“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.
Writing Sample Title:

Egyptological Excavation

Text Type and Purpose: Inform / Explain

Grade level/Content area: Grade 7 Social Studies

Type of Assignment: A journal that chronicles an imaginary archaeological excavation (several sample entries included here)

Standards Addressed: Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ELA and Literacy (2011)
(W.7.3), (WHST.6-8.2), (WHST.6-8.4), (WHST.6-8.8), (L.7.1), (L.7.2), (L.7.3)

Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework (2003)
(HSS.7.15), (HSS.7.16)

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:

• Maintains a strong unifying central idea
• Exhibits logical organization within and among journal entries
• Emulates the voice and professional tone of an enthusiastic archeologist
• Incorporates relevant information from research sources
• Includes non-formulaic transitions among paragraphs
• Displays sophisticated vocabulary, word choice, and word combination
• Uses domain-specific vocabulary effectively
• Includes a variety of sentence structure

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.

Understanding the Standards-Based Commentary

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)
Instructional Practices:
Preparation for this project included:
• Introduction to Egyptian civilization
• Reading assignments to provide background information
• Project packet to guide students through creation of the project
• Assistance with time management
• Provision of extra resources, e.g., books, reliable web sites
• Examination of sample projects completed by students in previous classes

Assignment Description:
Journal entries shown here are selections from a more extensive journal. Chronicling the excavation of an archaeological site, the journal is intended to be a first-hand account of an imaginary archaeologist's experiences in the field. The journal is part of a larger project to assess students' knowledge of ancient Egyptian culture while incorporating their understanding of the basics of archaeology. The larger project also includes a newspaper article and fashioning of two “authentic” ancient Egyptian artifacts.

Intended Audience:
Family members, friends, neighbors, and classmates

Time:
1 month or more—students worked on other assignments as well during this time

Writing Process:
Pre-writing; organizing; drafting; revising; self-editing

Materials:
Unknown

Please note:
The samples may contain inaccuracies in wording and content or shortcomings in the use of standard English conventions.
Language Standards:
Grade 7, Standard 1 (L.7.1)
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
EXAMPLES: H

Language Standards:
Grade 7, Standard 2 (L.7.2)
Demonstrate the command and conventions of standard written English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
EXAMPLES: I

Language Standards:
Grade 7, Standard 3 (L.7.3)
Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
EXAMPLES: C

History and Social Science Standards
Grade 7, Standard 15
Describe the polytheistic religion of ancient Egypt with respect to beliefs about death, the afterlife, mummification, and the roles of different deities.
EXAMPLES: K

History and Social Science Standards:
Grade 7, Standard 16
Summarize important achievements of Egyptian civilization.
EXAMPLES: K

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

In this sample...

The six entries selected from the larger journal effectively combine narrative and informational writing to offer an engaging, logically organized first person account of an Egyptian archaeological dig. The writer skillfully adopts the enthusiastic and authoritative voice of a young archaeologist, while clearly relating, in domain-specific language, factual and conceptual aspects of a lengthy, complicated archaeological project. In the course of the story of the dig, the journal entries vividly describe the archaeologist’s emotional attachment to the dig and its setting while also reflecting a solid understanding of the field of archaeology and many aspects of the civilization of ancient Egypt.

Egyptological Excavation

Journal Entry #1

First Day

My name is Liam Bailey. I am an Egyptologist and have been fascinated with the civilization from an early age. I made a hobby into a profession in 2018 when I graduated from Harvard University. I have participated in several digs, but I’m still waiting for my big archaeological find. Today is the first day of my two week archaeological dig in the Valley.
Inform / Explain

I am accompanied by seven team members including Sir Marcus Van Buren, an English Egyptologist who is one of the greatest in this field of all time. I hope that with our team’s skills and a little luck, we can make this one great dig.

I will be digging at the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. Egyptian rulers and nobles were buried here from the 16th to 11th century B.C.E. I have chosen to dig here for I feel that this place still has mysteries left in it. Also it is one of the few places in ancient Egypt that archaeologists and Egyptologists continue to have success with their expeditions.

