

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.

Daisy, a Nevada fifth grader, prepared for her state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing one month before taking her test. This was the third practice prompt Daisy’s teacher assigned her.

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



Daisy’s Practice Prompt: *Remember a time when you did something that made you feel proud of yourself. Think about what you did and how you felt about it. Try to remember the details clearly in your mind. Then write about what you did, including the sights and sounds of the moment.*

Daisy’s writing: “Hooray!” I shouted as we were entering the super-cool, awesome and fun carnival. I instantly knew it would be the best and most awesome night ever. I skipped excitedly to the ticket booth so we could get our tickets since I couldn’t wait! I think we got about twenty tickets which I think is weird since my dad paid with a hundred dollar bill.

First, we went to play a carnival game where you have to catch as many small, cute and rubber ducks as you can in a toy net to win. We didn’t win though. They were really hard to catch.

Next, we went to the super-cool, super small and super scary roller-coaster. Even though it’s small, it still scared me so much that I almost wet my pants!

Finally we went to the really tall, really scary and really awesome Ferris-wheel. I looked up at it and thought it was as high as a skyscraper! My sister & I gave the man our tickets, buckled ourselves in, then 3...2...1... LIFT OFF! We went up so high I was able to see the whole carnival and my parents! When we got off I was so proud of myself because I conquered my fear of heights and had an epic feeling afterwards!

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Daisy worked hard to improve her **idea development** and **organization** skills with this practice prompt. Throughout her writing, she includes very specific details about the carnival, the games, and its rides. It is also very easy to follow the story because Daisy uses simple but effective transition words. Highlight (in two colors, if you can) some specific details and some transition words in Daisy’s writing. Talk about what you highlighted with a partner.

Challenge: Look at your brainstorm or rough draft and find two places to add some specific details and two places where a transition word would help the reader know the writing has moved forward to a new idea or event.

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Nicholson, a Nevada fifth grader, prepared for his state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing one month before taking his test. This was the third practice prompt Nicholson’s teacher assigned him.

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



Nicholson’s Practice Prompt: *Remember a time when you did something that made you feel proud of yourself. Think about what you did and how you felt about it. Try to remember the details clearly in your mind. Then write about what you did, including the sights and sounds of the moment.*

Nicholson’s writing: On October 23rd, I competed in a national martial arts competition. It’s called the Bay Area Sport Karate Association competition. Or better known as the BASKA competition. Worldwide champions competed! It was my first competition!

It took place at the Grand Sierra Resort at 5:00 p.m. The room it was in was huge! It had six rings and a stage. People all over were screaming and cheering wildly! I was nervous to my full extension.

I had made up a kata to perform with in front of three judges. A kata is a series of movements used to defend against two or more opponents. There were nine competitors including me. I was the last one up. My hands were so sweaty I had to dry them several times on my uniform. Then, as I stepped onto the stage, every nervous feeling I had went away and I ignored everything. I put all of my energy into my kata. I was so tired when I finished that I didn’t notice that one of the judges had given me a perfect score!

When I left the ring I felt so proud of myself! It was my first competition and I had won! I was amazed with myself. I was so amazed, that I started practicing for the next BASKA tournament in January!

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Nicholson does two powerful things with details in order to strengthen his writing’s **idea development**. First of all, he explains ideas that the test scorer might be unfamiliar with. Second, he includes unique and memorable details throughout the writing. Highlight two places where he explains something the scorer might need to understand, and two places where Nicholson’s details are unique and memorable. Compare your highlights to a friend’s.

Challenge: Look over your brainstorm or rough draft and find several places where your details might be presented in a more unique or memorable way. Then ask yourself, “Would a test scorer need more information in order to make sense of what I am writing about here?”

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Emily, a Nevada fifth grader, prepared for her state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing one month before taking her test. This was the third practice prompt Emily’s teacher assigned her.

