

2025 MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guide

Grade 8 English Language Arts

Question 12: Essay

Reporting Categories: Language and Writing

Standard: [L.PK-12.1](#) - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Standard: [L.PK-12.2](#) - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Standard: [L.PK-12.3](#) - Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Standard: [W.PK-12.1](#) - Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Standard: [W.PK-12.4](#) - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Item Description: Write an essay that argues for a specific action based on two articles on similar topics; use information from both articles to develop the essay.

This item can be found in the released item sets on the [MCAS Resource Center](#).

Essay Prompt

For this question, you will write an essay based on the passage(s). Your writing should:

- Present and develop a central idea.
- Provide evidence and/or details from the passage(s).
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Based on “Finding Joy in Urban Winters” and “Bad Weather Is Good for You,” write an essay that argues for the importance of remaining active in all types of weather. Be sure to use information from **both** articles to develop your essay.

Continue to the following page to see the scoring guides for this question. Sample student responses begin on page 3. The annotations that appear above each sample response describe elements of the response that contributed to its score for Idea Development and Standard English Conventions.

Scoring Guide for Idea Development

Select a score point in the table below to view the sample student response.

Score*	Description
5A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is insightful and fully developed Skillful selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Skillful and/or subtle organization Rich expression of ideas Full awareness of the task and mode
5B	
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is clear and well-developed Effective selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Effective organization Clear expression of ideas Full awareness of the task and mode
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is general and moderately developed Appropriate selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Moderate organization Adequate expression of ideas Sufficient awareness of the task and mode
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea may be present and is somewhat developed Limited selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Limited organization Basic expression of ideas Partial awareness of the task and mode
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is not present and/or not developed Insufficient evidence and/or details Minimal organization Poor expression of ideas Minimal awareness of the task and mode
0	The response shows evidence the student has read the text, but does not address the question or incorrectly responds to the question.

Scoring Guide for Standard English Conventions

Select a score point in the table below to view the sample student response.

Score*	Description
3A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent control of a variety of sentence structures relative to length of essay Consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay
3B	
3C	
3D	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly consistent control of sentence structures relative to length of essay Mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little control and/or no variety in sentence structure and/or Little control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or insufficient length
0	Sentences are formed incorrectly with no control of grammar, usage, and mechanics and/or insufficient length.

*In both Scoring Guides, letters are used to distinguish between sample student responses that earned the same score (e.g., 5A and 5B).

Idea Development—Score Point 5A

The essay is fully developed and skillfully organized with well-chosen details to support the central idea that “[r]emaining active in all types of weather is essential to people.” The first body paragraph addresses the health benefits of being outside in the wind and rain: “A very windy day may seem like a bad time to take a stroll, but when the air is fresh, your lungs will thank you when you grab a coat and brave the windy outdoors.” Evidence from “Bad Weather Is Good for You,” both quoted and paraphrased, is well-integrated and explained. A skillful transition leads to the second body paragraph, which draws information from “Finding Joy in Urban Winters” and argues how enjoying outside activities can assist with avoiding “winter depression.” Ideas are richly expressed throughout the essay: “Winter isn’t just soggy snow and slippery ice, but [it’s] also a chance to build something beautiful which glitters just as brightly as snowfall in the moonlight.” The essay states that winter weather provides an opportunity to bring communities together and asserts that the emotional and physical benefits of being outside in the winter “should not be overlooked because it isn’t a sunny July day outside.” There is full awareness of the task and the argument mode of writing.

Standard English Conventions 3A

The essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions. Grammar, usage, and mechanics are consistently controlled across a variety of sentence structures: “It is common knowledge that pollution is bad for all living creatures, since breathing it in is very damaging to the lungs, and drinking polluted water has innumerable negative effects.” Minor errors in spelling or missing punctuation do not interfere with the meaning or the clarity of the writing.

Many people understand the importance of being outside. Sunlight provides vitamin D for the body, and fresh air is good for the lungs. However, what some people don't know, is that even if the weather isn't good, it's still good *for you*. Remaining active in all types of weather is essential to people, as "bad" weather actually has many health benefits and it can stave off any negative feeling that occur during bad weather.

