

# Writing for Understanding Writing Task Conceptual Planner

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**Grade:** 7/8  
**School:** Westford School

**Topic:** Lexington and Concord/Revolutionary War

**Subject / Course:** 7/8 Humanities

**Text:** Opening chapter of *My Brother Sam is Dead*.

### CENTRAL IDEAS

**Content:** Lexington & Concord/Revolutionary War (Part of US History: Pre-America --> Pre-Civil War course). The key historical lesson from this passage is that colonists did not suddenly decide that they would all rebel against Britain. Through the passage, students will see that—as it would be later in the Civil War—the Revolutionary War turned family members and neighbors against each other.

**Reading CC Standards:**

**RL 8.1:** “Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports analysis.”

**RL 8.3:** “Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of character, or provoke a decision.”

**Writing CC Standards:**

**W 8.2:** “Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.”

Focusing Question	Focus (answer to focusing question)
How do Sam and his father differ?	Sam: Confident, believes in the rebel cause, proud, energetic  Father: Conservative, anti-war, strong feelings about what is right and proper, easily angered

### *Assignment Planner -Teacher Worksheet*

**Title of Text(s):** *My Brother Sam is Dead*

**Observations on Text Complexity:** *Where will students need support?*

Meaning

Character analysis → Infer from what the characters say or do

(Example: "Father slammed his fist and said, 'Don't eat like that!')

Language

Vocab: Subversion, rebellion, peppered, treason, Lobsterbacks, Minutemen, taproom, Loyalists

Sentence structure: "Nobody said anything. They were silent and shocked." (Discuss purpose of simple sentences here.)

Knowledge

- Lexington and Concord basics
- Mr. Adams and Mr. Hancock
- French and Indian War & its connection to this scene
- Connect with prior knowledge—the often tense relationship between young teens and parents.

Structure

Story grammar (narrative structure or plotline diagram)

***Assignment Planner -Teacher Worksheet***

**FOCUSING QUESTION:** How do Sam and his father differ?

**FOCUS STATEMENT:** In the novel *My Brother Sam is Dead* by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier, the characters differ greatly: Sam's energetic, pro-rebellion optimism severely contrasts his father's somber, stern, conservative support for the king.

EVIDENCE
-“My brother Sam was standing there, wearing a uniform. Oh my, he looked proud” (1).
-Father's first words to Sam: “Shut the door ... The rain is blowing in” (2).
-Tim (narrator/persona) observes about his father, “That's the way Father was —do right first, and then be friendly” (2).
-Sam was “too excited to pay attention” to his father's scolding about the door. Sam says, “We've beaten the British ... The damn Lobsterbacks marched out of Boston yesterday” (2).

-Tim: "I couldn't take my eyes off him [Sam]; he looked so brave. He was wearing a scarlet coat with silver buttons and a white vest ... Oh, I envied him. He knew everybody was staring, but he liked to be the center of attention" (2).

-2<sup>nd</sup> words to Sam since he had come home after a long absence: "Don't eat like that!" To this, Sam "looked embarrassed and sat up straight" (3).

-"Father had a temper, and I could see he was trying hard not to lose it" (3).

-When Sam referred to British troops as Lobsterbacks, Father said, "By that I suppose you mean the soldiers of your King" (4).

-"Finally my father lost his temper and slammed his hand down on the table, making the plates jump. 'I will not have treason spoken in my house, Sam.'" (6). Shortly after this, Father slams his fist on the table again.

Sam says, "It's worth dying to be free" (7). Sam also mentions taxes that colonists had to pay to the British even though they were thousands of miles away from the colonies.

Father: "Free? Free to do what, Sam? Free to mock your King? To shoot your neighbor? To make a mess of thousands of lives?" (7)

Father: God meant man to obey. He meant children to obey their fathers, he meant men to obey their kings. As a subject of the Lord Our God I don't question his ways. As a subject of His Majesty, George the Third, should you question his ways?" (7-8).

### **Plans to Gather and Record Evidence**

*Circle all that apply.*

1. Evidence will be recorded by full group, then pairs and/or groups, and then individually. I will start with a loud, dramatic first reading of the story (with students following along in the text). Then, after introducing the focus question, I will do a think-a-loud in which I will re-read the first two paragraphs and show them (1) statements and actions that I notice that reveal character traits and (2) how I would add this to our compare/contrast character chart. Then, in small groups, I will ask them to try another paragraph or two. For homework, they will finish their second reading, this time marking up their own copy of the text and focusing on Sam and the father in terms of character traits.

2&3. Evidence will be recorded on a graphic organizer (Venn Diagram) as well as in margin notes on a copy of the story itself. I will use Elmo (a computer projector) and the Smartboard to demonstrate use of the graphic organizer. Students may take notes with words or with little pictures on the text and the graphic organizer.

Oral Processing

Understanding of evidence will be built through seminar / discussion: Students will share their ideas the night after finishing their homework. A larger class discussion will allow us to decide on the most important character traits.

## Writing

Understanding of writing craft will be built through (1) models (I will provide a model that is much more condensed than the one in my test drive) and (2)

mini lessons (including 1. basic historical info regarding Lexington/Concord 2. reminders about painted essay).

