teacher: So if you needed that quote to make sense to someone who hadn't read the story, what would you tell them? What is some really important information? Siena and then Sari. What do you need to know before [the evidence]?
2. Siena: Um, you need to tell them that George cut down the cherry tree.
3. Teacher: Okay, George cut down the cherry tree? Good. What else, Sari?
4. Sari: Uh, George's dad talked to him?
5. Teacher: Good, and what did he ask him?
6. Sari: Uh, did he cut down the cherry tree.
7. Teacher: Good. Those are two things that you could say. George got an ax for his birthday, he cut down a cherry tree, and his dad asked him what happened. That's all you need for that quote to make sense. Who has ANOTHER piece of evidence, that's different from "I cannot tell a lie"?

In this exchange, the conversation highlights the fact that the *orientation to evidence* will be directly shaped by the evidence selected: evidence from the end of the story will require the writer to include additional information but to do so briefly. The teacher helped students identify relevant events by asking text-specific questions. Such questions constrained student choice, but students were also introduced to the idea that different evidence required different contextualized information. Their choice of evidence would necessarily constrain what they chose to include to contextualize it. Likewise, both teachers referenced the implied audience, a natural constraint, when supporting students with this task. However, the notion of audience was not fully addressed, and could be an area of improvement in future iterations.

Of course, the teacher perhaps imposed an unnatural constraint by suggesting a specific length of the *orientation* be accomplished in "one or two sentences." This advice, which is likely an attempt to make "brief summary of background information" more concrete, is unnaturally constraining. Even so, the nature of the conversation is focused on the function of the stage. It's also important to note that such rigid (word, sentence, or page) limits are commonplace in academic and professional genres, for they provide some clarity regarding the expected depth and breadth of the writing task. Of course, perhaps the teachers could have modified their language to make the parameter less rigid, a point more developed more fully later in this section.

4.1.3. Students made purposeful linguistic choices to make nuanced evaluations

As students planned their own writing, SFL terms supported some of them to make specific choices in language they used in order to reflect their stance regarding George. For example, the terms "turn up" and "turn down" (which were central to the reading lessons) also supported students to make specific linguistic choices as they wrote their claims. In the following conversation, the 5th grade teacher reminds students of the attitude-related metalanguage (positive/negative/neutral; turn up/down) and explicitly connects it to the claim, which students were about to generate independently. He made the connection explicit:

"Now do you remember when we were doing *turn it up* and *turn it down* when we talked about that? Like if you're somewhere in-between? Some of you said he's more good than bad, what's ONE way you could turn down 'good' to make it good but not quite as good? Could you add any words to turn it down?"

This and subsequent follow-up questions elicited many varied responses from students, including: "Not the best (kid)," "George is a good kid, " "he's a sort of a good kid," "He's a super kid," "He's an awesome kid," and "He's a great kid." These responses provided students with an opportunity to experiment with and expand the evaluative lexis they would use in their own claims. The teacher then prompted students to apply it to their own writing: "I want you to decide where he falls on that good and bad line and *turn it up* and *turn it down*, depending."

After writing, students then shared their claims and evidence. Students provided widely different examples of evaluative stances (described in detail in the writing analysis), indicative that the previous conversations as well as the application of the SFL terms (positive/negative; turn up/down) supported students to adjust their language to represent their opinions of George. The examples reflect much more nuanced evaluative lexis than if students had simply rephrased the writing prompt ("He is a good boy"). SFL metalanguage in the context of writing CA stages supported students to experiment with their language, giving them an opportunity and the tools to make purposeful linguistic choices that matched their intended meaning and rhetorical purpose.

The 4th grade teacher likewise attempted to support such experimentation, but the conversation constrained student choices in an unnatural way. After reviewing the *claim,* she reminded students: "Remember in your claim you can use those *turned up* words." While the teacher's use of the verb "can" presents it as a choice, the exclusion of "turning down" (or softening) their evaluations unnaturally contracts linguistic choices available. As a result, the application of the SFL metalanguage may have influenced students to take more extreme (negative or positive) interpretive and evaluative stances regarding Pepita in their writing.