Bad weather has a huge mass of health benefits that are extremely important to staying healthy. Although wind and rain may seem like a horrible condition to take a stroll in, it can actually be one of the best. Stated in *Bad Weather is Good for You* by Annabel Streets, "wind disperses pollution, and rain washes the air of dirt and germs" (Streets 3). It is common knowledge that pollution is bad for all living creatures, since breathing it in is very damaging to the lungs, and drinking polluted water has innumerable negative effects. A very windy day may seem like a bad time to take a stroll, but when the air is fresh, your lungs will thank you when you grab a coat and brave the windy outdoors. Not only does rain wash the air, it also "causes plants trees and soil to release sweet-smelling compounds" (Streets 3). These compounds have to shown to improve mood, showing that the many effects of rain are super beneficial to people. The interactions of atoms during rain will cause many negative air ions and noted by *Bad Weather is Good for You*, after running a few experiments in the Alps, Austrian scientists found that breathing in ionized air had many good benefits, such as a higher level of a vital antibody in the lining of the mouth, nose and gut. This antibody can strengthen immunity and amplify lung capacity, which are health benefits one should not pass up on. Wind and rain are wonderful conditions to take walks in, but are they the only "bad weather" to have actual health benefits? The answer, is no!

Being outside during bad weather can help repel negative feelings. "Winter depression" is the term often used to describe the strangely abundant negative and hopeless feelings people may experience in the winter, usually caused by a lack of vitamin D and not enough outdoor time, and not actual depression. This can be helped, and there are steps that one can take to help lessen these feelings. In *Finding Joy in Urban Winters*, Melody Warnick explains how the Danish concept of *hygge* can help lessen the negativity surrounding winter. "Hygge" has no direct translation to English, but it can be generally summed up as coziness, enjoyment, and comfort. Although winter is considered to be the season with the worst weather, it doesn't need to be the season with the worst feeling. A key aspect of *hygge* is being outdoors, as "easy access to the outdoors staves off lethargy and activates spaces" (Warnick 14). Additionally, stated in the same article, in Copenhagen, a beautiful wintertime attraction is the ice skating rink, which attracts people of all ages and has gorgeous lighting. It will "create a very *hyggelig* atmosphere" (Warnick 14). This is clear proof that not only is raw winter good for you, but the things society can create in the winter can bring together community and happiness. Being outside in the winter is very important to maintaining good emotional health year-round, the fun things you can do outside are key parts of building a community in the winter, and it's a great way to create core memories in one's childhood. Winter isn't just soggy snow and slippery ice, but it's also a chance to build something beautiful which glitters just as brightly as snowfall in the moonlight. This seemingly bad weather actually has so many benefits, physically and emotionally, and those benefits should not be overlooked just because it isn't a sunny July day outside.

Bad weather isn't always bad, it's only bad if you force it to be. With the countless health benefits and the enticing emotional benefits, whether or not you should stay active, no matter the weather, shouldn't even be a question. Put on your jacket, grab an umbrella, bring a pair of ice skates, do whatever you need to, but go outside, no matter the weather, and stay active for your own health.

Idea Development—Score Point 5B

The fully developed and skillfully organized essay begins with an engaging introduction leading to the central idea: "Being active year-round is necessary for our bodies as it stimulates the senses, helps our health, and helps us relax." Three body paragraphs address these key points with details that are skillfully selected from the articles and explained. In the first two body paragraphs, relevant evidence from "Bad Weather Is Good for You" is both quoted and paraphrased to show that walking outdoors in rainy weather exposes people to "healthy bacteria and microbes" and "stimulate[s] our senses in many ways." The third body paragraph uses evidence from "Finding Joy in Urban Winters" to explain the benefits of exercising in cold weather: "[Exercising] can also warm up our bodies, giving some heat in the winter, also allowing our bodies to be less tense and more relaxed." The conclusion re-emphasizes the idea that "[e]xercise is crucial to our bodies and existence." Ideas are richly expressed and there is full awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions 3B

The essay contains varied sentence structures, and grammar, usage, and mechanics are consistently controlled: "In places like Scandinavia, people follow *hygge*, a method in which the cold is made more bearable." Minor errors and some awkward phrasing are present throughout; however, these errors do not interfere with communication, and the writing is of sufficient length and complexity to demonstrate consistent control of standard English conventions.

