

WRITING PROMPTS

As a school, you will have to decide whether you will do an impromptu writing where all students are given a prompt and then write (short constructed response), or a revised writing where they are allowed to create one draft and then revise (extended writing). I suggest that you do a revised writing. Use the student friendly six-trait rubrics to assess this writing. Also, you will want to have 3rd - 6th grade work in a timed situation. For third grade the CSAP time is 50 minutes + 10, and for 4th - 6th it is 55 minutes + 10.

K-2 Prompts:

Use the same prompt for the entire grade. For primary teachers, the writing assessment should not be as rigid as in grades 3-6 regarding time and exact format. Teachers should support their students as they work through the prompts with instructions and encouragement. Try to have all students complete the prompt during the same week to make the all-school assessment more valid.

PRE-WRITING. Teachers should help their students in both pre-writing and writing using these prompts. Give each child a copy of the prompt along with crayons and pencils. Read the directions aloud and show students where to draw on the page. Encourage students to add details as they are drawing that may later help them in their writing. After students have finished with their drawings, teachers may wish to give them the opportunity to talk about what they have drawn. They can do this by describing the drawing to a partner, a small group or the whole class. This talking will also help them generate ideas for their writing.

WRITING. You might consider just taking the second graders into the prompt without pre-writing support. Use your best judgment in this. Read the second part of the prompt aloud so that children are clear about what they will be writing. The prompts are easily adapted to different levels of writing development. You may wish to brainstorm as a class a list of possible responses and write them on chart paper or on the chalkboard. When students are writing, they can refer to the list for ideas or for help with spelling. Children can also refer to the word banks on many pages to guide them as they are writing.

3rd Grade Prompts:

For third grade, the CSAP prompt could ask students to write short personal narratives, friendly letters, or brief expository pieces (how-to, informational paragraphs). I've organized prompts in narrative and expository categories.

EXPOSITORY.

#1 Tell about your favorite game. Write a paragraph explaining why it is your favorite game to play.

#2 A lot of people in our country have a hard time learning to relax. Think about how you relax. What do you do when you need to relax? Describe at least two ways that you relax and explain how they work for you.

NARRATIVE.

#1 Imagine that you have invented a magic potion. Write a story that tells what happens when someone uses your potion.

#2 In the Disney movie *Toy Story*, we watch the adventures of Woody and Buzz who are toys that seem real. Write a story about a toy that seems real.

4th Grade Prompts:

EXPOSITORY.

#1 Think about one of your friends. Tell at least three things about this friend that makes him or her a good friend.

#2 "So today's the first day of the fourth grade," he said, "the year they separate the sheep from the goats."
from *Keep Ms. Sugarman in the Fourth Grade* by Elizabeth Levy

This quote talks about school separating people. Explain how schools separate people.

#3 Imagine your favorite aunt is thinking about moving to Colorado. Write a letter to your aunt explaining why Colorado is a great place to live. Give her at least two good reasons.

NARRATIVE.

#1 Laura feels like she doesn't have many friends at her new school. She sometimes stays after school kicking a soccer ball around with some kids trying to make friends, but they never ask her over to play. Making new friends in school isn't easy. Write a story about Laura making a new friend at school.

#2 When the regular teacher is gone and a substitute comes, students often misbehave. Write a story about a class that pulls some tricks when a substitute teacher comes.

5th Grade Prompts:

EXPOSITORY.

#1 Think of something you have made with your own hands. Write an explanation telling someone else how you made the object. Make your explanation so clear and complete that someone with little to no experience could follow your directions and make the same thing.

#2 Pretend your class is putting together a time capsule. It may not be opened by anyone for 100 years. This time capsule will tell people in the future what life on earth was like in 2003. You can choose one thing to go inside. Explain what you will choose and why.

#3 Think of the most valuable thing that you have that was not bought in a store. Explain why this thing is important to you.

#4 Think of your favorite animal. Explain what qualities this animal has that makes it important to you.

PERSUASIVE.

#1 People worry too much about _____. Fill in the blank with any topic you like. Then, write a paper that supports your statement. Convince others to agree with you.

#2 Some school districts have year-round school. This means students go to school for nine weeks and then have a week or two off and then go to school for another nine weeks. Summer vacations are shorter in year-round schools with only about four weeks off rather than the 12 weeks we have off. Do you think year-round schools are a good or bad idea. Write a letter to the local school board telling them your opinion and give at least two reasons you think this way.

#3 Some beaches have rules such as, no dogs, no kite flying, no swimsuits. What do you think? Should beaches have rules? State your opinion clearly and support it with at least two good ideas or reasons.

6th Grade Prompts:

EXPOSITORY.

#1 Isaac Newton was a mathematician who discovered the Law of Gravitation (gravity). The discovery started with an apple falling from a tree! How do you think the apple taught Newton about gravity? Do you think Newton's discovery of gravity was important. Explain.

#2 Many parents worry about helping their students be successful in school. Create a piece of writing that could become a how-to brochure for parents: How to Help Your Child Succeed in School.

#3 We live in a time when new things are being invented every day. Think of an invention that has been especially helpful or one that has been harmful to people. Write a paper that explains why this invention is either helpful or harmful.

#4 In the 1800s, many children began to work at the age of 10, some in factories or mills. Today we have child labor laws, protecting children from harsh work conditions. Imagine you lived during the 1800s. Would you rather be working or going to school? Explain why or why not.

PERSUASIVE.

#1 "The most important quality any person can have is a sense of humor." Do you agree or disagree with this statement. Write a paper in which you take a clear stand, and explain your position supported with clear reason, details, and facts.

#2 Choose one film or book that you have recently seen or read and liked. Write a recommendation to convince others to see the film or read the book. (Hint: Don't summarize the book or film, instead, tell reasons why the reader should read or see it.)

#3 Some teachers say cell phones and pagers should be banned from school. Some parents say kids need them. What do you think? Write a paper that states your opinion and has good reasons why cell phones should or should not be allowed in class.

#4 Some people say that, in emergencies, women and children should be saved first. The *Titanic* is a good example of this. It hit an iceberg in 1912 and only 700 of the 2,224 people survived. Many of the people who survived were the women and children because the men put them into lifeboats first. Do you think "women and children first" is a good idea? Why or why not?

RESOURCES

Some good resources for more prompts follow.

GRADES K-3

Lunsford, Susan. *Literature-Based Mini-Lessons to Teach Writing: 15 Engaging Lessons that Help Your Students Write Happily Ever After*. New York; Scholastic; 1998. (ISBN 0-59043372-5) Grades 1-3

Sweeney, Alyse. *50 Fun-Filled Draw & Write Prompts*. New York; Scholastic; 2000. (ISBN 0-439-10615-X) Grades K-2

GRADES 3-6

Daley, Patrick and Michael S. Dahlie. *50 Debate Prompts for Kids*. New York; Scholastic; 2001. (ISBN 0-439-05179-7) Grades 5 and up

Marx, Pamela. *Quick Writes: More than 60 Short Writing Activities from Practical to the Poetic*. Glenview, IL; Good Year Books; 1999. (ISBN 0-673-58743-X) Grades 6-8

Ohanian, Susan. *145 Wonderful Writing Prompts from Favorite Literature*. New York; Scholastic; 1998. (ISBN 0-590-01973-2) Grades 4-8

Sweeney, Jacqueline. *Prompt a Day! 625 Thought-Provoking Writing Prompts Linked to Each Day of the School Year*. New York; Scholastic; 1998. (ISBN 0-590-18738-4) Grades 3-6