4.1.4. Supports and conversations were sometimes unnecessarily rigid

Several aspects of the instructional units and their implementation constrained the target genre in unnatural ways, some of which were intentional and others not. The

first, and perhaps most defining decision regarding the presentation of the genre was to simplify the overall representation of the stages and the sequence in a rather static form (presented linearly in slides, and as immovable, inflexible stages on the one-page graphic organizer). For example, a writer arguing a nuanced claim may need to provide multiple pieces of evidence (each of which would need to be contextualized, interpreted and evaluated in order to argue the overarching claim). Such a situation arose in the 5th grade class when one student suggested she argue that George is neither good nor bad; he's good overall, but makes mistakes. The teacher highlighted the implications of such a decision, noting that "Alia could write two paragraphs." However, the teacher later repeated the original constraint, telling students to pick the best, single piece of evidence to prove their claim. This simplified the instruction, but also constrained student writing. The research team made these decisions (somewhat reluctantly) to simplify the instructional challenges the unit already posed to teachers and also to make the task more accessible for elementary students. In subsequent units (such as *Pepita Talks Twice*), we aimed to highlight ways in which more complex tasks might elicit more complex claims, supported by multiple pieces of evidence.

While the research group was careful to present most linguistic features of the genre as patterns rather than requirements, this was not always the case. For example, the majority of the language features highlighted in the classroom materials were presented in language that utilized modal locutions that left room for exceptions. For example, the *evaluation* stage was presented as: "often uses 'this shows'" and "Often uses 'because' to help explain WHY it proves your claim." Some of the features were presented more rigidly, such as: *evidence* "has quotation marks around it" and is "at least one full sentence." The decision to ask students to quote the text directly was in service of our goal to help students interpret attitudes implied in the author's word choice and to use textual evidence in supporting their claims.

The linguistic features presented for *orientation to evidence*, however, were inadvertently presented as rule-like and ran counter to the pedagogical goals. The language features of the stage were: "circumstances of time and place" and "Doing processes help to tell what was going on in the story." It was no surprise, then, when the language the teachers used to describe the stage was equally rigid. For example, as the 4th grade teacher prepared students to write their orientations to evidence, she said, "You need time and place and a doing process." This was also the case in the 5th grade classroom. After students correctly identified the *orientation to evidence* during the "scramble" activity (where they pieced together a model text), the students offered their justification as "It has a time and place." The teacher quickly accepted this answer and moved on, not engaging in any meaningful discussion of the features in relation to functional purpose of the stage. Classroom conversations and the supporting materials left little room for student choice in this particular stage. This was unfortunate, as these features are not only unnecessarily rigid, but also inaccurate. In fact, writers might contextualize evidence without an explicit mentioning of time or place, and processes

of all kinds (sensing, saying, being) might be necessary to explain important happenings prior to the evidence.

There was also evidence of the teachers' oral language presenting language features and advice about writing more rigidly than they were presented in the support materials. As previously noted, the evaluation stage was presented in the slides as "often" using "this shows" to help relate the evidence to the claim. However, both teachers emphasized students' use of this phrase. The 5th grade teacher suggested, "You can just start with 'this shows'." While his use of can suggests some choice here, it is nonetheless a relatively strong suggestion. The 4th grade teacher provided even more dialogically contractive expressions when trying to support students to evaluate Pepita. The teacher wrote two specific sentence starters on the graphic organizer that was projected on the overhead and instructed students: "Start with 'Pepita handled the situation well or not well. Then 'this shows.'" This was clearly a prescriptive formulation, a modification that limited student choice in order to provide more explicit support. The 5th grade teacher also gave commands that were non-meaning related, suggesting "Really write as much as possible here." While well-intentioned, the suggestion is nonetheless not rhetorical—writing "a lot" is not purpose-driven or rhetorical.

Overall, the classroom conversations provided evidence that SFL-supported discussions about text often aligned with the purpose of the *character analysis* genre. Also, conversations about the target genre often highlighted the natural constraints of the genre, and how the stages naturally fit together and to what end. Likewise, SFL offered students with tools for making their own linguistic choices as they wrote, particularly in establishing evaluative claims. Both teachers imposed some unnatural constraints—some perhaps overly formulaic, others might be considered productive ways to provide explicit support for this difficult task.

