

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 talk about *sparkling* techniques used by other student writers, they are more likely to try these techniques in their own drafts.

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

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

Beau’s Practice Prompt: *There are many amazing people, things, places, and events in our world. Tell a story about one of them.*



Beau’s title: “The Hike”

When I was in Zion National park, I had a blast. Angels Landing was where I was going. It is one of the most difficult hikes in the national park. It also has an amazing view.

My dad, A.J., and myself started our way up the trail. So far so good. We got to our first switchback. A switchback is a part of a trail that does a zigzag. I couldn’t believe how many people were coming down the trail! We turned and headed up the trail some more. There I saw six switchbacks one after another.

When I got to the top and looked down, I knew I didn’t want to do that again. I turned and followed my dad. There I saw the beginning of a chain. I couldn’t believe the sight. In front of me it was six feet wide a death drop on each side. This is what the hike was famous for. I started my way up. Luckily there was that chain to hold onto while going up.

When I got to the top and looked around, it was unbelievable. There were three really amazing sights. One way was a green valley with a glistening river wriggling through it. Another was a waterfall, the water vanishing before it reached the bottom. The last was where sandstone walls were opening to a green valley.

When my dad said time to go, it was hard to go.

An interactive task for other fourth graders: Beau does some interesting things with *idea development* in this piece of writing. In that next to last paragraph, he includes his best collection of memorable and specific details. Compare that paragraph’s details to the rest of his writing. How might Beau revise his paper’s other details to be as good as the set in the next to last paragraph?

Challenge: Look at your draft. Are your details equally strong throughout your entire narrative, or do they cluster together in one small part of your writing? How can you spread your details out more?

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

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

Paige’s Practice Prompt: *There are many amazing people, things, places, and events in our world. Tell a story about one of them.*



Paige’s title: “Oregon Trip”

One exhausting eleven hour trip was actually worth it. This is why.

“We’re here!” my mom said as we pulled into the RV area. I hopped out of the red Honda Pilot. Our spot was right next to a playground and pool.

Later that day we drove to Tillamook cheese factory. But we weren’t there for cheese, we were there for ice cream. After I slurped down root beer flavored ice cream, we headed to the beach.

The beautiful sunset, purple and pink, was to die for. The sand was as soft as silk. I found several sloppy jellyfish tops. All you could hear were seagulls chirping and waves clashing. Waves splashed against my bare legs as my sister and I stood together. “Let’s jump them,” she said. As we jumped waves, my mom yelled, “We’re getting hungry. Let’s head to Mo’s.”

Crabs dangled from the ceiling. Many sea treasures were hung. “Clam chowder please,” said my dad hungrily. After we ate, we ran outside to go watch seals. Many chubby seals slept as the sun set.

The next day we drove home. “Oregon is amazing. I hope to come again,” I thought as we drove home, satisfied.

An interactive task for other fourth graders: Paige doesn’t just *tell* us her narrative; she *shows* us the true story’s details in a way that really improves her voice score. Good *showing* can improve both a writer’s idea and voice scores, so it’s a good skill to use when writing. Strong action verbs are at the heart of showing. Read Paige’s whole narrative again, then circle her absolute five best showing verbs.

Challenge: Look over your draft again. Are your verbs strong enough so that if someone had to choose your five best verbs, they could? Where might you improve your use of verbs so that you *show* your writing’s details to your reader?

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

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

Jaden’s Practice Prompt: *There are many amazing people, things, places, and events in our world. Tell a story about one of them.*



Jaden’s title: “An Amazing Japanese Restaurant”

I was on my way to Ichiban’s with my family. When we got there, I was so shocked that there was fire and fun. There was a variety of food there like crispy rice, chicken, chicken liver, and other delicious things.

When we sat at our table, I said, “I want teriyaki chicken,” and my mom said that was okay. The chef came over with his fancy gold cart, and my dad kept teasing me that if I didn’t use my wooden chopsticks, the chef would cut off my little finger starting with the pinky. Next the chef brought up a container of brownish-yellow liquid. He poured it on the grill, brought out a match, struck it, and suddenly the grill burst into flames. I thought my eyebrows were gone.

The chef said, “Oil with match equals fire,” then got some veggies pushed them on the grill and cooked my teriyaki chicken. He also put rice on the grill and chopped up the veggies. He put on a little show with drumstick like things and banged them on everything around him.

The best dinner ended and we said thanks and goodbye. Of course on the way out, I snuck some weird Japanese candy from the table.

An interactive task for other fourth graders: A good piece of narrative writing reveals interesting things about the writer’s personality. Jaden reveals elements of his personality in this piece, which improves his *voice* score. That he likes teriyaki chicken is *not* the most interesting thing we learn about the writer through his actions and the way he expresses himself. So what is? Work with a partner to find words and phrases that reveal Jaden’s sparkling personality to us.

Challenge: Don’t hide yourself when writing a narrative. To improve your *voice* score, include words and phrases that let your reader know you’re a unique person who’s not exactly like anyone else. Look again at Jaden’s writing, then explore your draft for good places to reveal who you are to your reader.

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

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

Rianna’s Practice Prompt: *There are many amazing people, things, places, and events in our world. Tell a story about one of them.*



Rianna’s title: “An Eye-Filling Forest”

One eye-filling and amazing place is a forest in Wyoming where my grandma took my dad, sister, her dog, and me to go hiking. “Yeah! I can’t wait to get there!” Emily (my sister) announced while hopping up and down in the backseat. We drove for a long time until we finally stopped. Everyone looked relieved to get out of the car, and we shot out onto the trail with Bear (Grandma’s dog), who looks like a real bear. My dad and Grandma took the lead, pacing up the path.

“Wait up Dad!” I shouted to him.

“Yeah, we don’t want to get deserted out here knowing a bear might be loose!” Emily agreed, her cheeks looking as red as a tomato. They slowed down for us but sped up again at a patch of flowers.

“Let’s rest,” Grandma suggested later as she plopped down on a log with us by her side. “I’d love to have these flowers in my kitchen,” she added, watching the butterflies chase the bees around the trees and into the sunflowers. We started off again, examining the animal tracks in the dirt and breathing in fresh air. We stopped walking again at a little creek where tadpoles, miniature plants, and insects roamed. My grandma took off her shoes and stuck her feet in the clear, ice-cold water, so my sister and I did the same. Dad was sitting on a gigantic boulder gazing at the big blue sky, and Bear pounced in the creek. We rested there for about 30 minutes, then left as the blazing sun hit our faces.

“Dad wait up I... I can barely walk,” Emily panted and hopped on Dad’s back. We walked on, observing the trees with gashes in the trunks and visualized bucks sharpening their antlers. Back at the car, we hopped in, gulping down water. We fell right asleep after glancing at a family of deer poke their heads out of the forest. I love that amazing place to hike.

An interactive task for other fourth graders: Rianna’s introduction and conclusion remind the reader that she addressed the topic she was given, which help to earn her a passing score for *organization*. But her organizational skills between the first and last line go further, helping earn her a higher score with that trait. Discuss how she uses dialogue and well-paced action verbs to move her story’s events along at a steady and interesting pace.

Challenge: Where in your draft could you use a line of dialogue or an action verb to prove

to your reader that your narrative is moving forward?