

## A Fourth Grade Nevada “Sparkler”

A *sparkler* is not a perfect piece of writing, but it “shines” in small ways that all students can both identify and discuss. When students analyze *sparkling* techniques used by other student writers, they are more likely to try these techniques in their own drafts.

Julie, a Nevada fourth grader, prepared for her state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing seven months before having to take her test as a fifth grader. This was the third of three practice prompts Julie’s fourth grade teacher assigned her.

Read the prompt carefully. Then read Julie’s response. Be prepared to talk about where her writing techniques *sparkle* as well as where Julie might make the story even better if she wrote just one more draft.

**Julie’s Practice Prompt:** *If you could give a special gift or award to a deserving person, what would it be and why? Share reasons and details as you compose your answer.*



**Julie’s Title:** “Coolest Swim Coach”

My swim coach, Sharon, is the coolest swim coach ever, which is why I am giving her the coolest swim coach award!

First of all, she lets us do cool relays, such as tag team relays, diving relays and just regular relays. And when we are swimming, she always stands on the side of the deck and encourages us. I like how after a hard relay, she lets us do an easy 100 or 50 yard race. Sharon encourages me to swim as fast as I can during the relays.

And the other reason why she would win this award is because she lets us sit out the swims we don’t make. But we hardly have to sit out because she is such an amazing coach. We go so fast we almost always make every set. Once we were swimming ten fifties on forty-five, which is a really hard set, and I only made six of the ten fifties. She told me, “It was a really hard set and you will make it one day.”

Oh, I forgot to tell you what the award would look like. It would be a two-and-a-half foot trophy with black, yellow and blue threads. Why? “Because black, yellow and blue are our team colors.” And the plaque would say “Sharon, Coolest Swim Coach.” At the very top there would be a swimmer standing on the blocks wearing a swim cap, swim suit and goggles.

There are many reasons why I would give this award to Sharon, but these are the two most important.

**An interactive task for other fourth graders:** Julie does a great job of balancing stories about her swim coach with stories about her, the writer. A **personal narrative** has to include a story about the writer. With a topic like this one, it would be easy to just write about someone else and forget to include yourself in the descriptions. Julie makes sure her story is just as much about her as it is about her swim coach.

**Challenge:** Examine your draft for how much you include yourself in the story. You’ll find evidence of yourself in the writing when you see the words *I, me, myself*, and even *we* and *us*. Could you add a sentence or two in between the sentences you already have that include a little more of yourself in the story you’ve told? How might this improve your **voice**?

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Jake, a Nevada fourth grader, prepared for his state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing seven months before having to take his test as a fifth grader. This was the third of three practice prompts Jake’s fourth grade teacher assigned him.

Read the prompt carefully. Then read Jake’s response. Be prepared to talk about where his writing techniques *sparkle* as well as where Jake might make the story even better if he wrote just one more draft.

**Jake’s Practice Prompt:** *If you could give a special gift or award to a deserving person, what would it be and why? Share reasons and details as you compose your answer.*



**Jake’s Title:** “Athletic Joel”

If I could give an award to a person, I would give it to my friend Joel. I would give him the award called The Most Athletic Fourth Grader Award.

The most important reason he gets the award is he is the only kid I know that when he loses, he works even harder at the sport that he lost at. I know if he lost a baseball game, he would practice throwing the ball, hitting and catching so he wouldn’t lose next time.

He is also good at any sport he plays, like football, soccer, baseball, basketball and roller hockey. At soccer, he is a goalie, and he saves every ball that comes at him. At football, he is a receiver, and he catches the ball so amazing. At basketball, he plays every position and he makes more shots than I do. At baseball, he plays first base and he throws me the ball so fast. At roller hockey, he shoots the puck like a pro.

And that’s why I think Joel is the most athletic fourth grader that I know. Who would you give this award to?

**An interactive task for other fourth graders:** Jake worked especially hard on his **voice** skills by using good **word choice** throughout his writing; in particular, he includes nouns that are very specific to the sports he lists, and his use of verbs throughout the writing are strong and varied. Find three nouns that are very specific to the sport Jake describes. Then, decide which three verbs of all the ones Jake uses make the story the most action-packed.