4.2 Student Writing

The stage analysis examines the 4th grade's class full set of writing, focusing on the functional stages the students progressed through as they wrote, and in alignment with the instructional support offered. The analysis comments on each stage in turn, discussing some of the patterns that emerged across the papers. Appendix D offers a representative example of student writing by one student in the class, Malik. His scores on other literacy measures indicate he was an average reader and writer in relation to his classmates. On the district's fall writing assessment (a narrative task), he scored a 3 (out of a possible 6) on the 6+1 writing trait scale. The following analysis will refer to Malik's writing where useful in clarifying findings.

4.2.1. Writing offered claims that established interpretive stance

The vast majority of the students in this 4th grade class successfully established an interpretive stance regarding Pepita's attitude and briefly provided a reason for that stance in the body paragraphs they wrote (35 of the 41 paragraphs).[4] This is in accord

with the task set forth by the prompt, which foregrounded the interpretation of Pepita's feelings over evaluations of her. While there were similarities among those interpretive stances, there was variety as well. This is perhaps best illustrated through the fact that approximately half of the claims either modified the force of the attitudes (10) presented ("furious," "was really tired of," "feeling really mad") or brought more precise focus (8) to them (such as "relieved" to describe her attitudes in the end of the story). It should be noted that nine (of 10) of those examples modifying force were "turning up" Pepita's attitudes. This could be attributed to the fact that the teacher had placed an undue emphasis on "turned up" (or extreme) attitudes, however, the context of use was generally appropriate as Pepita's feelings were rather "turned up" in the text.

4.2.2. Partial success at contextualizing text evidence

Students' overall ability to adequately offer *orientations to evidence* was mixed: 21 paragraphs did an apt job of situating the evidence in context, 12 were partially successful, 10 attempted but were not successful due to providing too many details, and three did not attempt it. A closer look at the partially successful papers provides valuable insight, for they were successful (and not) in different ways. Nine of the papers were successful in providing details regarding the specific situation (for coding purposes, "situational context"). For example, students often used the example of Pepita hugging Lobo at the end of the story to prove she was relieved to have spoken Spanish to save him. Situational context might include explaining that Lobo had run into the street and that Pepita had called for him. However, additional context that specifically relates the evidence to the main issue or problem might be needed as well. For the previously noted example, one needs to include the fact that Pepita had called Lobo *in Spanish,* thus connecting to the primary problem driving the response. Likewise, in a text such as this (with multiple characters) students might also need to introduce characters mentioned for the first time ("character context" in the coding), a potential area of improvement in Malik's response. Perhaps providing students with opportunities to discover these different, but important ways of setting up evidence might have better supported them in this difficult task.

4.2.3. Students offered varied, supportive evidence

All but two students provided specific textual *evidence* that supported their claims. Tables 2 and 3 present the specific quotations provided and the frequency.

These findings suggest that students' selection of evidence was constrained by the activities that focused on these particular portions of the text, but a limited variety of evidence was presented. As all of these examples are relevant pieces of evidence, support for the assertion that the teacher's implementation productively highlighted student choice within the natural constraints of the texts, the genre, and the prompt.

Table 2. Evidence for Paragraph #1 (Grade 4)

Textual evidence	# of occurrences
And she did what they asked without a grumble.	1
But deep inside of her a grumble began.	1
But deep inside of her the grumble grew.	5
But deep inside of her the grumble grew larger.	4
... [T]he grumble grew so big that it exploded.	10

Table 3. Evidence for Paragraph #2 (Grade 4)

Textual evidence	# of occurrences
Pepita shut the gate firmly behind Lobo and hugged him.	13
"I'm glad I talked twice!"	6
"It's great to speak two languages!"	6

4.2.4. Students modified lexis to offer nuanced interpretations of attitudes

Almost all of the students (41) explicitly provided an appropriate and supported *interpretations of attitudes*. As in their *claims,* many students (15) modified their lexis in order to amplify their interpretation of the attitudes presented. It's interesting to note that four paragraphs did not attempt to provide interpretation of attitudes, and in two of those examples it was not necessary, for the attitudes were explicitly stated in the evidence (such as "It's great to speak two languages!). Considering the evidence, it was perhaps unnaturally constraining to require students to provide an interpretation of attitudes, since 12 students provided evidence where Pepita's attitude was explicitly stated. This is a limitation of the way in which we presented the stage, which was a conscious decision. The responses may have been stronger if students were positioned to be able to make a decision about when an interpretation was needed and when it wasn't.

