

In Common: Effective Writing for All Students
Collection of All Student Work Samples, K-12

By The Vermont Writing Collaborative, with Student Achievement Partners and CCSSO

Sixth Grade
Range of Writing Informative / Explanatory
Writing Samples

File Name: I6R Center of Life

Informative/Explanatory

Grade 6

Range of Writing

Center of Life

The saguaro cactus is a huge cactus that lives in deserts. It can live up to 150 years old! Even though it grows very very slowly, it grows up to be one of the tallest plants in the desert! The saguaro cactus is very adapted to desert life and this makes it a good home and food for many animals.

The saguaro cactus is adapted to survive in the deserts in many different ways. Because of the heat in the desert, saguaro cacti have waxy skin to prevent moisture loss. Many more adaptations help the saguaro keep water, though. It holds water in its stem, that's pleated like an accordion so that it can expand and hold more water. The roots also help it get more water. They spread out very far, almost as wide as the cactus is tall so that helps. The roots are also very close the surface, as little as 3 inches below ground. Because of this, if it rains, the cactus can get lots of water before the ground sucks too much up.

The cactus is also a home and food for lots of animals that live in the desert. Snakes can find a home, and many birds can perch on the big cactus. Many small flying creatures eat the nectar from the flowers. The cactus also bears fruit. After a while in the sun, the fruit splits in half and birds and insects eat the oozing sweet stuff from inside the fruit. Other fruit falls to the ground, where lots of animals eat them. Other animals eat the seeds. But after a long time, the cactus dies and falls down. Still, it is a place for small ground dwelling animals. Scorpions can take shelter from the sun. Jackrabbits can make a home there.

The saguaro cactus is really and amazing plant. It's also a good place for animals to live and find food. If one day I could go to see one, I totally would. If I was stuck in a desert, I think I would go to the nearest saguaro cactus to wait for help.

Introduces the topic:

The writer provides context in the form of background information on the saguaro cactus and then states the main point / focus

Focus / **topic** of the piece is clearly stated

Organizes ideas, concepts, and information: the writer describes the adaptation of the cactus to desert life using various categories

Uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary within evidence to develop and support topic of saguaro adaptation

Uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts

Uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to develop and

Provides a concluding section that follows from the information presented by restating the main point and reflecting on the topic

In this assignment from a science unit, students were asked to explain how the saguaro, a desert plant, has adapted to desert life and provides a home and food for desert creatures. The writer gives some background about the saguaro in general in the introduction and then states his main point (the saguaro is well-adapted to desert life and provides a home and food for desert creatures).

The writer organizes information and ideas clearly by category to support the main point. Within each chunk, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to convey information about the saguaro. He uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts. This makes the writer's thinking and understanding easy to follow.

While the language is sometimes a bit informal (*"If one day I could go to see one, I totally would"*), the bulk of the essay has a formal style. The conclusion follows from main point and, although not required by the Standards, provides some reflection on the topic.

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File Name: I6R Lyddie's Choices**Informative/Explanatory****Grade 6****Range of Writing****Lyddie's Choices**

Lyddie Worthen is the main character in Katherine Patterson's *Lyddie*. Lyddie is a young girl living on a Vermont farm in the 1840's. This is the time of the Industrial Revolution. Lyddie's father has abandoned the family and Lyddie's mother leaves her and her brother behind thinking that the world is coming to an end. The only thing Lyddie has left is her farm which she desperately wants to hold on to. In order to keep her farm Lyddie has to work off the debts on her farm, but the job she has isn't paying enough, so she leaves to begin a new life as a factory girl at the newly developed textile mills in Lowell Massachusetts. Because of working in the Lowell mills Lyddie gets a broader sense of herself. She is able to make some choices about who she wants to be in her life.

Introduces the topic clearly, including naming the title and author of the novel; provides context of for the story, including naming identifying characters and main central ideas of the novel

Lyddie is working at a place called Cutlers Tavern for very low wages. If she keeps working like this she will never be able to pay off her debts, so she decides to go to Lowell and work in the mills so that she can make more money.

States focus / **topic** of the piece

She is told by a customer who works in the mills "you'd do well in the mill you know. You'd clear at least two dollars a week. And' she paused 'you'd be independent.'" (p. 25)

Develops the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, and quotations, or other information and examples from the text. The writer explains the meaning of the quotation he has chosen, with details about context (what was going on here). He also explains details that **clarify the relationship among the ideas / topic** he is working with in the piece.

Lyddie then makes the choice to go to the mill. She realizes that at the mill she will be able to pay off the farm debts faster. This is a hard choice for Lyddie, if she stays at the tavern she knows that she will continue to make money and eventually pay off the debt. If she goes to the mill she has a chance of not getting the job at all but if she does get the job she will be able to pay off the farm debts much faster. This is when Lyddie begins to take her life into her own hands and makes the choice to take a chance at the mill.

When Lyddie begins working at the mill, she starts making much more and with that money she is able to buy a book. Lyddie does not have a good education and people at the mills by her roommate Betsy she becomes passionate about reading so she goes to buy a book.

“I-I come to purchase at book...” “what book do you have in mind...” “uh-uh *Oliver Twist* if you please sir” (p.83-84) she then pays with two silver dollars.

Develops the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples: the writer explains the meaning of the quotation he has chosen.

By making the choice to purchase that book she opens the doors to education and becomes a smarter person who loves to learn. She also changes from a thrifty penny pincher to someone who realizes that money isn't always the most important thing in life.

Because of Lyddie's love for reading she makes the choice to leave the farm that she has just returned to, and leave Luke, the man who loves her to go to Oberlin College in Ohio.

Establishes and maintains a reasonably formal style

“I'm off” she said “to Ohio, there's a college there that will that will take a women just like a man”. (p.181)

By making the choice to go to college Lyddie is showing that she won't give up on her education and won't give up on an adventurous life. Even though things haven't been great for her she is still ready to start another chapter in her life.

Uses appropriate, varied transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts

What does the author want us to understand about the power of the Industrial Revolution? I think that in Lyddie it is showing that the Industrial Revolution gave people many opportunities in their lives. The Industrial Revolution also had lots of hard moments where people would get sick, break a bone, or even die. The Industrial Revolution seemed to rule a lot of people's lives and ruin their families. Lyddie took advantage of the Industrial Revolution well and through the choices she made was able to pull past just being a factory girl and take different paths in life.

Uses precise word choice, and domain-specific vocabulary about the Industrial Revolution

Provides a concluding section that follows from the explanation presented by restating the main point and reflecting on the topic

In this assignment, students were asked to reflect on the question “How did the work in the Lowell mills change Lyddie’s life?” after they had read the book *Lyddie* by Katherine Paterson. Class discussion helped students to arrive at the focus statement that this writer uses. He provides enough context about the book in the introduction that even people who have not read the text can follow the writer’s thinking in the piece that follows.

The writer clearly organizes his evidence using three quotations from the text. In each case, he gives some context for the quotation he uses and follows the quote with a well-elaborated explanation that makes the relationship between the quote (evidence) and the topic / focus clear. He uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts. Throughout the piece, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to make his thinking clear.

The writer uses a formal, academic tone as he explains his thinking. The conclusion follows from the main point and, although not required by the Standards, provides some thoughtful reflection on the topic.

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