“What does good student writing at this grade level look like?”

The answer lies in the writing itself.

The Writing Standards in Action Project uses high quality student writing samples to illustrate what performance to grade level standards looks like—in action.

GRADE 6

English Language Arts

Narrate

(Poem)

Sailing
Writing Sample Title:
Sailing

Text Type and Purpose: Narrate
Grade level/Content area: Grade 6 English Language Arts
Type of Assignment: Poem
Standards Addressed: (W.6.3), (MA.3.A), (W.6.4), (L.6.3), (L.6.5)
See descriptions of these standards in the right column of the next page.

Highlights:
This sample of student work exceeds grade level standards. It demonstrates the following attributes of effective writing.
The sample:
• Demonstrates effective use of rich poetic language
• Exhibits skillful use of poetic techniques
• Includes sophisticated organization that captures and brings clarity to a complex experience

Instructional Practices:
The teacher used the following practices:
• Opportunities for teacher and peer feedback
• Opportunity for reflection by the writer
• Models of effective writing
• Explicit instruction in elements of effective poetry

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY
The student writing sample that follows includes standards-based commentary. The commentary found in this column describes how the writing meets the standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (2011) and other content frameworks when applicable.

1. Grade-specific standards addressed are:
• Listed in the column to the right of student work by strand, grade, and number (or number and letter, where applicable)
• Marked by a colored block with a letter code, also in the column to the right of student work
EXAMPLE: A

2. Colored arrow blocks beneath each standard in the right column:
• Are of the same color and letter code as the block that marks the standard being addressed
• Mark standards-based commentary related to the standard being addressed
• Appear in alphabetical order
EXAMPLE: A1

3. Corresponding colored arrow blocks within the text:
• Set off sections of student work to which commentary applies
• Do not necessarily appear in alphabetical order—but where evidence of a particular standard exists
EXAMPLE: (begin) A1 section A1 (end)
Assignment Description:
This is a “free verse poem” in which the teacher asked students to write a poem that contains the following criteria from the Free Verse Poem Guideline Rubric provided with the assignment:

- Strong lead—Does the poem start inside an experience, feeling, observation, or memory?
- Strong ending—Does the poem leave the reader with a feeling, idea, image or question?
- Line breaks and stanzas—Are lines/stanzas of the poem broken on nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs?
- Cut to the bone—Is the poem elegant shorthand? Are all the words used necessary?
- Use repetition (optional)—If repetition is used in the poem, does it stress an important word, phrase, idea or theme? (Repetition should not sound awkward.)

Intended Audience:
Teacher, students, parents

Time:
Unknown

Writing Process:
Pre-writing; drafting; self-editing; peer-editing/peer response; teacher-student conference; revising

Materials:
Free Verse Poem Guideline Rubric (see criteria)

Please note:
The samples may contain inaccuracies in wording and content or shortcomings in the use of standard English conventions.

Writing Standards:
Grade 6, Standard 3 (W.6.3)
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

EXAMPLE: A B C

Writing Standards:
Anchor Standard (MA.3.A)
Write fiction, personal reflections, poetry, and scripts that demonstrate awareness of literary concepts and genres.

EXAMPLE: D

Writing Standards:
Grade 6, Standard 4 (W.6.4)
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

EXAMPLE: E

Language Standards:
Grade 6, Standard 3 (L.6.3)
Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

EXAMPLE: F

Language Standards
Grade 6, Standard 5 (L.6.5)
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

EXAMPLE: G
Sailing

The writer conveys the experience of being alone in a sailboat on the ocean through a free verse poem. The reader can envision the experience of being on the ocean waters through the lens of sophisticated figurative and sensory language that reveals all the activity that is happening around the writer. Organization is skillful and subtle. The poem completes a full circle by beginning and ending with the strong sense of solitude.

Sailing

I hear the waves lapping against my boat. It is just me. It is magical.

The glossy water is now wrinkled by the wind,

Like a blue tablecloth that was never ironed.

Writing. Grade 6, Standard 3:

Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.

The writer clearly establishes in the opening of the poem the situation of being alone on the ocean (Sailing. I hear the waves lapping against my boat. It is just me.).

The writer gives the poem a sense of immediacy and underscores the significance of details mentioned by writing in the first person (I hear the waves lapping against my boat. It is just me. It is magical.).
Seagulls soar overhead,
calling from way up there,
to their friends.

The wide open sea greets me like home. The blue of the sky...

All I see is the glare of the sun,
the depths of the water,
the blue of the sky.

I hear the luff of my sail,
the call of the seabirds,
and my small wake bubbling behind me.

The wind makes my eyes water.
I smell salt spray, and fuel from a passing fishing boat.

This feels like nothing I’ve done before.

Only the giant grey-green abyss, and me.

It’s a new world.

Fish splashing, Sail flapping.

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

Writing. Anchor Standard:

D MA.3.A
Write fiction, personal reflections, poetry, and scripts that demonstrate awareness of literary concepts and genres.

D1 Examples: 1 · 2
The writer effectively initiates a personal response to sailing by using examples of onomatopoeia (Fish splashing, Sail flapping,) and alliteration (Seagulls soar) to create a rhythm in the poem’s language.

D2 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3
The writer uses simile (The glossy water is now wrinkled in the wind, like a blue tablecloth that was never ironed,), personification (The wide open sea greets me like home,), and sensory details (I smell salt spray) to create an image for the reader.

D3 Examples: 1
The writer’s awareness of graphic elements, such as capitalization, line length, and the formation of words enhances the depiction of the experience. The isolation of each word in alone... in... the... ocean in a line of its own highlights the writer’s sensation of solitude.

Writing. Grade 6, Standard 4:

E W.6.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

E1 Examples: 1
The task was to write a free verse poem that contained both a strong lead and ending. The writer creates a clear and strong opening by strategically using the single word Sailing and then clearly sets the scene by writing (I hear the waves lapping against my boat. It’s just me. It is magical.).
**B2** The sea mixes itself all together, like making a cake. **B2**

Only this is better.

**E2** Just the wind, the waves, and my sailboat alone in the ocean. **D3 E2**

**begin** section **end**

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**Writing. Grade 6, Standard 4:**
(continued)

**E2** E2 Examples: 1

The writer addresses the second part of the task with a strong ending. The poem comes full circle, effectively conveying the sensation of being alone on the ocean, by closing with an image that mirrors the opening lines *(Just the wind, the waves, and my sailboat, alone, in the ocean.)*.

**Language. Grade 6, Standard 3:**

**F** L.6.3.a

Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style.

**F** F Examples: 1 · 2 · 3

The writer mixes single words, sentence fragments, and sentences of varying lengths and types. This contributes to the poem’s effective style and to the vivid picture the poem paints *(Sailing... I smell salt spray, and the fuel from a passing fishing boat... This feels like nothing I’ve done before. Only the giant grey-green abyss, and me... ...It’s a new world.)*.

**Language. Grade 6, Standard 5:**

**G** L.6.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

**G** G Examples: 1 · 2

The writer utilizes figurative language throughout the poem to convey the experience of sailing on the ocean *(Like a blue tablecloth that was never ironed... Only the giant grey-green abyss, and me).*