4.2.5. Responses offered elaborated and varied evaluations of characters

With regard to the findings related to the writing, this is the most surprising and promising, as getting students to elaborate on their reasoning can often seem the most challenging. In the class set, the vast majority (42) of paragraphs *evaluated* Pepita in a way that was relevant to their claims. However, attempts to elaborate on this evaluation were less consistent: in about half of the paragraphs (22) students provided successful elaboration and in another significant group (17), their attempts were less successful. A closer analysis of both provided insight into *how* students were either successful or not. Table 4 presents the different ways students successfully elaborated:

Table 4. Ways Students Successfully Elaborated on Their Evaluations of Characters

Function of evaluative elaboration	# of occurrences
Addresses broader, relevant concept (what does it mean to be a "nice person"	1
Discusses what kind of person the character is ("nice, kind," etc.)	12
Connects character's emotions to the evaluation	3
Discusses additional internal processes of character (such as motivations)	4
Provides a hypothetical counter outcome ("if-then" statement) and relates to evaluation	12
Makes explicit reference back to text in evidence and relates it to evaluation	1

These findings suggest that the genre approach and instruction supported students to elaborate on their reasons, but in a way that still gave students room for achieving the function of the stage in their own ways. However, students' less successful attempts highlight one of the potential pitfalls; less successful elaborations retold events of the story without connecting them to their evaluation of the character. It should also be noted that many responses (26) copied the specific sentence starters the teacher had suggested students use for this stage (such as "Pepita did/did not handle it well" and "This shows"). As demonstrated in Malik's response, these sentence beginnings did not preclude students from elaborating in individual ways.

In sum, the analysis of student writing offers substantial evidence that the 4th grade students produced *character analysis* responses that were logically-organized, demonstrated some important language features central to the genre, and aligned with the overall purpose of the genre.

5. Discussion

Teachers often aim to create rich contexts for student exploration and active, collaborate learning—while also guiding that work in purposeful, pointed ways toward clearly-articulated goals. It's not an easy path, with pitfalls left and right. This paper explored this tension in the significant context of writing arguments about literature. The findings provide evidence and insights that further develop genre-based writing research, and can inform ways in which concepts from genre theory might better support our students as they find their own voices and write about academic content.

Examination of the instruction identified ways in which students and teachers used the construct of *character analysis*—and its inherent contraints and choices—to engage with content, plan, and revise their writing. The students and teachers often used the genre labels and SFL metalanguage to support meaningful talk about the text, plan their writing, get pointed feedback, and make revisions to their writing. The constraints and choices inherent to the genre mostly supported conversations that were generative and meaningful, rather than reductive and prescriptive. It extends current genre-based

writing research by offering a systematic examination of *how* genre constructs might support students' meaning-making and choicemaking.

The writing data likewise suggest that the genre-based instruction was supportive of students' meeting their writing goals. Generally, they produced successful character analysis responses: many offered nuanced claims, varied evidence, and elaborated analysis. But more generally, and perhaps more importantly, the data and analysis offer evidence that students *can* write successful arguments in response to challenging content. This intervention was the first or second time participating students had tried their hand at the character analysis genre. Perhaps with such supportive instruction presented here, and with additional opportunities to write about their content-informed arguments, students might fare better on high-stakes writing exams noted at the start of this paper.

The findings have instructional implications and inform work in elementary classrooms. If we want to support strong argument writing, we need to create contexts in which students meaningfully engage with academic content. In the elementary grades in the U.S., young students are often asked to write persuasive responses on topics such as the need for more playground equipment, health food in vending machines, or screen time—without an exploration of information or perspectives on the topics. The intent is to choose topics that relate to all students, but it often becomes a superficial exercise that does little to show what students know and can do, and does little to prepare them for written arguments they'll need to make in school and in their lives. We should pose authentic questions for exploring and evaluating those texts.

