Post-Unit Assessment Task

The prompt for the final essay is: After reading a text, study and consider the themes presented by the author throughout the text. After making inferences about what the author wanted readers to understand, determine how the author reveals a theme through character development. Then, determine a relationship between theme and character development to create an arguable claim about the theme. Use textual evidence to support the claim(s) as you construct a literary essay. Utilize the writing process, especially drafting, revision and conferencing, in order to create a cohesive argument worthy of sharing with others.

Atticus Finch is an independent, open minded father who takes care of his children with the help of a motherly African American maid, Calpurnia. Atticus raises his children in Maycomb County, Alabama, in the 1930’s. In Maycomb, white people believed that African Americans were inferior to white people. In Harper Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch showed that he was a nonconformist because he accepts everyone, including the African American community and by showing that he makes decisions based on his ethics.

One reason that Atticus is a nonconformist is that he is accepting of everyone. "'Scout,' said Atticus, 'nigger-lover is just one of those terms that don’t mean anything—like snot-nose… people use it when they think somebody’s favoring Negroes over and above themselves. It’s slipped into usage with some people like ourselves, when they want a common, ugly term to label somebody.’ ‘You aren’t really a nigger-lover, then, are you?’ ‘I certainly am. I do my best to love everybody… I’m hard put, sometimes—baby, it’s never an insult to be called what somebody thinks is a bad name,’” (Lee 144). This quote explains that Atticus does not care to use the "n" word because he does not believe that a word should categorize people. Atticus thinks that everyone is equal and that nobody should be labeled by a word. "’First of all,’ he said, ‘if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view…until you climb into his skin and walk around in it,’” (Lee 39). This quote shows that Atticus believes that you should not judge anyone until you truly know them and understand their point of
view. He believes that you need to put yourself in the other person’s place to really know a person and understand how they think about things.

The second reason Atticus shows that he is a nonconformist in the book is by showing that he makes decisions based on his ethics and what is best for his family. “‘Heck,’ Atticus’s back was turned. ‘If this thing’s hushed up it'll be a simple denial to Jem of the way I've tried to raise him. Sometimes I think I’m a total failure as a parent, but I’m all they’ve got. Before Jem looks at anyone else he looks at me, and I've tried to live so I can look squarely back at him...if I connived at something like this, frankly I couldn't meet his eye, and the day I can't do that I'll know I’ve lost him. I don't want to lose him and Scout, because they're all I've got,’” (Lee 366). This quote demonstrates that Atticus takes his time and thinks about the best choice to make for his family. He knew the consequences of if he were to make the choice to tell people that Bob Ewell fell into his knife. If he were to choose this option than Atticus would take the risk of having people in Maycomb saying that he was a liar and that Jem truly killed Bob Ewell. After thinking this through, he chose the other option because he knew that option would be better for Jem in the long run.

Some people believe that Atticus is a conformist because he has an African American maid.

Atticus treats his African American maid differently than others treat their African American maids. Atticus treats Calpurnia with more respect by giving her control, “‘Don’t matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house, they are company and don't let me catch you remarking on their ways like you were so high and mighty,’” (Lee 33). Atticus is a conformist in the sense that he has an African American maid. Although, he gives Calpurnia power over the children unlike other white people in Maycomb. Instead, of having Calpurnia clean and straighten up the house, Atticus accepts Calpurnia and encourages her to set boundaries and have a motherly authority over Jem and Scout. During Aunt Alexandra’s visit, Atticus has to make it clear to her that Calpurnia is there to stay. “‘Alexandra,
Calpurnia’s not leaving this house ... until she wants to. You may think otherwise, but I couldn't have got along without her all these years. She's a faithful member of this family and you'll simply have to accept things the way they are,” (Lee 182). This quote indicates that Atticus needs and has a maid just as everyone else does, and in that way Atticus is a conformist. To the Finch's, Calpurnia is not just a maid. She keeps the whole family together, and the Finch’s would never have gotten along without her.

Atticus shows in this quote that the Finch’s think of Calpurnia as family. If Aunt Alexandra does not like her, then so be it because the Finch’s love her. Based on how Atticus treats Calpurnia it is clear that he treats her with respect and thinks highly of her.

Overall, Atticus is a non conformist because he accepts everyone and makes decisions based on his morals and what is best for him and his family, while other people in Maycomb make decisions based on what is happening in the community. Atticus respects the African American community along with other ethnicities. Atticus also respects his family members and he tries his hardest to always accommodate everyone's needs, "... but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird,” (Lee 119).
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| **Introduction & Claim** | -Introduction cohesively includes: connection, summary, claim.  
- Thesis statement clearly presents claim(s) to be proven. | -Introduction includes: connection, summary, claim.  
- Introduction presents theory (ies) as claim(s) to be proven. | -Has only a claim statement to open the paper.  
- Paragraph does not clearly present claim(s) to be proven. | Incomplete/ Missing |
| **Body Paragraphs:** | **Content** (weighted) | Claim: -all paragraphs have a clear focus from the claim, using key words.  
Evidence:  
- Examples support claims in various ways (quoted, paraphrased).  
Connections:  
- Statements are positioned around all examples to connect the examples to the claim. | Claim: -some paragraphs could be more clear about the focus from the claim.  
Evidence:  
- Examples support claims, but lack variety in presentation.  
Connections:  
- Statements are positioned around some examples to connect the examples to the claim. | Claim: - paragraphs still need to stay focused on claim.  
Evidence: - Many examples weakly support the claim and are not quoted or paraphrased correctly.  
Connections: - Many examples are missing statements to connect the examples to the claim. | Incomplete/ Missing |
| **Organization** | - Evidence presents claim(s) in an effective, logical structure (chronologically or by priority).  
- Transition words are cohesive to the structure used. | - Evidence presents claim(s) in a logical structure (chronologically, or by priority).  
- Transition words are cohesive to the structure used. | - Evidence does not seem to be presented in a logical structure.  
- Transition words are unconnected or not used. | Incomplete/ Missing |
| **Conventions** | - Evidence of editing for | - Attempts were made | - Lacking conventions; | Incomplete/ |


Teacher Comment:
The literary essay unit required students to use what they learned during the argument paragraph unit to write an extended argument proving a claim about the theme of a novel using multiple pieces of evidence. This writer did a particularly good job of using a rebuttal to make her argument stronger, which is an advanced argument writing skill that students begin to work with in the 8th grade writing units. Like many middle school writers, this writer could use some additional support in ensuring that her evidence connects back to and proves her original claim. This is an example of an advanced level 8th grade literary essay.