It is snowing outside, kids voices can be heard as they go down a hill or hit each other with snowballs. Parents are outside for a stroll watching their kids play as they sip on a hot cup of coffee, while you stare out the window, too cold and too scared. Exercising is vital to our health, no matter what the climate is outside. Whether its taking a walk or going to the gym. It makes the body stronger and healthier by circulating blood and training muscles. It can provide a didtraction from stress, helping one's mental health as well. Remaining active during cooler months is especially improtant as people don't go outside as often. Gear can be used to aid one during different weather conditions such as indoor gyms, jackets, rainboots, or outisde installations that brighten up people's lives by increasing happiness. Working out is essential to our lives. Being active year-round is necessary for our bodies as it stimulates the senses, helps our health, and helps us relax.

Different weather conditions can benefit our health in many ways. Respiratory sytems can boom due to the beneficial negative ions that's released from muddy areas. Healthy bacteria and microbes can be exposed from these muddy areas as well. The immune system can also gain anti-bodies that line our gut, nose, and mouth. This can amplify lung capacity as well.(Streets, para.5). As it rains, the air is washed out of germs and wthe wind blows away the germs. When its raining outside, streets are empty which is " perfect for practicing backwards walking"(Streets para.4). This can improve posture and activate other muscles which weren't before. If its too hot when one is excercising, it can lead to an endurance of pain and heat. We can learn our limits and how sensitive our body is to certain work outs. We can determine which muscles are the strongest and which ones the weakest. It can help you learn how to regulate one's body heat. It helps us take control of our bodies and discover it for ourselves.

Being active can stimulate our senses in many ways. Due to the rain hitting the ground, many smells are released from different plants and trees. The compounds that are excreted "mingle and combine with the air we breathe"(Streets, para.5). The air we breathe is then cleaner and more desirable of a scent. It makes oour bodies more alert towards how we are feeling, as a defense mechanism. We don't want to hurt ourselves. If we aren't aware it might lead to hypothermia or heat-exhasution. On top of that, our bodies are forced to cool down or warm up which can help activate our sweat pores or the process of burning fat. Since our bodies need to heat up, white fat(blocks one's heart) is burned by brown fat, improving heart health as well. When people go out at dark, they're forced to use their nose and other sense more as their eyes can't function optimally. Along with this, one's eyes are forced to relax allowing them to be less strained. Lastly, the dim light of night allows our bodies to produce melatonin as it gets prepared to go to sleep. Different types of weather can allow one's body to activate senses, while others climates can help destress.

When faced with multiple weather patterns, one's body is forced to adapt or have adaptqtions made in order to make life easier. In places like Scandinavia, people follow *hygge*, a method in which the cold is made more bearable. As people are forced to go outside, this can become a mean to get together and relax. With the outdoor areas provided it , " gives residents a reason to emerge from the blankets."(Warnick, para.17). People will no longer have an excuse to saty inside and will feel obliged to go outside. The objective of wintertime can be outdoorsy enjoyment which is encompassed by coziness. People prepare houses to make themselves warm during the winter so they can remain active inside. Excercising in cold weather is important as it creates the need for cold weather sports such as sledding or skiing. Once the relaxation hits, one's mind can be clearer, having positive side effects on one's mental health. Excercising can aslo warm up our bodies, giving some heat in the winter, also allowing our bodies to be less tense and more relaxed. Due to how it sharpens focus and can get one's muscles to relax, excercise can be a great way to have some downtime.

Excercise is crucial to our bodies and existence. It provides a natural way to strengthen our health and immune system allows different parts of our body to be stimulated, and it allows our bodies to relax and become focused. Antibodies fill our bodies. We are more aware of our surroundings. Body fat can be burned and heart health can be increased. Many sports have to be created in order to maintain our bodies during different tempertaures, like skiing and sledding. Being active solidifies our immune system, activates our sense, and gives us the habitat to focus. Excercise gives our bodies the ability to function properly.