Young students are capable of analyzing content and developing arguments, but our instruction needs to be attentive to the specific purpose of the genre and the nuanced ways that arguments often get constructed with different kinds of content. For example, when introducing the character analysis genre, we had a conversation about why we read narratives, why we would make careful judgments about characters, and why that might matter to us as people. But functional stage labels also supported students to work their way through writing the arguments, particularly with writing "analysis." In this genre, analysis isn't simply connecting the evidence to the claim--it's making a careful judgment about the character and explaining why the character's actions, speech, or attitudes made them believe that. In some cases teachers offered a bit more direction, offering text-specific prompts to further support students to generate ideas (such as "Did Pepita handle the situation well? What makes you think that? Why?"). These scaffolds made the expectations of "analysis" explicit, and students not only met the expectations of the genre, but offered evaluations that were developed and elaborated in highly varied ways.

But genre-based writing instruction is not inherently generative or supportive of student meaning-making. How we position students in our classrooms and how we use the genre constructs matters. From the analysis of the classroom data, we can draw some conclusions. First, the conversations about text paid close attention to language in service of developing multiple interpretations about character attitudes, which was in

alignment with the kind of analysis expected in the written arguments. In addition, teachers used the instructional tools, such as the graphic organizer with stage labels, as a touchstone for dialogue rather than as boxes to simply be filled out. We can ask questions, as students write and revise, that engage them with constraints and choices related to their purposes for writing. For example:

- "Does anyone else have a *different* claim to share?"
- "If this is her evidence, does the language of her claim match?"
- "What words did she use to make the attitudes match?"
- "What information from the story does the reader need for this evidence to make sense?"
- "Let's talk more about *why* this action of the character was justified..."

These questions are not a blueprint, but are examples of ways in which we might support students to develop habits of mind as they plan, write, and revise—habits of mind that help them consider their purpose and audience in relation to the way they structure and choose language as they write. The constructs from SFL, such as metalanguage for attitudes and stage labels, are mere tools for helping them consider the answers to those questions. Genre- and SFL-based constructs used in this way are then not mutually exclusive to process-based approaches to writing, but are complementary.

Limitations to the study point to possibilities for future research. Considering this work through the foundational notion of genre as social action is useful. As Devitt notes, "the most significant genre labels for a rhetorical definition of genre—are the labels given by the people who use the genres (2004, p. 8). In this study, the research team made important modifications to the genre of *character analysis* to meet the needs of the instructional context. But those tools were somewhat static, and even these experienced teachers who grasp the meaning-focus of SFL and dynamic nature of genres, sometimes failed to make purposeful modifications in the moment. This was evident when Alia (section 4.1.4) and the teacher realized that she would need to make structural changes and multiple forms of evidence to support her more sophisticated claim, but those changes didn't occur. It's crucially important for students and teachers to use genre in flexible ways and make purposeful changes. We need to explore ways in which the physical forms of supporting tools might better reinforce such thinking--and be responsive to a writer's needs while still providing guidance.

Related to the previous point, it's important to recognize that the teachers in this study were very experienced with SFL and its focus on meaning. As we look toward further developing and offering these tools with teachers new to these ways of thinking, it's important to address ways we shift teachers' thinking of language and genre to be more dynamic--and *if* we are accomplishing that end. As Devitt noted, "... conceptions of genre as classification system and formula have such a long history and are so well established that they are not easily dethroned" (p. 5). Future instructional efforts and research need to be attentive to the ways in which teachers' conceptions of genre shape

their implementation--and explore what kinds of professional development experiences support the transformation of attitudes about genre and the ways it affects their instructional practice.