Today, when we arrived at the site, I was astounded by the sight of it, tattered with graves. It was like going back in time to see all of these tombs, each holding answers to the mysteries of ancient Egypt. I couldn’t wait to begin my digging. When I got to the site, I decided to take a quick sketch for later reference. The spot where I would be digging has never been excavated before. It is not far from the tomb of king tut, so we will be digging in a place that has brought results of the Kings.

Journal Entry #1: The writer establishes a context and engages the reader’s curiosity about the mysteries yet to be discovered in Egypt (I have chosen to dig here for I feel that this place still has many mysteries left in it and I hope that we will discover something that will change what we know about ancient Egypt forever.).

Journal Entry #1: The writer introduces the narrator (My name is Liam Bailey.).

Journal Entry #1: The writer introduces the topic (Today is the first day in my two week archaeological dig in the Valley of the Kings) and suggests what will follow (I hope that with our team’s skills and a little luck, we can make this one great dig.).

Journal Entry #1: The writer introduces three elements important to the journal: the nature of the project (Today is the first day in my two week archaeological dig); the setting (the Valley of the Kings); and some significant participants, along with their specific archaeological functions (My name is Liam Bailey. I am an Egyptologist; Sir Marcus Van Buren, an English Egyptologist; my surveyor Tom Malone; and Batman Jones, our geologist).
before. There is a little rock and hard ground at the site, so the pick axes we brought will be needed if we hope to find anything underground. Tomorrow the first thing we will do is mark the site and my surveyor, Tom Malone, will make a more detailed drawing and decide where will be best spot to dig. Batman Jones, our geologist, will also take a good long look at the site. We need to be completely sure that where we begin to dig is the right place because once we start, we can't turn back. I hope that we will discover something that will change what we know about ancient Egypt, forever.

My team will have some tough work in front of them, but I know they can handle it. Tomorrow will be a big day, but I cannot wait for it to come. I can't help but think that when I wake up tomorrow morning, I will be beginning an adventure that could change what we know about ancient Egypt forever.

Journal Entry #3
1st Day of Digging
Today is the beginning of the excavation of our site. After surveying the site yesterday, we began to dig away at the rock filled soil. Once the team had met this morning, we pulled out our pick axes and began to chip away. It was amazing and hard to believe that I was really in the Valley of the Kings digging away at ground that I and the others hoped would hold something that would make this all worth while.

Once we got some of the tougher ground out of the way, some of us started with the shovels and trowels. These were very useful in getting much more dirt out of the way. Once we got to the much sandier dirt, as opposed to the think soil with stones in it that we had been dealing with before, we began to use the sieves. These are used so that when you put sand into it, larger objects that were not visible before will be left behind. These are good if you happen to find a smaller artifact. All of the tools we brought will be extremely helpful during the process of the dig.

Around midday, we had made quite a bit of progress. We had gotten past the rock, to the soil in most parts, but we all knew that we

Language, Grade 7, Standard 3 AND Writing, Grades 7, Standard 3:

L.7.3.a: Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy.

W.7.3.d: Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

C Examples: 1, 2, 3, 4

The writer describes the scene of the dig concisely through carefully chosen imagery.

Journal Entry #1: Today, when we arrived at the site, I was astounded by the sight of it, tattered with graves.

Journal Entry #9: Vivid descriptions and carefully chosen imagery allow the reader to visualize the setting of the dig and to sense the writer’s emotional attachment to it (The sun glistened down on the pale tan-brown Egyptian soil that has seen so many amazing things and It was a bright blue, like the sea, mixed with a dark, deep blue, such as the deep ocean waters... It was almost like a dream that I didn’t want to wake up from).
were only at the beginning. After our lunch break, the whole team met to discuss the digging so far. Everyone had the same basic reaction that things were going well, but nothing has been discovered just yet. That was, until we resumed digging…

