



Advanced | Exemplar Essay

Just Because

How to Make the Best of Things



Plot and Ideas

The writer establishes an engaging, plausible context (“my mom went to war on my teenaged lifestyle”). Purposeful description situates the conflict (“I realized that they didn’t want to be there any more than I did”) that builds toward a climax and resolution (“I’ll never be bored again if I can help it”). The plot and ideas completely fulfill the purpose of the task.



Development and Elaboration

The narrative maintains a clear setting. The writer introduces and develops engaging characters to advance the story (“I won that day, but I knew my days were numbered as my mom is nothing but persistent”) and reveal the central idea through meaningful and significant dialogue and description (“Once my attitude started to change, it created a domino effect...”).



Organization and Sequencing

The narrative uses a clear, well-paced sequence of events to support story development. There are effective transitions and other narrative techniques that signal shifts in time and setting (“she came in the next day” and “When we got to the Y”). The resolution offers closure to and reflects on the course of events (“My just-because-I-had-to day taught me how to make the best out of a bad situation”).



Language and Style

Descriptive words clearly create distinct characters and feelings (“Cars were lined up with an endless stream of brats exiting the vehicles with backpacks and lunch clutched in their dirty little paws”). Writing is interesting and varied in a way that builds the voices of characters (“She rolled her eyes so hard that I think it’s quite possible that she hurt herself”). The point of view is well-established and maintained throughout.



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.

Just Because



How to Make the Best of Things

Parents are supposed to teach their kids all the important life lessons. I think that it's possible my mom just wanted me to get out of the house, but the whole experience ended up being one of those "just because" experiences that really taught me something that I will value and use the rest of my life.

Last summer I was in typical teenager mode. I slept in until afternoon, listened to music and played video games all day, and stayed up half the night dm'ing and texting my friends. Not surprisingly, my parents didn't like this and they decided to do something about it. The second week of summer vacation, my mom went to war on my teenaged lifestyle. She opened my curtains and ruined the perfect darkness. All that sun made it impossible to ignore the detritus that came from living on junk food while playing GTA endlessly. She had that determined mom look so I tried to focus. "You've got to get up," she insisted. I argued back, saying "I have absolutely nowhere to go and nothing to do, and I'm not even old enough to get a job," but she wouldn't stop. I won that day, but I knew my days were numbered as my mom is nothing but persistent.

So I I wasn't surprised when she came in the next day with a determined glint in her eye. She repeated her actions from the day before while informing me, "You do have somewhere to be. Today you're going to volunteer at the Y camp as an arts and crafts counselor." I tried to stare her down, but this time she out-waited me with shorts and a t-shirt in hand. I scrambled into them, and prepared for the most boring day of my life. Little did I know that today would change my outlook on life.

When we got to the Y, it was sheer chaos. Cars were lined up with an endless

stream of brats exiting the vehicles with backpacks and lunch clutched in their dirty little paws. I could see the predatory gleam in their nasty little eyes as they eyed up the counselors, ready to make mischief and ruin everyone's day. I sighed heavily and followed my mom to a sign-in table for camp counselors and got the t-shirt. Determined to make the time go by more quickly, I changed into my new shirt and went to my assigned station. Arts and crafts. Oh boy.

Texting at the table was another counselor. I think we shared an identical bored expression but I figured we'd be working together so I tried to be friendly. "Hi there! I'm Marissa. Are you the other counselor?" She rolled her eyes so hard that I think it's quite possible that she hurt herself. "Obviously," she replied and her head dropped down again to her phone. The message was clear: It was up to me to make our station fun for the campers, and maybe for myself too. This was maybe the turning point for me. Once my attitude started to change, it created a domino effect, and things turned out being not as bad as I thought they would be.

"Alrighty then," was all I said as I assessed the situation. The table had plenty of supplies, but they were strewn all over the table, and another round of kids would be here soon. Since she wouldn't be any help, I did my best to make the best of a bad situation. I quickly wiped up the glue and glitter and put all the beads back into their bins. I didn't have time to completely clean up and organize the supplies on the table, but it was definitely better than it had been. Just because it was a little messy didn't mean we wouldn't be able to actually work on a craft during the day.

"Hiya, kids!" I greeted the campers perkily. They just kind of looked at me. I tried again, "Who wants to make a mask? We have glitter and feathers ..." I trailed off at the lack of interest I saw reflected on their faces. I realized that they didn't want to be there any more than I did. That changed my whole fake, cheery approach. I'm not a bad person, after all, just a bit lazy so I scrambled to think of what to do next. I realized that I had all the materials to change up the craft a bit and maybe



make it a bit more interesting for everyone. "Who wants to make a puppet show?" I improvised. The response was instant and enthusiastic. I quickly broke the campers into groups. Some of the arty kids made the puppets and some of the quieter ones wanted to write the play. Our table turned out to be the most fun one at camp that day. Other counselor's groups wanted to come over and be a part of my group. Neither the kids or I had a bored look as we feverishly prepared for the show.

Before I knew it, my mom was standing by our group applauding the puppet show. I was surprised to find that the day had flown by. Honestly, the puppet show wasn't as great as I have made it out to be, but I learned something important that day and hopefully they did too. Maybe Mom meant for me to learn a valuable life lesson or maybe she just wanted me to get out of the house! But what I learned is how to make the best of things and that's something I didn't expect I'd learn that day. Life really does teach you in roundabout ways. That day changed how I approached a problem and I will never forget it. My just-because-I-had-to day taught me how to make the best out of a bad situation. I'll never be bored again if I can help it.