

A Sixth Grade Nevada “Sparkler”

A *sparkler* is not a perfect piece of writing, but it “shines” in small ways that other students can identify and discuss using analysis and evaluation skills. When students talk about *sparkling* techniques used by other students, they are more likely to try these techniques in their own drafts.

Cassidy, a Nevada sixth grader, prepared for the state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of expository two years before having to take the test as an eighth grader. This was the second of two practice prompts Cassidy’s sixth grade teacher assigned her.



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

Cassidy’s Practice Prompt: *Ever since the cave man invented fire and the wheel, people have been inventing things to move us forward. What invention do you think has been the most important? Explain your answer with relevant, showing details.*

Cassidy’s essay: “Gum is the Best Invention”

Suppose you couldn’t chew on that wonderful, gooey, sticky gum. Without gum, you would have very little jaw muscles. You are probably thinking that talking builds jaw muscles. It does... but not as well as gum does! One last thing that gum does is that if you have to stick something onto another thing, gum is there to help you out. That is something I would do!

You have to agree with me that the best thing about gum is that it is fun to chew. I mean, say you just had that urge to chew something. That is when gum comes in handy! Did you know that gum sometime helps you concentrate? Chewing on gum can help you get a good grade on school work...well, only if we could! Now you get my point that the best thing about gum is that it is fun to chew.

You want to know something? Gum can also relieve your thirst if you are thirsty. There are flavors that can do that, like strawberry, apple, orange, tropical punch, etc. There are also flavors that can freshen your breath, like cool mint, spearmint, peppermint, etc. You know, gum is way better than breath mints; all you can do with those guys is have them rest on your tongue. Borrrring!

With gum... at least you can chew it!

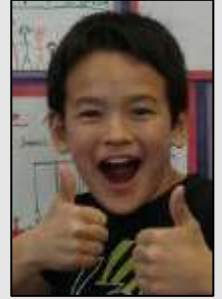
An interactive task for other sixth graders: Cassidy’s title, introduction and conclusion show better-than-average organization skills. Discuss how these three things, when working together, develop the essay’s purpose and guide the reader through its beginning and ending. Organization, in some cases can be pretty dry, but Cassidy goes out of her way with her word choice skills to ensure the reader enjoys him/herself as they read this short, organized essay.

Challenge: What title, introduction, and conclusion can you use to assist your reader in understanding the purpose of your essay? What word choice can you include throughout your essay to make the organization come to life?

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Connor, a Nevada sixth grader, prepared for the state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of expository two years before having to take the test as an eighth grader. This was the second of two practice prompts Connor’s sixth grade teacher assigned him.



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

Connor’s Practice Prompt: *Ever since the cave man invented fire and the wheel, people have been inventing things to move us forward. What invention do you think has been the most important? Explain your answer with relevant, showing details.*

Connor’s essay: “Think about Radio Signals”

ALERT! ALERT! You hear the message crackling out of your old-fashioned radio. You look out the window and, sure enough, there it is. You and your family crawl into the basement. Seconds later you hear the tornado roaring above you, destroying everything in its path. Without the radio, you and your family would have probably died.

I want you to think about how your life would be without radio signals. Probably not that bad, right? Wrong! Without the radio there would be no cell phones, no T.V., no internet, and no computers. The only way of long range communication would be the telegraph and mail. With a telegraph, you would have to learn Morse Code--which is very difficult--and with mail it would hard to make plans with people. It might take weeks to get a response! You couldn’t keep in touch with as many people, and you would have fewer friends.

Another reason radios are important is because they can provide entertainment. Imagine a world with no music to listen to, no movies to watch, nobody to text. You would be bored out of your mind! I’m not saying I watch T.V. 24/7, but if there were no radio signals, I would have a large chunk of time with nothing to do.

The final reason radios are important is because they can provide up-to-date, factual information on almost any topic. Without the radio, the only source of information would be from books which could hold out-dated, incorrect information. Radios/computers also make researching more efficient. You just type in what you want and BAM! There it is. With books you have to search for the right book, hope the information is up-to-date, and then skim the book for relevant info. It takes longer and it’s less efficient.