**B2** About one hour and fifteen minutes after we had begun to dig again, I was digging with a shovel along with Sir Marcus Van Buren and I heard a “clunk”. **B2 B3** I had hit something! Van Buren heard it to and he yelled to the others that we had found something. Everyone came rushing over. **B3** Marcus and I took our trowels and began to dig around the object that we had unearthed. After a short period of time I hit some dirt and there was nothing below it. We were at the part of the site where the ground started to go up to the sides of the valley. Everyone started to realize that we had possibly found an underground chamber! Our historian Cherleena James let out a shriek and Shaquille O’Hara, our photographer, snapped a few early pictures. Once we got a little bit more of the dirt away, we clearly saw that there was a 10 meter drop, at least. I knew that if I wanted to go any further, I would have to get away the rest of the dirt and that could be potentially dangerous.
We were hoping that it we could find the outline of the passageway that we could dig around that and then get the dirt to fall down into the pit. With the help of the whole team we completed this task in about an hour’s time. I couldn’t believe my eyes when the soil actually fell. I had actually found a chamber that hasn’t been seen for thousands of years. It was amazing!

We decided that since it was getting late and that we were all tired that the digging should stop for today. As much as I wanted to keep digging, I decided to lay down my tools for the day. I couldn’t wait for tomorrow because I had a feeling that tomorrow, I would make history for ancient Egypt.

Journal Entry #4
The Chamber
(Description of arriving at the site the next day and descending in to the chamber)
It was a square shaped room with a perimeter of what I estimate to be about 25 meters, relatively large. Over on one side, there were...
collection of objects that we weren’t quite sure what they were. Lanterns and flashlights were passed down to us on the pulley which would be very helpful in seeing what was in the dark, dark room. When the room was lit up we were astonished at the sight that lay before our eyes. There were decorations all over the wall with pictures of gods and great designs. It was as if we were in a pyramid or some pharaoh’s tomb!

(Description of further exploration of the chamber and the discovery of a large plaque with hieroglyphs on it)

Journal Entry #5

The Plaque

I rushed to the site as quickly as possible this morning, so that we could start working on decoding the plaque as quickly as possible.

Only about five minutes after I got there, Sir Marcus Van Buren arrived accompanied by our artifact preserving specialist, Chris Wingard. Chris had arrived last night and Marcus had told him everything we had found so far. So, we were all eager to get down to the chamber and find out what was on the plaque. When we were down there, we took another...
look around the first bigger room to see if there was anything that we had missed. While looking at the room, we heard a yell from up above. It was Batman Jones and the rest of the team who had finally arrived. We told them to come on down and that Chris had arrived. They were all excited to see him because most of us had worked with Mr. Wingard before. After all, he is in at the top of the field of what he does. After our greetings, I took Chris into the smaller chamber to let him have a look at the plaque. The first thing he noticed was the mentioning of King Tut’s name in hieroglyphs many times. When I told this to the rest of the team it made us all very excited. Could this be a description of King Tut’s death? Could it give directions to other chambers made for the boy King? Whatever it is, I’m sure it will be a big discovery.

Along with the help of the rest of the team, we go the plaque onto the pulley. Luckily, it was not attached to the wall and was not too heavy. We got it up onto the pulley and had to heave it up onto the heap of sandbags we had laid out. From there, we put the plaque on a little cart and moved it from there to the camp we had set up. Chris unpacked his equipment and got ready to get down to work. I stayed with

Writing Standards for History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects—Grades 6-8, Standard 8:

G WHST.6-8.8

G1 Examples: 1 · 2
Journal Entry #1: The writer includes specific information about the Valley of the Kings (Egyptian rulers and nobles were buried here from the 16th to 11th century B.C.E. and it is not far from the tomb of King Tut, so we will be digging in a place that has brought results before.).

G2 Examples: 1
Journal Entry #5: The writer provides additional linguistic and historical information. (We had also seen that there was the Egyptian hieroglyph for death which made us very excited for this could be a plaque that might describe something of the boy king’s death.).

