



Proficient | Exemplar Essay

Just Because

A Museum Moment



Plot and Ideas

The storyline establishes a plausible context (“Son, we’re going to the American History Museum next Friday”). Sufficient description situates the conflict (“I refused to give in with grace”) and builds toward a climax and resolution (“My team was already ahead before we started because of my experience”). The plot and ideas address the demands of the task.



Development and Elaboration

The narrative establishes a clear setting. The writer advances the story by introducing and developing the characters (“I tried the workaround next, turning to my mother” and “If I learned a thing or two, well, I wouldn’t tell Mom or Dad”) and reveals the theme through effective dialogue and description (“The museum itself was pretty cool once I got over my tantrum”).



Organization and Sequencing

The writer establishes a beginning, middle, and end with a well-paced sequence of events. The narrative uses transitions and other techniques to signal shifts in time (“Just before school started” and “Fast forward to week two of school”), and the resolution offers closure (“My team was already ahead before we started because of my experience”).



Language and Style

The narrative uses descriptive words to create imagery and convey setting and characters (“my dad could win Olympic medals in pigheadedness”). The writing is engaging in a way that builds the voice of the narrator (“I licked my fingers when they weren’t looking” and “I still say it was something I did under protest”). The point of view is consistently maintained.



Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait ‘looks like’ in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see “25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays” by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

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Notes

A Museum Moment

Coincidence is a pretty funny thing. People talk all the time about cause and effect, but no one can really predict how things will turn out.

A couple of years ago, I was really looking forward to an entire summer of playing baseball, swimming, and hanging out. Just before school started, Dad changed all that with a few words: "Son, we're going to the American History Museum next Friday." I just stared at him. Museums are dusty and dull. "No, thanks," I replied. "I already have plans, remember? Jayson and I are headed to the water park." Dad rarely digs in, but the few times he does, I know it's useless to argue.

I complained all week, but it was no use. I'm stubborn, but my dad could win Olympic medals in pigheadedness. I begged him, claiming, "But, Daaad, Jayson doesn't have a brother. How much fun will he have at the water park with just his parents?" No love from Dad.

I tried the workaround next, turning to my mother. Sometimes she'll take my side against Dad. Not this time! "I'm sorry, but I'm really looking forward to a family trip before you go back to school," she replied. She didn't even look sorry. How could she ruin my last week of summer vacation by taking me to a museum??

I refused to give in with grace. Friday came, and my mom tried to make it up to me by packing my favorite snacks for the road trip. They even broke out a visit to Krispy Kreme in an effort to make this trip more acceptable. I wasn't going to give them the satisfaction of seeming to enjoy it, although I have to admit that the donut was pure love. I licked my fingers when they weren't looking. After half a dozen tries, my mom gave up trying to have a conversation. I just listened

to music in my headphones. Yes, it was childish, but I wanted them to know that I didn't want to be there. I refused to pretend just to make them happy.

The museum itself was pretty cool once I got over my tantrum. The exhibits were more interesting than I expected. I loosened up as we moved along and participated in some of the interactive exhibits, listening to podcasts and trying out various scenes from history. I learned some things that I didn't know before and it really wasn't as bad as I'd expected. I still say it was something I did under protest. I went along with it "just because," after all. If I learned a thing or two, well, I wouldn't tell Mom or Dad.

Fast forward to week two of school. Mrs. Sanchez, my history teacher, announced that our class was going to participate in History Day competitions. You guessed it, some of the possible topics, were nearly identical to some of the exhibits I'd seen a few weeks earlier. My team was already ahead before we started because of my experience. We did very well in our competition.

Whenever you learn something "just because," you never expect yourself to improve at all. You believe that learning this will just end up as a hobby, or as something you will forget. However, you can learn so much more in situations similar to mine by working harder, focusing more, and identifying new learning. It is not only just because, but it is something you experience.