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Idea Development—Score Point 4

The essay is effectively organized and includes a well-developed central idea that presents a clear argument for the importance of remaining active in all types of weather. Effective details from both articles are integrated and explained in each body paragraph to support the central idea that “bad weather cannot stop you from having a good time.” The first body paragraph focuses on outdoor festivals and activities that offer a “fun source of exercise and a good time to have with family and friends.” The benefits of walking are addressed in the second body paragraph, further emphasizing health advantages and opportunities for social interaction. The third body paragraph focuses on the positive impacts that outdoor activities have on overall well-being. “Rain can cause people to be happier and if they go outside it improves their mood.” Expression of ideas is clear, and there is full awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions 3C

The essay contains a variety of sentence structures, and grammar, usage, and mechanics are consistently controlled: “Bad weather isn’t bad at all when you see all the good it can do for the community and how important it is for people to live.” Some awkward phrasing and minor errors in spelling and usage do not interfere with communication. The essay is complex enough to demonstrate consistent control of standard English conventions.

In the article, "Finding Joy in Urban Winters," by Melody Warnick, summer might be enjoyable for most people, but some places around the world have found ways to make winter a fun and relaxing time. The article, "Bad Weather Is Good for You," by Annabel Streets, emphasizes how even though people might think bad weather could be bad for you, it can actually improve your body and bring new opportunities to do things you don't normally do. These articles highlight the fact that bad weather cannot stop you from having a good time. There are many festivals and events to go and calming walks you can take. Exercise is easier and you can benefit yourself by continuing to be active, even during cold or bad weather.

"Finding Joy in Urban Winters" shows that despite it being cold, many events are being held. There are many different outdoor activities available in Hyggelig cities, "As part of its WinterCity goals, Edmonton sponsors a full slate of winter festivals and activities, including Silver Skate, with its ice castles and fire sculptures, and Flying Canoe Volant, whose main event is a wild downhill canoe race," (Warnick 17). The cold weather doesn't stop you from being able to have fun outside and there are many things you can do in the snow and ice. These events are limited so you should take advantage of them. They can be a fun source of exercise and a good time to have with family and friends. "Bad Weather Is Good for You," shows that in the winter there are a few things you could do as well. This list shows some things you could do, "You can shiver through a[n] . . . ice bath or you can go for a nippy walk with your coat undone at the collar and your scarf unwrapped. Exercise and caffeine also spur production of brown fat. . . ." (Streets 8). Winter activities can be enjoyable for people who like the cold and push through it. Exercising can help your body get rid of things that aren't good for you.

Walks can be very calm and relaxing. During the winter less people walk outside in fear of sickness so the streets are clear of people. It's easier to take walks in the winter, "Cities empty quickly in the rain—meaning we can pick up our pace and stride along streets usually thronging with people," (Streets 3). You can go at your own pace and start to see how fun a walk can be. Walks can be beneficial for your health and it can be something that's done anywhere as long as you have motivation. In "Finding Joy in Urban Winters," walking is something embraced and you can do it with your friends too. Along the streets there are many things for you to do, "You meet friends for breakfast at Grød, Copenhagen's porridge-only café, for fortification both physical and spiritual. You wander the city's light-studded cobblestone streets," (Warnick 5). IN Copenhagen, it is normal to see groups walking along the streets and going out to places. It's a common thing that should be done in other places as well, they don't stay pent up inside their houses but instead get exercise while interacting socially.