G3 Examples: 1
Bibliography: Although the number of sources is limited, the writer provides a list of citations presented in a standard format.
him to help decode the plaque while Marcus went back down into the chamber with the others. Around lunch time, Chris and I had noticed the mentioning of King Tut’s numerous times. We had also seen that there was the Egyptian hieroglyph for death which made us very exited for this could be a plaque that might describe something of the boy kings death. After our noontime break, I went back underground with the others. I informed the rest of the team of our findings so far, and they were all just as exited as we were. Batman Jones, the geologist on the team, called me over to the plaque room while I was there. It seemed as though, she had found another block covering a second passageway. This was not unusual for chambers or tombs to have many rooms and passageways. This one was much smaller that the door we had found before so it would be much harder to get through it to whereever it went. She said she would tell the rest of the team and that they would try to get it open. I headed back up to see how Chris was doing. To my surprise, he had decoded almost the entire plaque’s hieroglyphs. It was indeed a plaque describing King Tut’s death! This was extremely exiting, but there was just one problem. The part of
the plaque that described exactly what happened was covered in a built up sand substance. Chris would have to work on getting this off and that would take a while. So, we decided that it would be better if we left that for tomorrow since it was getting late. Chris Wingard and I headed down to the chamber to have one last check at what was happening with the second passageway before we were done for the day. Unluckily, this block was not moving as easily as the first one did. So, we all decided that since the sun was about to set, it would be better if we left the rest of the work for tomorrow. We have made so much progress today and I have no idea what will be in store for us tomorrow, but I do know that whatever it is, it will change Historians outlook on ancient Egypt, forever…

Journal Entry #7
The Passageway

When I got up this morning, I felt as though all of the excitement had been sucked out of me and that I didn’t have anything left. After what we have done so far, I feel as though this trip has hit a climax. We have already made an archaeological find.

Language. Grade 7, Standard 2:

L.7.2
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Examples: 1

Journal Entry #3: The writer takes advantage of a good command of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling to enhance clarity, meaning, and continuity. The few errors do not interfere with understanding. (Around midday, we had made quite a bit of progress. We had gotten past the rock, to the soil in most parts, but we all knew that we were only at the beginning. After our lunch break, the whole team met to discuss the digging so far. Everyone had the same basic reaction that things were going well, but nothing has been discovered just yet. That was, until we resumed digging…).
that will change the entire world of Ancient Egypt. What could top that? This trip has already been a great success and whatever happens today, and in the last remaining days, will be an added extra.

As I arrived at the site this morning, I was greeted by the rest of the team. The mood around the camp was happy, but I sensed that they felt the same way as I did about the rest of the trip. At around ten forty five, am, we headed down into the second room to try to get the block loose. We tugged and tugged and finally, after lots of hard work, we finally got it loose. It was a very skinny tunnel and was very dark. We shone our flashlight down the tube through the earth and we saw the end of it. It was not very far, about eight to nine meters, but we were faced with a pretty tough dilemma. How were we supposed do get someone down the shaft when it was so skinny, and also how would we then get to what we hoped was past the rock blocking it at the end of the passageway. So, we decided that we would use the wireless drill that we brought to get through the hard rock. It would’ve been nice to keep the block intact, just for the sake of keeping this whole chamber, or set of chambers, looking nice, but what’s behind that wall will make it all worth it. I was the one
that would go down with the drill to unveil what could be another great discovery. It took a little while because I had to go slow so the rock that would come from the block would not hit me very hard. When I had cleared enough away to look through, I could see another room. It was very hard to see the exact details of this chamber for it was extremely dark. When I lit up the chamber with my flashlight, I could see what I looked like just another clump of rocks in the corner, so I carried on with my drilling. Once I finally got the opening completely clear, I went through and was soon followed by the other team members. We all took our flashlights out and Marcus ran back up to grab a lantern. With all of this, we could see the room much better and what we saw was amazing…

In front of us, all over the ground be a collection of miniature statues of gods. Most of them were immediately recognizable for most Egyptian gods had very distinct features. Unluckily, many of them were broken and in bad shape, but Batman Jones did notice one of the gods, Osiris the god of the dead, was not too damaged. This statue was in extremely good shape compared to the others in the room. The white paint on the body and the green paint on the hands were still in a very

**History and Social Science:**

Grade 7, Standards 15 AND 16:

**HSS.7.15**: Describe the polytheistic religion of ancient Egypt with respect to beliefs about death, the afterlife, mummification, and the roles of different deities.