Lastly, it's important that future research and teaching that uses a genre-based approach to writing instruction apply a critical lens to the genres we aim to teach and their larger social purposes. How might we engage students with school genres, such as character analysis, in a way that allows them to create these genres successfully, while also critiquing them and considering implied issues of power? Additionally, we must carefully consider the social action of the writing tasks we assign—and their greater significance. Writing an argument to pass a test or simply demonstrate content knowledge for their teacher are not likely to be compelling reasons for our students, particularly those historically-marginalized by formal schooling, to write arguments to their best ability. If we can offer students opportunities to use academic content to argue about important social issues, we might engage students in more authentic and purposeful literacy practices. Genre-based approaches described here--tools and conversation that bring careful attention to purpose, structure, and language features--could offer students with the support for successful to write compelling arguments that truly show us what they're capable of while arguing for a better world.

Notes

1. The comprehensiveness of our video data for all 12 teachers was inconsistent for observations were sometimes limited due to overlapping instruction times, researcher availability, and availability of video equipment.
2. Some teachers co-constructed the character analysis response with their students through a shared writing approach, thus limiting variation in students' responses. In the data selected, students participated in writing-focused lessons and utilized instructional supports, but students generated their own ideas and wrote the texts themselves, with opportunities for feedback from classmates and the teachers.
3. Transcription conventions: Student names are pseudonyms. Summarized portion of conversation and speak actions in italics. Stressed words in CAPS. Elided material marked as […]. Pauses one second or less indicated by ',' longer pauses by '. . .'. Incomprehensible talk marked by xxxx. Text in [brackets] denotes overlapping speech. Interrupted speech marked by long dash, —.
4. Students wrote multiple claim-driven paragraphs for this response, each paragraph was coded separately. The numbers presented in parentheses reflect the paragraph count, while the language of the text generally refers to students (placing agency on student rather than on the "paragraph").

