

We invite teachers to show these ‘sparklers’ before, during, or after their own seventh graders write to the same practice prompt.

An Eighth 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.

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

Read the prompt carefully. Then read Parker’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.

The Practice Prompt: Books, movies, and television can offer opportunities to learn valuable lessons. Write about a lesson learned from a book, movie, or television show that proved to be of value to you.



Parker’s writing: “Sphere”

I learned from the book Sphere what it would be like if you were a diver or in a submersible in the deepest parts of the ocean. The book taught me several interesting facts.

First, I learned that it would be very dark and cold in the deepest part of the ocean because sunlight cannot get all the way down there. You would not see very many fish or plants because there are only few of each that can actually survive those conditions.

In addition, there are thousands of pounds per inch of pressure down there. If you were a diver at those depths, you would need a special suit so the pressure didn’t crush you. If you were an aquatic scientist or marine biologist and you were in a submersible, the submersible would have to be very strong so it wouldn’t be crushed by the pressure either.

Also down there you breathe a mixture of oxygen, helium and other gases because the amount of oxygen we breathe up on the surface would be corrosive down there. To come up from those depths, you would need to stay in a depressurization chamber so your body could be readjusted to normal air.

The Book Sphere by Michael Crichton taught me that the deepest parts of the ocean are strange, dangerous, and amazing places.

A discussion topic for other eighth graders: As Parker revised this expository piece of writing, he worked hard on both his **organization** and **voice** skills. With *organization*, what transition words and phrases helped you move through Parker’s essay more smoothly? How might Parker make his introduction and conclusion even stronger? With *voice*, what word choices does Parker include that make him sound both knowledgeable about and interested in his chosen topic. Where might Parker have included more explanation of his writing’s terminology?

Your challenge: As you prepare to revise, where might you improve your organization and voice skills? Borrow two or three ideas from Parker that you can share with your teacher or your peers.

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

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

The Practice Prompt: Books, movies, and television can offer opportunities to learn valuable lessons. Write about a lesson learned from a book, movie, or television show that proved to be of value to you.



Samantha’s writing: “Peer Pressure”

“Come on, try one.”

“No thanks.”

“It’s just one, it won’t hurt.”

I’ve thought about that episode of “True Teen Life” many times since I first saw it. Ever since I was in grade school, we’ve watched videos about the dangers of peer pressure. “Don’t do drugs. Don’t drink alcohol. Don’t do anything you know isn’t right.” Those videos taught me how to say “No” and how to just walk away.

You’re supposed to be yourself, right? So why do some people do things that they shouldn’t do just to fit in or look cool? I have learned that if you say “Yes” to the wrong question, it could affect your future.

Some say that T.V. rots our brains, but watching all these videos about being pressured with doing drugs, acting like a bully, getting pregnant, and making wrong decisions have affected my choices in life.

The people I see on these T.V. shows demonstrate how to handle the problem both the right way and the wrong way. That really helped me; I haven’t fallen for peer pressure yet, and I know if I do, I can remember my long-term goals in life and look at the bigger picture.

The shows about peer pressure show kids how to do the right things. I have learned from those videos, and I hope others will learn from them too.

A discussion topic for other eighth graders: Samantha took a risk by including an introduction that feels almost more narrative than expository, but she kept it short enough so that she still had enough space to explain her actual response to the prompt. Where in her writing does she include the most *specific details*, which are the ones that would affect an **idea development** score?

Your challenge: Can your introduction be re-worked so that it’s more interesting to your reader? Can you find two or three places in your rough draft where adding a specific detail could explain one of your ideas better to your reader?