## Test Drive: \_\_\_\_\_

It is a common scene in today's American households: Parents and their young teens are in conflict. Parents don't understand why the teen just dropped the towel on the floor after a shower or why he/she has been online for the past two hours. The teen doesn't understand why the parent even cares: "It's just a towel! I have to check in with my friends!" This conflict is nothing new. Even in the 1770s, when we weren't even America yet, young teens and parents were going at it. Readers see, first-hand, such a conflict in the opening pages of *My Brother Sam is Dead* by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier; however, the stakes in this argument are much higher. On the eve of the American Revolution, families did not simply agree that they needed to rebel against the British and then do so. Some colonists still saw themselves as British. In the novel's opening scene, a young teen, named Sam, and his father (nicknamed "Life") waste no time in showing their differences. In the novel *My Brother Sam is Dead*, the characters differ greatly: Sam's energetic, pro-rebellion optimism severely contrasts his father's somber, stern, conservative support for the king.

Sam shows his energy and pro-rebellion optimism right away within the second sentence of the novel. He makes his entrance with a loud swinging open of the family's front door, returning home from college after a long absence. Readers see, immediately, that Sam has youthful energy and is optimistic about the positive political change that may be coming to the colonies. Sam, whom we are told was "too excited to pay attention" to his father's request that he [Sam] close the door, ignores his father's request regarding the door and expresses his first words to the reader: "We've beaten the British ... The damn Lobsterbacks marched out of Boston yesterday" (2). From this, we see Sam's strong belief in the rebel cause and his distaste for the British as well as the more general feeling of energy that emanates from him. This zeal is punctuated by Tim's younger-brother perspective of Sam: "I couldn't take my eyes off him [Sam]; he looked so brave. He was wearing a scarlet coat with silver buttons and a white vest ... Oh, I envied him. He knew everybody was staring, but he liked to be the center of attention" (2). Tim's observations complicate the picture of Sam's personality—Sam's character may include potentially negative aspects such as too much pride or an impulse to take action too quickly. It is like a football player fully dressed in pads, helmet, and jersey before a game: The uniform itself contributes to the excitement about the imminent game. One already wonders if Sam will get so quickly caught up in revolutionary excitement that he will make careless mistakes.

Sam's father is nicknamed "Life." Life's character provides a stark contrast to Sam's. Life is serious, rigid, conservative, and impatient. For example, Life's first words to his son, whom he had not seen in a long time, are as follows: "Shut the door, the rain is blowing in" (2). Already we see that Life lacks warmth. The narrator of the

story, another character named Tim, adds to this inference: “That’s the way father was—Do right and then be friendly” (2). Readers actually never see this “friendliness” in the entire first chapter. Appropriately, Life’s second set of words to his son aren’t any more congenial. Sam, having wasted no time digging into a stew that his mom had prepared for him, is admonished by his father: “Don’t eat like that!” This is the first time we see that the father is conservative and has strong feelings about propriety. Things get worse as the family talks about the opening skirmishes of the nascent revolution. For this family, their small Pennsylvania town is a collection of church-going, King-following British citizens, who have little need for the so-called Patriots with which Sam is connected. Life epitomizes such a citizen. After slamming his fist on the table a couple of times, Life exclaims, “God meant man to obey. He meant children to obey their fathers, he meant men to obey their kings. As a subject of the Lord Our God I don’t question his ways. As a subject of His Majesty, George the Third, should you question his ways?” (7-8). We see Life’s temper but, even more importantly, the source of some of that temper. The father finds order in the structure that his life affords. Daily life is easier when we know who fits in where, how we are supposed to live, and what each person’s place in this structure is. Sam, and rebels like him, represent a threat to this order. Sam makes a futile argument about freedom and unfair taxes from a king 3,000 miles away, but this makes no dent in Life’s armor. The following quotation illustrates the father’s rigidity: “Finally my father lost his temper and slammed his hand down on the table, making the plates jump. ‘I will not have treason spoken in my house, Sam’” (6).

As one can see, Sam and his father clearly illustrate the intense conflict that family members—and citizens—experienced with each other as rigid Loyalists faced off against seemingly foolish, impulsive Patriots building up to war with Britain. However, a closer look at the text reveals another potential reason for Life’s behavior. We learn that Life had seen gruesome war action as he fought side-by-side with his British counterparts in the 1750s French and Indian War. Not only does this fact suggest the source of Life’s strong loyalty to Britain, but it also suggests that his anger is sparked by a deeper, fatherly concern for his son’s welfare. This might account for Tim’s surprise at seeing his father cry—for the first time that Tim had known—following a big fight between Life and Sam. Life loves his son, Sam. Certainly it can be true for the frustrated parent of the modern teenager. The concern about the towel left on the floor isn’t just about propriety and personal responsibility; it’s about a worry over whether or not the person you love so dearly will be okay in the world.

**Notes/Observations**

Anticipated student need	Instructional support
<b>Painted essay and historical context</b>	<b>Mini lesson about painted essay, Lexington-Concord basics, and conflict between Loyalists and Patriots.</b>
<b>Complex Text</b>	<b>-Close reading with note-taking on focus question. -Help from Sally Conant, special educator, regarding appropriate accommodations.</b>

<b>A frame for writing</b>	<b>-template for those who need it -requirement sheet and brief outline</b>