

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.

Wyatt, 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 first of two practice prompts Wyatt’s sixth grade teacher assigned him.



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

Wyatt’s Practice Prompt: *It may be fun to be someone else for a while. If you could change places with someone, who would you choose? Explain your choice.*

Wyatt’s essay: “Being a Spy”

I know only one spy, and that spy can do things with a rope that seem unimaginable. His name is Alex Rider, a spy for MIG, and I would want to be him for a while.

I really like Alex Rider because of his intelligence, his fighting, his computer hacking, and his infiltrating skills. I could never do any of those things, and I’m not nearly as adventurous as Alex is. He even infiltrated a billionaire’s home to spy on him for MIG. He got captured after a week and put in a tank with a killing jellyfish that tried to eat him. But he had a gadget, given to him by MIG, called acid crème, and he applied it to the glass of the tank and busted himself out. Talk about getting in and out of trouble! It turns out that the billionaire tried to blow up the world’s computers killing millions, but Alex Rider stopped him. Isn’t that wicked? I definitely couldn’t do that.

If I had an instructor to teach me martial arts I would want it to be Alex. He is very skilled at fighting--unlike me. Like I said before, he can do things with a rope that seem unimaginable. He once knocked out more than 20 guys with just a rope. Talk about using your resources. I would want to be able to do that. He also defeated a Chinese Mafia boxer who was a champion. I would definitely want Alex’s career.

Me being one of the world’s greatest spies? Me being famous for saving the world 7 times? That would be the life. Out of all the people in the world, I would want to be Alex Rider for a while.

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Wyatt’s strength in this sample is his use of both voice and sentence fluency skills. Wyatt doesn’t hide his personality (voice) when he writes this expository piece. Where do you see his personality come through the strongest? Also, look at how he varies (and skillfully punctuates) his sentence lengths, using a good mixture of simple and complex sentence types.

Challenge: As you draft, can you find an appropriate place to insert some of your personality into your explanation? As you prepare to revise, can you make sure you vary your use of complex and simple sentences? How will you ensure your complex sentences are punctuated as correctly as possible?

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Emma, 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 first of two practice prompts Emma’s sixth grade teacher assigned her.



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

Emma’s Practice Prompt: *It may be fun to be someone else for a while. If you could change places with someone, who would you choose? Explain your choice.*

Emma’s essay: “My Mum”

I love my mum. She is, besides my dad, my favorite person in the whole world. She’s awesome, and it’s just nice to hang out with a girl sometimes.

My mum is one of the smartest people I know. She has a history degree, even though neither of her parents finished school, let alone college, so she didn’t have anyone to help her be prepared. But she still managed to pull through. I think the main reason she was able to do this was because she is always interested in learning something new and didn’t care if she’s wrong. Mum is actually going back to school to become a teacher. I wouldn’t be able to do this like she did.

Another reason I’d like to be her is because she is a substitute at a middle school. She has a long term job as the E.S.L. teacher at the moment. She really enjoys her new job, and I think her students really enjoy her as their teacher, too. Even though every day she comes home tired, you can tell she’s had a good day. I don’t think I’d be able to teach E.S.L. like her because I don’t speak Spanish.

In my opinion, my mum is the best mum any girl could want. She’s very fun, creative, and always there for me when I need help.

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Emma not only did a nice job of basically organizing this short essay, but she also remembered to remind the reader of the topic she was assigned without simply stating the topic again and again. This helped her achieve a better-than-average mark with the organization trait.

Challenge: As you draft and revise, think about your own essay’s organization. Have you broken up your different reasons into separate paragraphs? With each reason you explain, is there an opportunity to remind your reader of your topic without simply stating it over again?

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Julia, 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 first of two practice prompts Julia’s sixth grade teacher assigned her.



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

Julia’s Practice Prompt: *It may be fun to be someone else for a while. If you could change places with someone, who would you choose? Explain your choice.*

Julia’s essay: “A Pretty Cool Job”

Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States has entered the room! Barack Obama has a pretty cool job. He’s the President of the U.S. If I had to be someone else for a day, I would probably choose him.

I really respect President Obama because he really tries to help everybody to the best of his ability. He tries to keep us safe too. I also appreciate him because he is about 45, and I am only in 6th grade, still trying to figure out politics. He is trying to stop poverty all over the country, and he makes a lot of the most very important decisions for the country.

The second reason I would like to trade places with the president is that he is very involved with kids’ education. Even though it’s not that good to raise taxes, he is raising them so we can have better education. That shows that he really cares about learning. Some states are at the bottom of the education list and, sadly, Nevada is number 50. Obama makes speeches and kids all over watch them at school.

At first I thought the whole prompt was a little crazy, then I thought and came up with the president as my topic. It would be cool to live in the White House.... Just for even one, little day!

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Julia shows great command of language and conventions in this sample, which really helped her earn a better score on this essay. Take a close look at Julia’s sentences, especially the ones that use commas, apostrophes, and other sophisticated punctuation marks. Julia carefully edited this piece as she copied it onto her final draft page.

Challenge: After revising and before carefully copying your essay onto your final draft sheet, double- and triple-check your sentences. Don’t guess on your commas and apostrophes. Really think them through, remembering the rules your teachers have been helping you with. Try to turn in the most carefully edited sample of your life as you create your final draft.

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

Julian’s Practice Prompt: *It may be fun to be someone else for a while. If you could change places with someone, who would you choose? Explain your choice.*

Julian’s essay: “Rock Star”

One person, ten albums, millions of fans, a world famous band. If I could change places with anyone in the world, I would be Jimmy Page.