**HSS.7.16**: Summarize important achievements of Egyptian civilization.

The writer’s stance in this journal of an archaeologist assumes knowledge of the profession and Egyptian civilization with little need for extensive explanation. Nevertheless, the writer demonstrates knowledge of the tools and techniques used by archaeologists as well as many of the historical events, achievements and culture of ancient Egypt, including: Polytheistic Religion.

Journal Entry #7: …most Egyptian gods had very distinct features… but Batman Jones did notice one of the gods, Osiris the god of the dead, was not too damaged …The white paint on the body and the green paint on the hands were still in a very nice nature. The statuette was about one and a half feet tall and being Osiris, was carrying a crook and a flail.

K Example Information (CONTINUED NEXT PAGE)
nice nature. The statue was about one and a half feet tall and being Osiris, was carrying a crook and a flail. We decided to wait for Chris, who today was packaging up the plaque so that it could be sent back home for further tests and cleaning without damage being done to it. And without his expertise, it would be a little risky to remove these “models” from a place where they’ve rested for two thousand or more years. So, when he comes back to the site tomorrow, we would be able to move the statues of the gods, with hopes that the undamaged one of Osiris makes it out of here safely.

Today, believe it or not, has been extremely astonishing. I thought that with finding the plaque, we would be the end of our excitement for the trip, but I was so wrong. These miniature statuettes may not give us answers to mysteries thousands of years old, but they are still incredibly valuable and remarkable artifacts.

Journal Entry #9

Last Day

Today is the last day of our miraculous dig. It has been one
that will surely be remembered for years and years to come. I got to the site extra early this morning at six thirty, so that I could take full advantage of the final day. When I stepped out of my truck, I decided to take a last walk around the part of the Valley of the Kings where we were. I still marveled at the beautiful site of the enormous valley. It felt as though I had just gotten here yesterday, but in fact, I’ve been here for more than a month. I looked at all of the other tombs and chambers that have been found and thought that now I was part of the select group to have made a discovery in the Valley of the Kings. The sun glistened down on the pale tan-brown Egyptian soil that has seen so many amazing things. The sky was a blue that I have never seen before. It was so astounding in its color that I almost cannot be described. It was a bright blue, like the sea, mixed with a dark deep blue, such as the deep ocean waters. The sight of the valley this morning is one that I will never forget for as long as I live. As I continued to walk, all I could hear was the sand crunching beneath my feet, because no one had arrived in the valley yet. I stopped and just looked all around me with complete silence. It was almost like a
I was unhappy to be having to leave tomorrow, but I decided to look on the bright side and make the best of today.

When the rest of the team arrived about an hour and a half later at eight o’clock, we had a team meeting. Everyone was also sad to be leaving, but they were happy that they had at least one more day. We all went down into the tomb for one last time. It was so amazing to think that a little less than a month ago, we found this amazing place. In it was an answer to a three thousand year old mystery, and many beautiful works of art with one that was a true keeper. The wall where the plaque once was is now bare, and the room in which the statuettes stood, is now completely empty.

It is a shame that this amazing tomb now has nothing in it, but at least it gave us some amazing results. It was odd to go down the ladder to the first room for I remember my first time I went down it, slowly, with the anticipation boiling inside of me. It was again a little awkward to slide down the second passageway, for I was the first to go down this one as well. Although the anxiousness is not there, I still get the similar feel of excitement each time I go down these
passageways. While we were down in the chamber, nobody talked very much. It was definitely a time of remembering all of the great things that happened 20 meters under the Egyptian soil and rock.

After we were done in the chamber, we had to pack up all of the materials we had brought. The plaque and figurines are already back at the hotel so all that is left to do is pack up all the. Everyone came in handy and not one was left untouched. Everything from the pick axes to the sandbags, to the pencil and paper was used multiple times. It was depressing to see everything get put in boxes so be shipped away.

When I really thought about it, those tools were not just tools; they were items that allowed us to make an Egyptian breakthrough. It was tough to get through today, but in the end, I didn’t want to see the sun set. Today may have been my last day in the Valley of the Kings for now, but I know that someday I will come back.

Bibliography

