After reading fifty essays from NPR’s This I Believe series, I found many that would be good for students to read and analyze. Among my favorites was an essay which sang the praises of public transportation. “Bus Chick’s Manifesto” by Carla Sauter would be a good essay for ENGL 1301 students to read. By studying it closely, they would see how Sauter provides specific information, distinguishes between hyphens and dashes, and makes her point by calling attention to effects.

Sauter’s short essay is packed with specific details. Instead of telling us that she began riding the bus alone when she was young, she tells us that she was “in third grade” when she began to take the bus to visit her grandmother. When Sauter tells us about the car she gave up, she lets us know that it was a “lovely silver coupe.” Sauter also uses proper nouns to deliver the special facts that make an essay superior. Instead of telling us that public transportation allowed her to go to places in general, she tells us that she was able to go to “Pike Place Market and . . . Seattle Center.” Instead of telling us that public transportation helps protect the environment, she tells us that it helps preserve “the beauty of Puget Sound and the majesty of Mount Rainier.” By following Sauter’s example, students will see the value of giving specific information to develop their essays.

Sauter’s essay can help students distinguish between hyphens and dashes. Her essay demonstrates both correctly. She uses hyphens to create adjectives in such phrases as “my eight-year-old peers” and “middle-aged gossips,” illustrating rule M2b from A Writer’s Reference: “Use a hyphen to connect two or more words functioning together as an adjective before a noun.” Additionally, students will notice that Sauter knows how to use the dash as a heavy-duty comma, rule P7d. Sauter uses dashes “to set off parenthetical material that deserves emphasis.” When she tells us that she did own a car for ten years, she interrupts her sentence with this material “—except for a short time in college, when I found myself unable to afford a personal vehicle—” which is set off with dashes. Finally, in her last sentence, she uses a single dash to emphasize her realization: “I believe that change is possible—if all of us ride.” Given these clear-cut examples, students will see the difference between hyphens and dashes—between connecting and setting off.

Sauter is especially good at presenting effects to prove her point. She admits that riding a bus does have some negative effects. Bus riders must contend with bad weather, crowded conditions, and heavy-footed bus drivers. Completely outshining “these occasional inconveniences” are many positive outcomes. Sauter says that she likes the “camaraderie” that she shares with fellow bus riders. She adds that the weather is often pleasant, allowing her to enjoy fresh air and warm sun. Besides getting to observe the variety of people that ride the bus, she has ample opportunities to take a nap or read a book. Most importantly, Sauter believes that by foregoing the convenience of having a private vehicle, she is doing something to help protect the environment so that others can enjoy the beauties of our world in the future. Sauter’s last four paragraphs, fully half of her essay, are based on an analysis of effects. By following Sauter’s example, students would learn how to present effects convincingly.

“Bus Chick’s Manifesto” by Carla Sauter is an excellent essay for ENGL 1301 students to read. They would see how specific information is the ticket to an engaging essay. They would see how careful control of the mechanics of writing—even hyphens and dashes—provides a smooth ride for the reader. Finally, they will see how analysis of effects can carry the essay to its final destination—a convincing realization.

Sources Cited

Tell about your preparation.
Make your recommendation.
Mention your points.
Topic sentence
Use material and short quotes to illustrate essay’s good features.
Refer to author by last name.
Include 1301 students from the future.
Get down to the nuts and bolts of writing.
Include our rulebook and rules by code #’s.
Use short quotes to give evidence.
Back up evidence with explanations.
Save a strong point for last.
Also use indirect quotes as in Sauter says that.
Work short quotes into the phrasing of your own sentences, keeping them grammatical.
Recommendation
Write one sentence for each sub-topic presented.
Alphabetical order in MLA style. Second date for is when you accessed the source.