"Finding Joy in Urban Winters" talks about the positive impact winter has on the people of Denmark. Hygge has no true translation but is very positive, "'Coziness' is perhaps the word's best translation, although togetherness, enjoyment, relaxation, and comfort capture angles of it too," (Warnick 4). Hygge winters bring happiness to the people and when people are happy it tends to have a positive reaction to the body since the person is thriving. This makes it so they want to keep going and have more energy to get up and do something. "Bad Weather Is Good for You," explains how going outside after a rainy day has positive outcomes for plants and for you. Plants release a perfume scent after rainfall, "Studies suggest that inhaling these compounds improves our mood, while the abundance of negative air ions—created as water and air molecules collide making a molecule with an extra charge—can improve respiratory health and immunity," (Streets 5). Rain can cause people to be happier and if they go outside it improves their mood. Going outside is crucial to be able to being happier and that causes your body to have more energy to be stronger and better.

The articles, "Finding Joy in Urban Winters," and, "Bad Weather Is Good for You," explain that despite your beliefs, bad weather can cause really good things for you and scientists can prove it with data. People describe winter as sad and moody but if you look on the bright side and go past that, you can see the true beauty of the outdoors and how beneficial it is for you. Bad weather isn't bad at all when you see all the good it can do for the community and how important it is for people to live.

Idea Development—Score Point 3

The central idea is moderately developed throughout the essay. The brief introduction establishes the argument for the importance of remaining active in all types of weather, including “staying positive even in winter, improving the air quality you inhale, and improving your state of mind.” The body paragraphs address these points with appropriate quoted evidence from the articles, but the explanation of the details is general: “This means that the air quality is better on those rainy days outside” and “This means that rainy days are some of the best kinds to go for walks in.” A formulaic structure and basic transitions (“Firstly,” “Secondly,” “Thirdly”) demonstrate moderate organization. Overall, there is adequate expression of ideas and a sufficient awareness of task and mode.

Standard English Conventions 3D

Grammar, usage, and mechanics are consistently controlled. Sentence structures are varied, though there is some use of repetitive phrases such as “The article states” and “This shows”. The essay is sufficiently long and complex enough to demonstrate consistent control of standard English conventions.

Both articles highlight the importance of staying active in all types of weather, such as staying positive even in the winter, improving the air quality you inhale, and improving your state of mind.

Firstly, the passage *Finding Joy in Urban Winters* demonstrates many ways to stay positive during the winter. The article states that, "Through a magical alchemy of urban design, business development, and cultural conviction, residents revel in simple pleasures, particularly when the weather turns foul. In Copenhagen, you defy the cold. You meet friends for breakfast at Grød, Copenhagen's porridge-only café, for fortification both physical and spiritual" (Warnick 5). This shows how people who live in very cool places still have things that make them feel good and almost forget about the cold. The paragraph states "A similar competition in Toronto invites artists to convert lifeguard towers along the beachfront into wacky winter stations" (Warnick 9). This is an example of how communities take advantage of the cold in a positive way. The author states that "Fargo launched Frostival . . . with outdoor tournaments for volleyball, softball, kickball, and golf. The event tagline: 'Making Cold Cool.'" (Warnick 17). This is another example of how cities take advantage of the colder months to have things to look forward to.

Secondly, the passage *Bad Weather Is Good for You* highlights how staying active in bad weather can have many health benefits including improving the air you inhale. The article states "The pounding of raindrops causes plants, trees and soil to release sweet-smelling compounds which then mingle and combine in the air we breathe." (Streets 5). This means that the air quality is better on those rainy days outside. The author exaggerates, "while the abundance of negative air ions—created as water and air molecules collide making a molecule with an extra charge—can improve respiratory health and immunity." (Streets 5). This is evidence that the air outside on rainy days is very beneficial. The text states that, "In misty woodlands, negative air ions are twice as abundant as on open land, so get up early and make the most of autumn's final morning mists." (Streets 6). This shows that not all wet areas have the best air quality, but they are still very healthy.

Thirdly, the article *Bad Weather Is Good for You* shows that walking outside during "bad weather" can actually improve your mood. The text states, "The Scottish writer, Nan Shepherd, loved walking after rainfall, noting that birch trees released a perfume. . . . Studies suggest that inhaling these compounds improves our mood" (Streets 5). This means that rainy days are some of the best kinds to go for walks in. The article states that "the dim evening light prompts our body to start making sleep-inducing melatonin." (Streets 9). This shows that walks in the dark improve your mood and they will help you fall asleep easier. The passage shows that "In darkness we alter our primary way of encountering the world, and when the air is damp it traps odor-causing molecules, transforming a dark, damp walk into a source of inspiration and imagination." (Streets 10). This shows that walks in the dark are very beneficial to your mood and that darkness is no excuse to stay inside.