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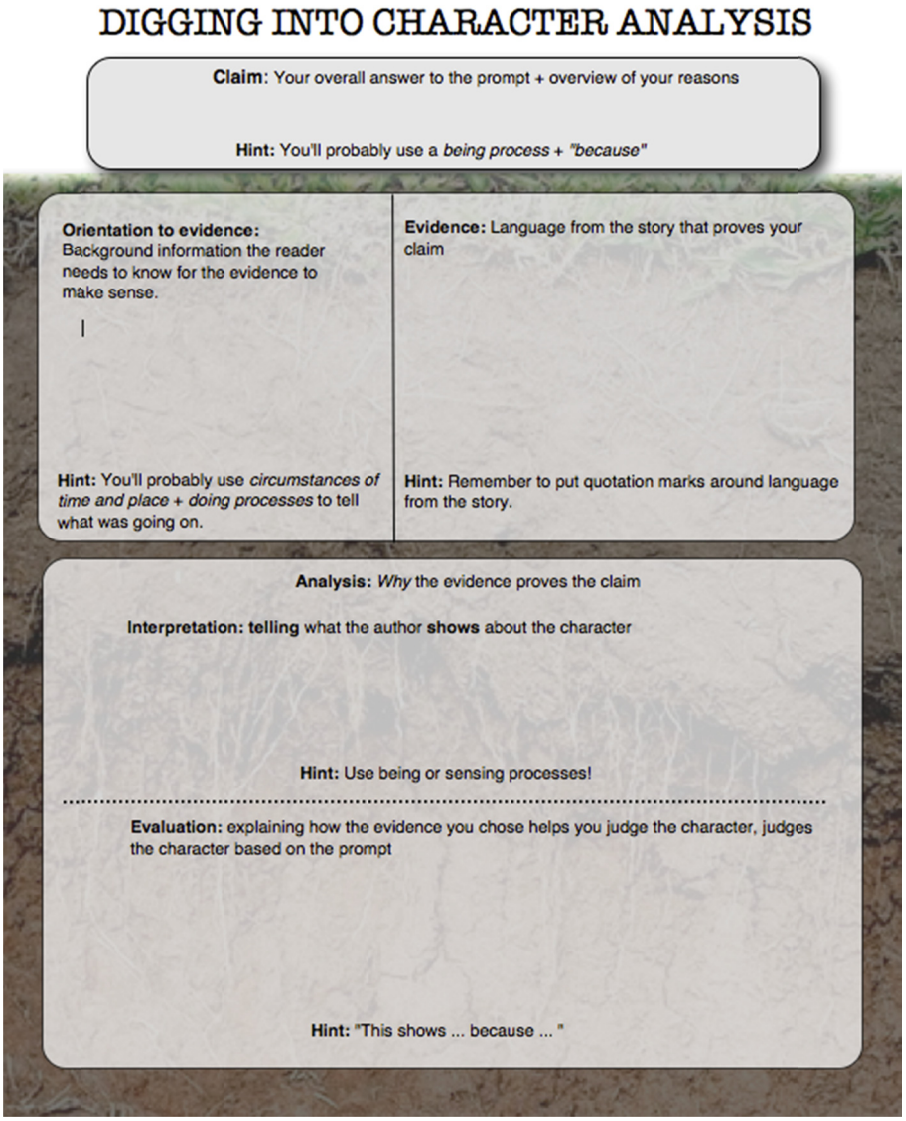
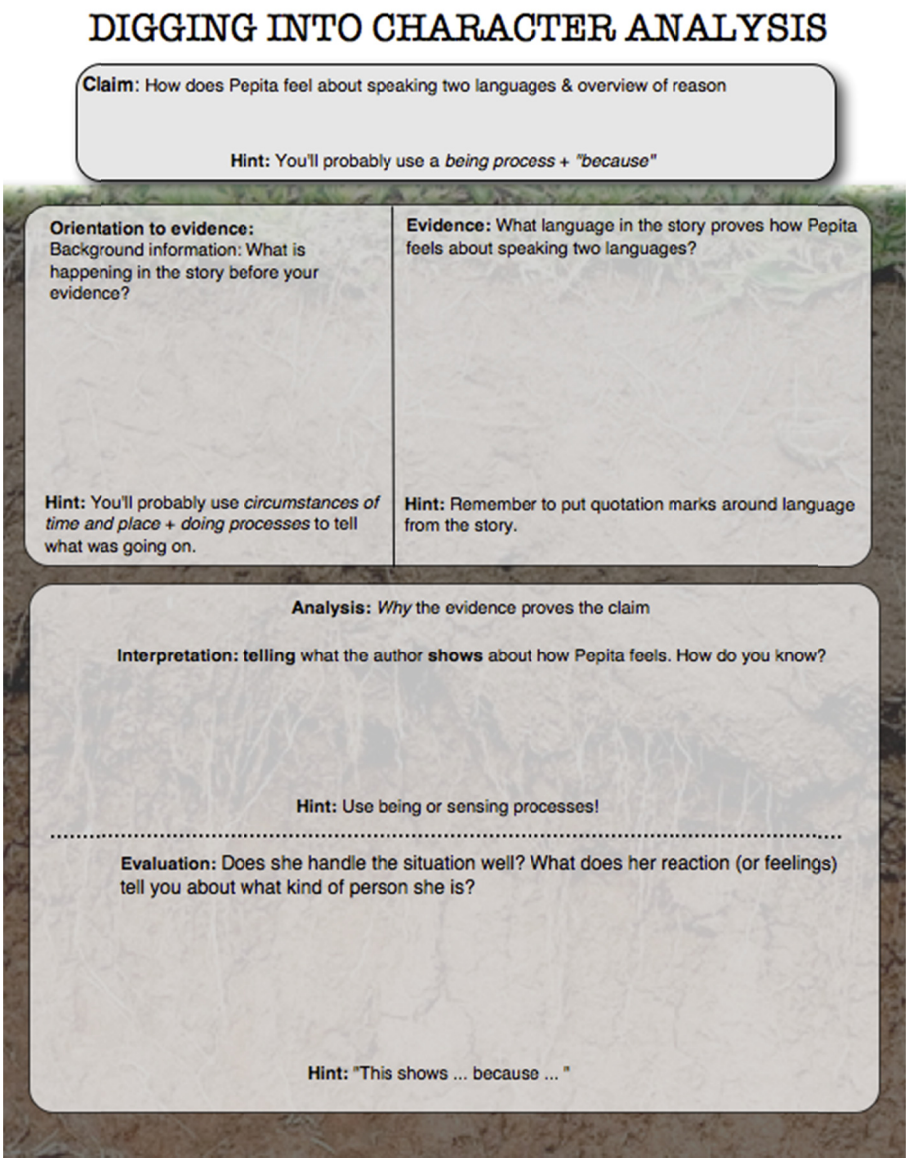
Appendix A: General Graphic Organizer for Character Analysis