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



Emily’s Practice Prompt: *Remember a time when you did something that made you feel proud of yourself. Think about what you did and how you felt about it. Try to remember the details clearly in your mind. Then write about what you did, including the sights and sounds of the moment.*

Emily’s writing: I want to take you back in time to April twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth 2009! When I tested for my black belt! My black belt test was in San Jose, California. When my family and I got there, on April 24, it was roasting outside and I wanted to swim. So my dad and I went to the hotel’s pool. After about an hour or so, I felt tired and like I was about to collapse.

Then, it was time to get ready for my first test, for my black belt test, which is my writing test! A writing test is a thirty page folder that you have about an hour to finish! We have a writing test so we know about self-defense, self-confidence, respect, self-control, and so much more. When I walked in, I noticed it was a high school gym that was loud, crowded, and stuffy. There were about 100 kids and 200 parents! The families got to sit on bleachers and the kids had to sit on a dirty, yellow floor. After about forty-five minutes, I was feeling rushed and then, “boom”! I was out of time and I didn’t finish!! But I still passed.

Then, on the twenty-fifth it was time for my physical test! I woke up about 5:30 to get ready. I loved the physical test because it was fun and hard. We have a physical test to make sure we know our self-defense (boxing everyone your age, boxing combo, kick combos, and my favorite thing, wrestling). My physical test was long, hard, sweaty, and crowded too! After my physical test was the worst thing – conditioning! It was at about 9:00 until midnight! All you did was run back and forth, pushups, and sit ups! Boy, was I tired after that!!

So my black belt test was long and hard, but it was worth it. Now I know all about self-defense! Sadly, I had to quit karate because it cost too much money!! Hey, but I will always have my self-defense with me!

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Emily’s writing is certainly excellent, but pay close attention to how she excelled with her **organization** skills. Her introduction and her conclusion are both solid. Between the introduction and conclusion, she uses transitions that move her story along from event to event. Highlight five different transitions she tries out as her narrative moves forward. See if you highlighted the same transitional words and phrases as your partner.

Challenge: Can you borrow an idea from Emily’s writing that might improve your own introduction and conclusion? Can you skillfully use transition words between your narrative’s events?

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Joshua, a Nevada fifth grader, prepared for his state writing examination by composing and revising the following piece of narrative writing one month before taking his test. This was the third practice prompt Joshua’s teacher assigned him.

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



Joshua’s Practice Prompt: *Remember a time when you did something that made you feel proud of yourself. Think about what you did and how you felt about it. Try to remember the details clearly in your mind. Then write about what you did, including the sights and sounds of the moment.*

Joshua’s writing: “The Fishing Trip”

One Friday afternoon, my parents called my brother and me into the kitchen. They said “We are going camping to AlmanorLake!” I was very ecstatic after hearing that because that means I might be able to go fishing, and maybe even catch my first fish! They said, “We will leave next week on Friday.” I was too excited to wait though, so I dashed out to the car, but that changed nothing. We would still leave Friday, next week.

When we were getting ready to leave, the first things I packed were a fishing pole, some bait and some hooks and line. When we got there, I was raging mad when I heard the news. We weren’t allowed to go fishing til tomorrow.

So I waited one week just to be told I can’t go fishing for another day. I sat at the mossy, wet, slippery rock wondering, “If I do catch a fish, I wonder what I will catch.” I sat there for a very long time.

The next day at the dock, my brother and I casted out. Then “Splash!” I had a bite! I yanked and pulled with excitement! My brother scurried to get my parents. By the time they got back, I was holding a seven inch shiny rainbow belly trout. I was very excited because this was my first fish, and we would eat it tonight!

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Joshua includes two types of details in this piece of writing: physical and emotional details. The physical details help a reader see the things the writer saw. The emotional details help a reader to understand how the writer was feeling. Using these types of details can improve both your **idea development** and **voice** scores. Highlight both types of details in Joshua’s writing, perhaps in two different colors. Compare your highlights with a partner.

Challenge: What type of details did you use more of in your rough draft? Can you find places in your writing where both types of details can be added or improved upon?