

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

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.

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

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



Jacob's Practice Prompt: *Think about a time when something special or unusual happened at school. It could be a time when something unexpected happened in your classroom. Or it could be any event at school that you remember well. Write about what happened and why it was special or unusual.*

Jacob's writing: "The Game Show"

Once in first grade at my elementary there was a... Game Show! I had brought my "Deal or No Deal" DVD and people were having a blast! How did this happen you ask? OK, I'll tell you but gather close.

It all started when my class was watching a boring old documentary. We were all bored out of our skulls along with the teacher. We were doing this because a rain storm had cancelled recess. I know what you are thinking. How could we survive under such conditions? Well, it wasn't easy. We were in the middle of the documentary when something popped into my head. Why not play the T.V. game I got for my birthday?

Then I darted over to my backpack and grabbed the game and ran over to the teacher... When I asked her and she said maybe the class heard and they started chanting "yes, yes, yes."

She said Okay, but when she was going to put it in the T.V. the power went out and my teacher threw it out the WINDOW! Oh No!

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Even though you may not know Jacob, you hear his **voice** and personality throughout this writing sample. Highlight three places where you think Jacob shows the most **voice** and personality with his carefully chosen words and phrases. Compare your highlights to a friend's.

Challenge: Look over your own brainstorm or rough draft for this practice prompt. Where might you add **voice** so your reader understands a bit more about your personality?

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Madi, 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 first of three practice prompts Madi's teacher assigned her.

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



Madi's Practice Prompt: *Think about a time when something special or unusual happened at school. It could be a time when something unexpected happened in your classroom. Or it could be any event at school that you remember well. Write about what happened and why it was special or unusual.*

Madi's writing: "Sort of in Trouble"

It was a cool morning out on the dusty playground. I was setting down two colorful paper bags and my pink backpack. When all of a sudden, the loud bell rang so, I had to collect my heavy stuff and get into the crowded line.

We were all inside the big warm building and we shuffled to our desks. I shouted out, "Move your lunch cards!" Then I took attendance. We all scurried to get our work done.

Right out of no where Ms. Lawson poked her head of orange wavy hair in and said, "Madi! I need to speak with you!" in an upset voice. Then I said "What did I do wrong? Ms. Lawson, should I be scared?!" She replied "no" with a smile.

I was out of the classroom in a heartbeat and Ms Lawson said, "Great job." Then I said, "Thank you! Wait, for what?" Then she said, "On your writing test, can I use it as an example for my students?!" I said, "Ok."

Then she said "Go back to class, but first I'm going to make a big scene!" I said, "Ok, sure, I guess so!?" She yelled, "Don't you ever do that again! You hear me!?" (Remember we're making a big scene.)

Some kids in the classroom went, "Ooh, Madi's in trouble!" (In a joking way.) So, that was the day, yes the day I got yelled at by Ms. Lawson.

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Madi improved her rough draft by adding thoughtful word choices to her revised draft. Thoughtful word choice can greatly improve **voice**, but when you 'force' unnatural words into a piece of writing, the voice can be harmed. Highlight three places in Madi's writing where the word choice feels natural to you.

Challenge: Add some natural-sounding word choice to your draft to improve its **voice**.

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

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



Bryan’s Practice Prompt: *Think about a time when something special or unusual happened at school. It could be a time when something unexpected happened in your classroom. Or it could be any event at school that you remember well. Write about what happened and why it was special or unusual.*

Bryan’s writing: “Changing Pencil Sharpeners”

“Hmmm...” I wondered inside my head. We were supposed to write about something unusual for this practice prompt I’m writing about now. I was about to give up on trying to get a good topic. That was until Tommy, the boy sitting in front of me, changed that.

He asked me if I wanted to trade pencil sharpeners with him. When I said no he was doing the “Awman!” expression. He started to look around for anyone who would trade with him for about three to five seconds. I wouldn’t have wanted to trade anyway. First of all I bought my easy-to-open pencil sharpener. He didn’t buy his. He looked into Andrew’s (the boy next to him) desk. I thought trouble was occurring!

I was right. Tommy secretly changed his pencil sharpener with Andrew’s! He should never have put it so close to the edge of inside his desk! But then the thing hit me. My best topic ever! I raised my hand at the last minute and said my idea. Tommy secretly exchanging pencil sharpeners with Andrew! Tommy was totally exposed! Andrew was shocked too. And this was an unusual thing that happened at school!

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Bryan 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 Bryan 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 both the introduction and conclusion that refer back to the prompt Bryan as assigned.

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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Carolyn, 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 first of three practice prompts Carolyn’s teacher assigned her.

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



Carolyn’s Practice Prompt: *Think about a time when something special or unusual happened at school. It could be a time when something unexpected happened in your classroom. Or it could be any event at school that you remember well. Write about what happened and why it was special or unusual.*

Carolyn’s writing: “The Craziest Field Trip Ever”

It was a sunny day at my elementary school, and it was the last day of school. We were going on the annual walk to the park when suddenly it started raining! It was totally out of the blue with nobody expecting it. All of us were cold and the teachers decided we didn’t need to go back to the school. We were almost there when the rain turned into piercing hail! We were all wondering where it came from because the weather report said nothing about rain or hail. We all finished running to the park and we ate all the snacks and desserts that the parents set up for us and we were very lucky that one of the parents saw the rain and brought delicious hot chocolate! Finally we made our long voyage back to the school.

We all thought that the trip back would be easier than the way there but we were all terribly wrong...

We Got Lost!

The teachers should have known their way back because they do this every year, but they didn’t. It was a foggy gray sky because it had just rained and we took a wrong turn. We went down a wrong street for probably about a half-a-mile and finally they realized that they had never seen that part of town before. We turned around and we were back on the main road and we were on our way back to the school. We got back to the school and it was about five o’clock and the field trip should have been over two hours ago. After all that we were glad that we went on that crazy adventure!

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Carolyn made sure—while drafting and revising for this prompt—to include unique details that would be remembered after her reader put the writing down. Using these types of details improved her **idea development** score. Highlight three or four details that you believe Carolyn used because they were both unique and memorable.

Challenge: Study your brainstorm or rough draft and find a way to add more memorable details or to change some ordinary details to be more unique.

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

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



Jordan's Practice Prompt: *Think about a time when something special or unusual happened at school. It could be a time when something unexpected happened in your classroom. Or it could be any event at school that you remember well. Write about what happened and why it was special or unusual.*

Jordan's writing: "The Sticky Day!"

One morning, I woke up so exhausted I could sleep standing straight up! I slowly made my way to the kitchen table to eat my warm pancakes. Then my mom realized that we would be late for school if we didn't leave instantly. So she shoved me in her car like a rag doll. I was off to another day in 3rd grade.

When I got to school and when the 9:00 bell rang, I realized that today was the Thanksgiving Turkey project. First, we did our very mathy morning message. Then it was time for the project. I started off good on my project but then I heard this, "Come on glue open!" It was Max trying to open some glue. Then I heard a huge SPLAT! The glue had come open alright but right into Max's face and hair. The class was really laughing. Even Max was laughing and I, well I fell to the ground laughing.

Max went to wash up. I knew that he was having a unusual, funny, and weird day. After school I told my mom the sticky story. I asked her "What do you think his mom will think?" It had been a really unusual day at school.

An interactive task for other fifth graders: Jordan used thoughtful word choice to do two things: improve his paper's **voice** with interesting words that sound natural when used by a fifth grader; and improve his paper's **idea development** because they paint a memorable look at his details. Highlight several words that you believed improved Jordan's **voice**, and several words that improved Jordan's **idea development**.

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