In conclusion, both articles highlight the importance of remaining active in all types of weather, such as improving your mood, improving the air you breathe, and finding the positive side during those cold months.

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Idea Development—Score Point 2

The central idea of the essay, that “staying active throughout winter is important,” is somewhat developed. Each body paragraph focuses on one of the articles and includes a single quotation with limited explanation: “In winter, if you go outside, it stops you from being lethargic, which you usually would be if you didn’t go outside.” The essay’s evidence and explanation is limited to support the central idea. Expression of ideas is basic throughout the response, though there is some awareness of audience: “In winter, you may want to stop exercising and just stay in from the cold, but it is actually more beneficial to be active in winter!” There is partial awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions 2

Sentences are varied and grammar, usage, and mechanics are mostly correct, though there are a few minor errors, including missing punctuation in contractions (“dont” and “didnt”). However, the essay is too brief to show more than mostly consistent control of standard English conventions in relation to length and complexity.

Have you ever felt bored and unmotivated in winter? In the nonfiction article *"Finding Joy in Urban Winters"* by Melody Warnick, and the nonfiction article *"Bad Weather Is Good for You"* by Annabel Streets explain that staying active throughout winter is important.

During winter, you may feel like you dont want to do anything, but staying active in winter is beneficial in more ways than one. In the article *"Finding Joy in Urban Winters"*, Warnick states, "Easy access to the outdoors staves off lethargy and activates spaces" (Warnick 14). In winter, if you go outside, it stops you from being lethargic, which you usually would be if you didnt go outside.

In the article *"Bad Weather Is Good for You"*, Streets states, "Cold weather is another excellent reason to walk, thanks to the way brown fat works" (Streets 8). When you walk in the cold weather, it burns fat using brown fat, which is activated by cold.

In the nonfiction article *"Finding Joy In Urban Winters"* by Melody Warnick, and the nonfiction article *"Bad Weather Is Good for You"*, by Annabel Streets, they explain the benefits on being active in winter. In winter, you may want to stop excersising and just stay in from the cold, but it is actually more beneficial to be active in winter! This topic is important because it explains the principle of being active in winter, which many people may not know.

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Idea Development—Score Point 1

The response contains a single paragraph that does not develop the idea that it is "important to remain active in all types of weather." Details from both passages are included, but they are insufficiently developed and explained. A quotation and close paraphrase from "Bad Weather Is Good for You" address some benefits of walking in the rain, but these ideas are not further developed. The evidence from "Finding Joy in Urban Winters" focuses on the winter light festival in Calgary, which is not directly connected to the benefits of remaining active in all types of weather. Organization is minimal. The response demonstrates poor expression of ideas and a minimal awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions 1

The response shows little variety and complexity of sentence structures. The response is too brief to demonstrate more than minimal control of standard English conventions.

It is important to remain active in all types of weather. It is important because the weather can be beneficial like when it's raining. In the article "Bad Weather Is Good for You" the author states that "Studies suggest that inhaling these compounds improves our mood," The people that were walking in heavily ionized air also had higher levels of vital antibody. Another way it's important is because you can do things like go to festivals. The article "Finding joy in Urban Winters" states " In February 2017, Calgary's downtown district [launched] its inaugural three-day winter light fesitival," In this there is summer sounds that play gently in the backround and an interactive shower that rains light from every direction, it ends in 90 seconds. These examples help show why being active in all types of weather is important.

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Idea Development—Score Point 0

The response shows evidence that the student has read the passages but does not correctly address the prompt. It is not an essay arguing for the importance of remaining active in all types of weather.

Standard English Conventions 0

There is insufficient length to demonstrate control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

In both of the passages they tell you that you can do alot of things during the winter
like hanging out with your friends and exercising.

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