This guitar player for Led Zeppelin leads a world-famous band. Wow! How I wish I could be the guitar player for Led Zeppelin. If I could switch lives with Jimmy Page for even just a day, I would. The thing I admire most about him is that he is a really good guitar player. I’m not too bad myself, but Jimmy Page actually has a band and millions of fans. What’s cool is that he can play the mandolin too. A mandolin looks like a small banjo, with the top four strings of a guitar, but doubled! Jimmy is also very rich and famous. He has ten great albums, a world famous band, and millions of fans!

Another reason I would switch places with Jimmy Page is that he inspired my Dad to play guitar, and then my Dad inspired me to play guitar better. His world famous band, Led Zeppelin, has made many great albums, all of which I own. Millions of people listen to his music and, like myself, have all of the Led Zeppelin albums. He was in one of the most famous bands of all time.

If I could take a break from being me for even just a day, I would pick Jimmy Page to switch with. It would be a refreshing change to be a world famous guitarist instead of being myself. That is why I would want to be Jimmy Page for even just a day.

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Julian goes out of his way to help you *really* believe he has a desire to become Jimmy Page for a day. Look carefully at Julian’s sentences and his word choices. Find two or three places in the writing where his conviction comes through the strongest; compare your examples with a partner.

Challenge: Adding *conviction* to your writing means you can convince a reader that you believe what you are saying about your topic. At what step of the writing process—pre-writing, drafting, revising, or editing—does it make sense for you to add your own conviction about your writing topic? Before finishing a final draft, find time to include three or four distinct places in your essay where you show your reader that you really believe what you’re saying about your topic.

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Matthew, 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 first of two practice prompts Matthew’s sixth grade teacher assigned him.



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

Matthew’s Practice Prompt: *It may be fun to be someone else for a while. If you could change places with someone, who would you choose? Explain your choice.*

Matthew’s essay: “The Great General”

A day in the Philippines, above villages and trees, war was in the air. Guns fired, planes flew and demanding officers screeched in frustration at their “green” privates. This was a typical day for General Douglas McArthur, an American general of World War II, also Field Marshal of the Philippine army during WWII. McArthur also participated in WWI. He even won the Medal of Honor! General McArthur was a highly decorated soldier. He has seventy silver crosses! McArthur is a general, a leader--something that I’m not--and probably won’t be, so I’d choose to be him.

General McArthur was in wars, which meant he saw death, tons, and tons of death. Sometimes people have psychological trouble dealing with all the bloodshed, death, and sights of war. They run away, commit suicide, hide, and basically go crazy like a monkey. Death is like a cat; it gets you when and where you least expect it. I think I would like to experience that “war” because I would like to see how I would react.

So I would be General Douglas McArthur, soldier of the 1st World War, and the officer of the Philippine army in World War II. I believe I would learn a great deal about myself if I stepped into the shoes of General McArthur. I would learn my physical and my psychological limits, if I was McArthur for a time. So if I could be somebody else, I would choose McArthur. You can learn things, even in a time of war.

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Matthew made sure to choose topic for this prompt that he knew something about, which strengthens his idea development score. Too often with this particular practice prompt, students choose a person to switch places with that they really don’t know very many facts about. Matthew shares facts about his topic, and he shares them using a writing style that stays interesting throughout the short essay.

Challenge: Before writing to this topic, make a short list of four or five people that you actually know three or more interesting facts about. Your choices can be famous people, or they can be people you know personally. Just be certain to list actual (and interesting facts) on your brainstorm so you can choose the very best topic to write about.

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Michael, 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 first of two practice prompts Michael’s sixth grade teacher assigned him.



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

Michael’s Practice Prompt: *It may be fun to be someone else for a while. If you could change places with someone, who would you choose? Explain your choice.*

Michael’s essay: “Why I’d be a Famous Author”

Down through history, so famous that people will remember you for centuries, all for documenting a journey through your deepest imagination. An author can accomplish such a feat. And if I could choose just one author to be, it’d be Rick Riordan.

Imagine being able to suck people into the depths of your dreamscape, letting them see the hand-painted portrait that you yourself created. That has been a dream of mine for who knows how long... Well, that and making a living doing what I love. Rick has been living that dream for a long time now. Years, in fact. With his vivid imagination, he can take you anywhere, all with a piece of paper. I’d be able to flow ideas into my writing like heartbeats, each one connecting each other with shocks that will open your eyes to the unseen world.

Rick is also a father! I am almost positive his child sees him as a role model. It’d be nice to be a father, in my opinion. Seeing your children growing up would seem heart touching. Rick’s child gets to hear his stories first! It’d be an honor for a normal person like me.

And even if I wasn’t him for a day, I’d try my best to fulfill this dream, even if I yield to succeed at first. But deep in my heart, I know I can turn that dream into a non-fiction, all between the covers of a book.

An interactive task for other sixth graders: Michael does a great job of not only including relevant details (**idea development**) as he explains his choice, but he “decorates” those relevant details with interesting nouns, verbs, and adjectives. During revision, writers have an opportunity to really “decorate” their ideas. Find three or four thoughtful **word choices** Michael uses in this final draft that you suspect he might have actually added when he did his final revision of this essay.

Challenge: After drafting your essay the first time, look back at the relevant details that you used to explain your essay’s topic. Which details could you make stand out more by “decorating” with sophisticated word choice, like Michael did in his final draft?