

A Fifth 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.

Kalley, a Nevada fifth grader, prepared for her state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing two months before taking her test. This was the second of three practice prompts Kalley’s teacher assigned her.

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



Kalley’s Practice Prompt: *It’s always a pleasure to give and receive gifts. Sometimes the gift is a present. Sometimes the gift is something someone does for you or someone else. What is the best gift you have ever given or received? Tell about a time you gave or received a gift and why that gift was important to you.*

Kalley’s writing:A Great Gift

“I love it,” I exclaimed.

“I knew you would,” my grandma said happily. It was a cheerful, jolly, snowy Christmas day. The bears were hibernating, the trees were dying, and snow was falling. It was 1:00 in the afternoon and the whole family was over, opening presents. I looked at the big box that was from my grandma, addressed to me. Five minutes later I opened it, and looked down at the gift, which was the best gift ever.

The gift was made of a light-brown wood. It was 12 inches by 12 inches long and was very well made. It had many holes and came with two silver, pea-sized balls. The gift had two knobs, one on two of the four sides. It also came with three different levels that you could take on and off. The gift was a one-of-a-kind labyrinth maze where you use the knobs to control the ball through the levels.

I was so excited that I wrestled it out of the packaging as fast as I could. I wanted to play with it right away so I picked it up and plopped it on the kitchen counter. Minutes passed and I couldn’t stop playing, it was so addicting. Soon my whole family was in on it and betting money on who could make it to the end first. My Aunt put the ball in the end hole to start with, but I guess that doesn’t count. This gift is important to me because it came from the heart and I will love it forever.

An interactive task for other fifth graders:Kalley worked hard to show off her **organization** skills as she revised this narrative. Her use of a quotation as an introduction forced her to start her story smack dab in the middle of some action, which is a smart way to begin, and her conclusion purposely refers back to the prompt to prove to her reader that she had read the prompt carefully.

Challenge: Could your revised story start in the middle of some action, and can you find an interesting way to refer back to the writing prompt at the end of your writing?

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Arjun, a Nevada fifth grader, prepared for his state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing two months before taking his actual test. This was the second of three practice prompts Arjun’s teacher assigned him.

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



Arjun’s Practice Prompt: *It’s always a pleasure to give and receive gifts. Sometimes the gift is a present. Sometimes the gift is something someone does for you or someone else. What is the best gift you have ever given or received? Tell about a time you gave or received a gift and why that gift was important to you.*

Arjun’s writing: “Family & Friends”

My family and friends are the best gift I have ever received. Without them, I wouldn’t be the kid I am today. My friends and family have helped me with many things. Now I am a happy ten year old boy, but without my friends and family, I would be a hollow shell of the kid I am today.

Without my friends, I wouldn’t be so “jolly” in school. My friends have encouraged me to take on new things. We all help each other in pain. My friends have believed in me just as I have believed in them. My two best friends make me the kid I am in school.

Well, I have known my family years longer than my friends. My family has always said someday I will reach the top stair in my studies, and also gave me much encouragement and love. Besides, without my family, I wouldn’t be named Arjun, or I wouldn’t even have been Asian! Wow! Family makes a difference!

See, without my friends and family, I wouldn’t be the kid I am today. A happy ten year old boy. I respect my family and friends, as they respect me. We always get along! You see, my family and friends are my best gift I have ever, ever received!

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Arjun worked hard to make sure both his introduction and his conclusion referred back to the prompt in an interesting way, which was a great way to improve both his **organization** and his **idea development** scores. Notice how naturally Arjun does this; he doesn’t begin with *I’m going to tell you about...* and conclude with *So now you know about...*, which rarely sounds natural. Highlight words and phrases in Arjun’s introduction and conclusion that shows he consciously did this.

Challenge: Study your brainstorm or rough draft and find a way to *naturally* refer to the prompt as you begin and end your writing.

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Amber, a Nevada fifth grader, prepared for her state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing two months before taking her test. This was the second of three practice prompts Amber’s teacher assigned her.

