“What should 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:
Sailing

Text Type and Purpose: Narrate
Grade level/Content area: Grade 6 English Language Arts
Type of Assignment: Poem
Standards Addressed: (W.6.3), (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 (2017) 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)
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.
In this sample...

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

F A1 Sailing. F

E1 A2 I hear the waves lapping against my boat.

It is just me. A1

It is magical. A2 E1

C3 B2 The glossy water is now wrinkled by the wind, B2

Like a blue tablecloth that was never ironed. C3

Understanding the Standards-Based Commentary

The student writing sample that begins on this page includes in this column standards-based commentary describing how the writing meets the standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (2017) and other content frameworks, when applicable. Where they apply, sub-standards marked by letters are included.

Evidence for the commentary is noted in the text of the student writing using color-coded, numbered ‘begin’ and ‘end’ arrows.

For example:

A1 marks the beginning and A1 marks the end of the relevant section in the text.

Please note that the labeled arrows in the text do not necessarily appear in alphabetical order.

Writing. Grade 6, Standard 3:

W.6.3.a

Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an appropriate narrative sequence.

A1

A1 Examples: 1

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.).

A2

A2 Examples: 1

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.).

A3

A3 Examples: 1 - 2

The writer continues to develop the progression of the experience of being on the water with vivid descriptions (the glare of the sun, the depths of the water, The blue of the sky...It’s a new world.).
STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ELA and Literacy (2017)

GRADE 6

Narrate

Seagulls soar overhead, calling from way up there, to their friends.

The wide open sea greets me like home.

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.

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Writing Standards in Action Project

www.doe.mass.edu/candi/wsa

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES

Writing, Grade 6, Standard 3: (continued)

B W.6.3.b
Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

B1 Examples: 1
The writer conveys a love of the sea and the sensation of sailing through keenly attuned description that draws on examples from personal experience to address the topic (The wide open sea greets me like home.).

B2 Examples: 1 · 2
The writer uses strong figurative language to develop the experience of sailing for the reader. Examples demonstrate the writer’s ability to convey how it feels to be on the sea (The glossy water is now wrinkled by the wind … The sea mixes itself all together, like making a cake).

Writing, Grade 6, Standard 3 AND Language, Grade 6, Standard 5:

C W.6.3.d AND C L.6.5

W.6.3.d
Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, figurative and sensory language, and techniques such as personification (e.g., “the fog crept in”) to convey experiences or events.

L.6.5
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

C1 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4
The writer uses sensory language to great effect by identifying sensations from each of the senses (All I see is the glare of the sun… I hear the luff of my sail… I smell salt spray,…This feels like nothing I’ve done before.).
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

Narrate

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:
Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ELA and Literacy (2017)

Writing. Grade 6, Standard 3 AND Language. Grade 6, Standard 5:
(continued)

C2 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.

C3 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.), metaphor (Only the giant grey-green abyss...), personification (The wide open sea greets me like home.), and sensory details (I smell salt spray) to bring alive the speaker’s sea-going experiences.

Language. Grade 6, Standard 3:

L.6.3.b
Recognize variations from standard or formal English in writing and speaking, determine their appropriateness for the intended purpose and audience, and make changes as necessary.

D 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.
**Narrate**

**GRADE 6**

**FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:**
Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ELA and Literacy (2017)

**STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY**

**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.)*.

**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**  
Maintain appropriate consistency in style and tone while varying sentence patterns for meaning and audience interest.

**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.)*.

**SAMPLE A6-7 (Narrate—Poem)**

**END OF WRITING SAMPLE**