**Challenge:** Is there anywhere in your draft where you could include some more specific nouns to help paint a better picture in your reader’s head? How do your verbs compare to the type of verbs Jake used in his writing? Could you change some or add some to improve your voice?

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Jessica, a Nevada fourth grader, prepared for her state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing seven months before having to take her test as a fifth grader. This was the third of three practice prompts Julie’s fourth grade teacher assigned her.

Read the prompt carefully. Then read Jessica response. Be prepared to talk about where her writing techniques *sparkle* as well as where Jessica might make the story even better if she wrote just one more draft.

**Jessica’s Practice Prompt:** *If you could give a special gift or award to a deserving person, what would it be and why? Share reasons and details as you compose your answer.*



**Jessica’s Title:** “Not Just Any Babysitters!”

Do you have a babysitter? Well I have two, but they’re not just any babysitters. They are Leah and Josh, the best babysitters in the world!

The first thing you need to know about Leah and Josh is that they turn boring things into creative things. Like scrambled eggs that they turn into something artsy. It depends on the upcoming holiday, like one time they came over two days before Halloween. For dinner, Leah put some green food coloring into our plain and boring scrambled eggs, added ketchup, and *Voila!* There you have it! Leah and Josh made some boring eggs into Frankenstein’s brain! The ketchup was his guts.

The next thing you need to know is that they are so funny they could be comedians. For instance, one day in the summer, Leah and Josh went outside with us to play soccer. Josh wanted to look cool, so he started to spin and spin, and then he tried to kick the ball but completely missed. He still wanted to look awesome so he landed in some kind of karate pose.

If you are looking for a superb set of babysitters, try Leah and Josh!

**An interactive task for other fourth graders:** Jessica combines **idea development** skills and **voice** skills to make her writing appealing to a reader. With idea development, she takes extra steps to include really specific details. Can you find two or three of those details? With voice, she describes her ideas with words and phrases that hint at her personality. Can you find two or three words or phrases that help you know a little more about the person telling you these stories?

**Challenge:** Where in your draft did you include your most specific and memorable detail? Could you include more that would help your reader see the story in his/her mind a bit better? And did you remember to use words or phrases that would reveal a bit of your personality to the reader...like Jessica? If not, where could you add them?

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Ben, a Nevada fourth grader, prepared for his state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing seven months before having to take his test as a fifth grader. This was the third of three practice prompts Ben fourth grade teacher assigned him.

Read the prompt carefully. Then read Ben’s response. Be prepared to talk about where his writing techniques *sparkle* as well as where Ben might make the story even better if he wrote just one more draft.

**Ben’s Practice Prompt:** *If you could give a special gift or award to a deserving person, what would it be and why? Share reasons and details as you compose your answer.*



**Ben’s Title:** “A Funny Friend”

If I could give an award to someone, I would give it to my comedian best friend, Ethan. This isn’t any old award. This award is probably more important than the Oscars. This award would be made out of gold-painted iron, saying the words:

Most Awesome Friend  
Ethan  
2010-2011

With all the many reasons, let’s start off with the best...Funny. He is very funny. He is always cracking jokes. Sometimes they’re so lame they’re funny, like his “Guess what? Chicken butt!” See, so lame it’s funny. With so many possible reasons, do you see why this is my favorite?

My second favorite reason is that he is always buying things, like video games. One time, we spent 40 minutes in Game Stop just to buy one game. And the last but not least reason is that he is so awesome at math. Like when we get to go and start on math boxes before everyone else because we knew the lesson.

Now, see why he gets this award?

**An interactive task for other fourth graders:** Ben went out of his way to make this writing sample reflect the way he actually speaks. Find the three places in Ben’s draft that most sound like the author is having a conversation out loud with you rather than on a piece of paper. What techniques does Ben use to make his voice sound like a real fourth grader who likes the topic he is writing about?

**Challenge:** Great voice makes your writing more memorable. Where in your draft could you add more voice? Remember, your writing for the state test will be just one among hundreds that your scorer will read that day. How will you add enough voice to yours so that your paper is more memorable to that scorer? How did Ben inspire you to make your draft even better?