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



Amber’s Practice Prompt: *It’s always a pleasure to give and receive gifts. Sometimes the gift is a present. Sometimes the gift is something someone does for you or someone else. What is the best gift you have ever given or received? Tell about a time you gave or received a gift and why that gift was important to you.*

Amber’s writing: “You’ll See!”

“Huuuuuuuu” says six year old Amber, as she watches the T.V. “I’m bored,” she says.

“Uh, huh, Yep, Okay, Yes, We’re going right now Okay, bye,” says Amber’s mom, as she hangs up the phone. “Where are we going?” says Amber. “You’ll see,” says Amber’s Mom.

“Why are we going to Pets-Mart?” says Amber. “We’re meeting someone” says Amber’s Mom. “Who” says Amber. “You’ll see!” says Amber’s Mom.

Amber and her mom start walking towards a caramel colored truck. “Isn’t that Kim’s truck?” says Amber. “You’ll see” says Amber’s Mom. “Why are we meeting Kim?” says Amber. “I said, You’ll see!” says Amber’s Mom. “Why do I haveta see? Why can’t you tell?” yells Amber.

A short, blond lady comes out of the truck, holding a dog carrying case. “Hi” says the lady with a soothing voice. “Hi, Kim” says Amber and her mom. “Why are you carrying one of your dogs?” says Amber. “I’m not... I’m carrying yours!” says Kim.

“Now you won’t be bored,” says Amber’s Mom. “Thank you! I love him!” says Amber. “You’re Welcome,” says Kim. “I’ll call him Oreo.” says Amber.

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Amber demonstrated strong **voice** and **organization** skills while taking a few risks with this writing. Adding dialogue is a smart **voice** strategy, but it can be risky; if you don’t punctuate it well, you can hurt your conventions score. Amber’s repeated use of the line “You’ll see” adds a nice structure to her story that should earn her higher than a three in **organization**. Look closely at Amber’s dialogue and highlight several places where you believe she showed her best knowledge of punctuation rules.

Challenge: Study your rough draft to find some tired or unnatural sounding words to change for your revised draft.

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Cole, a Nevada fifth grader, prepared for his state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing two months before taking his actual test. This was the second of three practice prompts Cole’s teacher assigned him.

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



Cole’s Practice Prompt: *It’s always a pleasure to give and receive gifts. Sometimes the gift is a present. Sometimes the gift is something someone does for you or someone else. What is the best gift you have ever given or received? Tell about a time you gave or received a gift and why that gift was important to you.*

Cole’s writing: “The Best Gift Ever”

Christmas night last year is a night I’ll never forget. When I was almost done opening my presents, I questioned my brother if he had gotten me a present. He admitted that he had and that it was a humongous one too! I demanded for him to get it for me, but he viciously said, “You have to wait. It’s your last present!”

I tried to forget about it while I opened the rest of my presents. I eventually forgot about it with all my other toys around. Then I remembered about my humongous gift. I told my brother that it was time for him to get my present for me. Again he viciously said, “You have to wait until I’m ready to give it to you!” Thanks to him saying that, I was as sad as a lonely person singing the Blues. I went back to playing with my toys to make the time go by faster. I played with my electronics, my board games and my card games. After I played with every new toy, my brother finally said, “It’s time to get your gift.” I was as excited as a person finding two tons of gold!

My parents told me to close my eyes and wait for my brother to say open them. When my brother said to open them, I saw his electric scooter that I loved to drive ever since he got it! It was so amazing. I couldn’t say a word for about two minutes! When he said that it was now mine, I was as overjoyed as an orphan being adopted by a millionaire! It was the ultimate present because it was the scooter I always enjoyed riding. It was the gift I always wanted and it was the best gift my brother or anyone else could’ve given to me.

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Cole did a great job improving his **sentence fluency** when he revised this narrative writing. To create an interesting rhythm, Cole used a combination of short and long sentences in his paragraphs. He also used a variety of words to start his sentences. These two skills, when combined, can improve both the **voice** and **conventions** scores a writer receives.

Challenge: Circle the first words of your sentences in your rough draft before revising; do you use a variety of sentence beginnings? Count the number of words in your sentences before revising; do you have both long and short sentences

represented in your writing to give your words rhythm and flow?