True, a radio probably won’t save your life, but as you can see now, they are still extremely useful.

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Connor combines organization skills and voice skills to create a lively, easy-to-follow essay. Find the best evidence of Conner’s organization and voice knowledge, as proven by this essay.

Challenge: Write down two or three voice and organization skills that Connor used that you need to remember to use in your “best invention” essay.

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Jack, a Nevada sixth grader, prepared for the state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of expository two years before having to take the test as an eighth grader. This was the second of two practice prompts Jack’s sixth grade teacher assigned him.



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

Jack’s Practice Prompt: *Ever since the cave man invented fire and the wheel, people have been inventing things to move us forward. What invention do you think has been the most important? Explain your answer with relevant, showing details.*

Jack’s essay: “Electricity”

Dark. Everything’s blacker than a prison cell at night. Black. The world’s only light is from the sun and fire. You reach for a flashlight, but it doesn’t work. The blackness swarms over you. You’re scared. The thing you need is electricity.

Electricity powers almost all of the world’s light. As I said before, the only other light is from the sun and fire. What do you see with at night? Aa light bulb, flashlight, or even an electric fireplace? You wouldn’t have any of those without electricity. Face it, electricity helps the world, and without electricity, the world would be darkness.

Electricity is also one of the world’s best inventions because it helps people with their daily lives. Think of the inventions people use most in their lives: the computer, the stereo, the TV, and the walkie talkie. Imagine not being able to talk to your friends on the internet, or a cop not being able to communicate with his partner. The battery is also a form of electricity. It powers the flashlight, remote, and even some cars. Also, anything that’s plugged into an outlet uses electricity.

Wow, electricity is important.

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Jack’s introduction really goes out of its way to grab the reader’s attention. What trait(s) does he use to create his essay’s strong beginning? How might have he used the same trait skills to make his conclusion stand out just as strong?

Challenge: Like Jack, can you find a way to use skills of *imagery* to craft a stronger introduction and conclusion for you invention essays? Remember, imagery relies on skills of idea development, voice, and word choice working together to paint a picture in the reader’s head. And remember, imagery is a good skill to use in small doses with expository writing; too much imagery can turn your paper from expository to narrative if you’re not careful.

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Kamea, a Nevada sixth grader, prepared for the state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of expository two years before having to take the test as an eighth grader. This was the second of two practice prompts Kamea’s sixth grade teacher assigned her.



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

Kamea’s Practice Prompt: *Ever since the cave man invented fire and the wheel, people have been inventing things to move us forward. What invention do you think has been the most important? Explain your answer with relevant, showing details.*

Kamea’s essay: “Capturing Memories”

Suppose you could capture a moment in time. It’s possible to do so now because something *amazing* has been invented. The camera!

With a camera, you take a picture that becomes history. You probably don’t realize it, but the camera is a very important invention. Think of how empty and desolate walls would be without pictures of friends and family. When you read a newspaper article, there’s always a photograph to help paint a picture in your mind. Without a camera, that wouldn’t be possible.

The camera has been around for a long time, so it has evolved over time. It now has more pixels, which make the images clearer. A camera is a fourth of the size that it used to be. It’s now also mobile. I think it’s really cool that now you can text or email pictures to friends and family immediately. Taking pictures is now really popular because of how easy it is.

I love looking at pictures because of all of the great memories they bring back. Some make you laugh, some make you smile, and some even make you cry. Cameras make you remember the past.

Life would be very different without cameras, and it’s awesome that you can capture a moment in time.

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Kamea’s **idea development** is pretty strong in this essay. Sometimes young writers repeat their ideas and explanations more than once in an essay like this as a way to make their essays seem longer. Other than her introductory idea and her conclusion being linked by the same idea (which is an effective organization strategy), Kamea’s reasons and explanations are all different and thoughtful. Clearly, Kamea brainstormed multiple reasons for choosing her essay before drafting this essay.

Challenge: Look at your brainstorm. Have you brainstormed multiple reasons for choosing your invention or will you have to repeat your ideas to fill up your answer sheet? Repeated ideas usually mean a lower idea development score.