Appendix B: Text-Specific Character Analysis Graphic Organizer



Appendix C: Scoring Guide | Character Analysis of Pepita Talks Twice

Stage	Score:	Functional criteria:
Claim	Successful	Establishes an interpretive stance regarding Pepita's attitude Briefly provides a reason for that stance
	Partially Successful	Establishes an interpretive stance, but does not provide a reason
	Unsuccessful	Does not establish a relevant interpretive stance and does not provide a reason
Orientation to Evidence	Successful	Provides adequate contextual information about the evidence so that a reader understands it. This might include situational context, relating to problem/topic, or information about a character.
	Partially Successful	Provides some contextual information about the evidence Additional context could have been added, OR Some extraneous information is included
	Unsuccessful	Does not offer context about the evidence or offers details unrelated to the evidence provided
Evidence	Successful	Offers a quote or paraphrased information from the story that supports the claim about Pepita
	Partially Successful	Offers a quote or paraphrased information from the story that is only somewhat related to the student's claim
	Unsuccessful	Offers a quote or story information that is unrelated to the claim. Does not attempt to provide evidence.
Interpretation (of attitudes)	Successful	Provides an appropriate, explicit explanation of Pepita's attitudes presented in the evidence provided.
	Partially Successful	Attempts to provide a description of Pepita's attitude in the evidence, but it is not supported by the evidence provided
	Unsuccessful	Does not attempt to provide a description of Pepita's attitudes presented in the evidence
Evaluation	Successful	Provides a careful judgment (evaluative statement) about Pepita that is relevant to the claim and evidence provided.
	Unsuccessful	Does not provide a judgment about Pepita's

		handling of the situation
Elaboration of evaluation*	Successful	Offers elaborated reasoning for the evaluation they provide. The elaboration offers substantive, logical reasoning (
	Partially successful	Attempts to offer reasoning for the evaluation they provide, but the reasoning is unclear or not relevant to the evaluation (only re-stating external events)
	Unsuccessful	Does not attempt to elaborate on the evaluation provided.

*These are some ways students might successfully elaborate on their evaluations.

Evaluation: Has to relate to that particular paragraph's claim and content.
Orientation: Explicitly note all of the necessary information--not just imply it.

Function of evaluative elaboration
Addresses broader, relevant concept (what does it mean to be a "nice person"
Discusses what kind of person the character is ("nice, kind," etc.)
Connects character's emotions to the evaluation
Discusses additional internal processes of character (such as motivations)
Provides a hypothetical counter outcome ("if-then" statement) and relates to evaluation
Makes explicit reference back to text in evidence and relates it to evaluation

Appendix D: Malik's response: Representative 4th grade writing sample

In the story "Pepita Talks Twice," Pepita was a girl who spoke two languages; English and spanish. pepita would translate for people.

In the begging Pepita was really tired of speaking two languages because she wants to teach Lobo a new trick. People kept asking her to help them but when she went into her own yard and saw Juan teaching Lobo to return a ball, "*the grumble grew so big it exploded.*" Pepita was furious inside because Juan was teaching Lobo to return a ball. Pepita didn't handle the situation the right way. This shows Pepita is an unresponsible person because should of just said I have alot of things to do.

Towards the end of the story Pepita was relived about speaking two languages because two languages is better than one. The ball rolled down the street Lobo ran after it dashed into the street a car was coming, Lobo was about to get ran over by a car but Pepita called him in Spanish. Just as he heard her in a flash he came back, "Pepita shut the gate *firmly behind Lobo* and *hugged him*." Pepita was relived because her dog Lobo was about to get ran over by a car but suddenly Pepita calls him in Spanish, she was relived that Lobo never got hurt. This shows that Pepita did handle the situation the right way because if she didn't call Lobo in Spanish he would of been a gonner.

In conclusion Pepita realizes that speaking two languages is great.