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Sophia, a Nevada sixth grader, prepared for the state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of expository two years before having to take the test as an eighth grader. This was the second of two practice prompts Sophia’s sixth grade teacher assigned her.



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

Sophia’s Practice Prompt: *Ever since the cave man invented fire and the wheel, people have been inventing things to move us forward. What invention do you think has been the most important? Explain your answer with relevant, showing details.*

Sophia’s essay: “Milk + Chocolate”

Two forces combined, chocolate and milk. What do they make? Chocolate milk! What a brilliant idea!

You might not notice how much one simple invention, like chocolate milk, could actually change the course of history or humanity? Now I’m not quite sure if it could actually do that, but I do know it’s really delicious. Chocolate milk actually helped get other items popular, like marshmallows. Studies have shown that since the start of hot cocoa, the demand for marshmallows has doubled. Not only does chocolate milk taste great, but it helps other businesses as well!

Though you may not know it, milk chocolate would have never been invented without chocolate milk. Daniel Peters (the inventor of milk chocolate) was influenced from Nestlé’s condensed chocolate milk. Without this invention, think of all the things we wouldn’t have. Let’s face it, chocolate milk has changed the world.

You probably don’t know it, but many people are unaware of the benefits of milk, let alone chocolate milk. Chocolate milk is actually great after exercising. It aids the body in recovery, mostly the muscles. It works for rehydrating the body and helping to rebuild muscle that was depleted of energy during a workout. It’s packed with protein and doesn’t contain a lot of sugar. So next time you go to the gym, bring a bottle.

Maybe, I have now changed your whole life’s perspective and you are rethinking what you do and how you do it. Probably not, but I hope you realize why I love chocolate milk and why I think it is the best invention ever.

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Sophia made her invention essay come across as fun. Obviously, she doesn’t believe chocolate milk is a more important invention than—say—electricity, but she has discovered the value of choosing a unique topic. Test scorers read a lot of essays, and often the essays are on similar topics, which might prove a little boring after a while. Sophia’s makes use of both a unique idea and a unique voice to “wake her reader back up again.”

Challenge: What unique invention could you convincingly argue for, or how could you make an obvious invention come across more uniquely than other writers?

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Taylor, a Nevada sixth grader, prepared for the state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of expository two years before having to take the test as an eighth grader. This was the second of two practice prompts Taylor’s sixth grade teacher assigned her.



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

Taylor’s Practice Prompt: *Ever since the cave man invented fire and the wheel, people have been inventing things to move us forward. What invention do you think has been the most important? Explain your answer with relevant, showing details.*

Taylor’s essay: “Lost in Time”

Have you ever thought about life without the clock? We would be “lost in time,” or lost without time.

The clock helps do many things, though it basically only tells time. If we didn’t know the time, we would have no way of meeting people at a certain time. For example, if I was meeting someone at 2:15 a.m., how would I know when it was 2:15 a.m. without the clock?

The clock also helps plan out events easier. If you know what time it is, you know when events start and end. Take school, for example. If you didn’t know when it started or ended, we might go earlier or end it later. That would be horrible.

With the clock, you can know how long it’s been between two points in time. Say you were making brownies. They need to be baking for 15 minutes. Let’s say it’s 1:30 p.m., so in 15 minutes it would be 1:45 p.m. Check your clocks when its 1:45 p.m. and your hot delicious brownies will be done.

So without the clock we would be “lost in time” or lost without time which is why, I think, the clock is the most important invention ever!

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Taylor does a nice job of both organizing her essay into distinct parts, but also making sure to provide a detailed explanation to accompany each of her three reasons. Most young writers remember to provide reasons in their essays but many fail to also provide relevant examples; they assume the reader will create their own examples, which is not a good thing to assume if you’re working on improving your idea development score.

Challenge: How many different reasons did you share in your essay? Did you provide a relevant example that illustrates each reason that you share? Good reasons + thoughtful examples = better idea development. And don’t forget to separate your ideas with paragraphs.