

Writing Prompts

for grades 5-12

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PROMPTS

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■ An Important Object

Everyone has an important object in his or her life. It could be something you found, something you made, or something that was given to you. Explain to your classmates what this object is and the reasons it is so valuable to you.

■ What Bugs You?

Everyone has things that bug them. Think about all the things that annoy you. What drives you crazy? In an essay to your classmates, explain the one thing that bothers you the most. Explain why it bugs you. Explain what you do to deal with it.

■ What's New in Sixth Grade

You have been chosen to give a talk to fifth grade students. You have to explain how sixth grade is different than fifth grade. Write an essay explaining to fifth graders what you find more fun. Explain what you find more difficult. What can they do to prepare themselves for sixth grade.

■ Role Model

Everyone has role models, people they admire and look up to. Who is your role model? What is it about this person that makes him or her so important to you? Write an essay explaining who your role model is and why this person is admirable?

■ Snow Days

You woke up this morning to find lots of snow on the ground. It snowed so much overnight that school was canceled for the day. Do you enjoy or dislike snow days? Explain your reasons. Write about the activities you do on a snow day.

■ Favorite Game

Almost everyone has a favorite game they enjoy playing. It may be a board game, a card game, an action/sporting game, or a computer/video game. Think about which game you like the most. Write an essay explaining several reasons why this game is your favorite. Use specific details to support and explain the reasons.

■ School Improvements

A local school planning team is seeking ideas to improve our school. These ideas will be discussed during meetings with students, teachers, parents, administrators, and other interested parties. The changes proposed by students will be seriously considered since students are the reason for the school's existence. Choose one change that might improve our school for all students. Write an essay explaining why your suggested change is an improvement. Give at least three reasons to support your suggestion.

■ A Good Friend

Think about one of your friends. It might be a schoolmate, a family member, or a pet. Write an essay to 5th graders describing one of your friends and give several reasons why this friend is important to you.

■ Hobby

Everyone has an activity that they enjoy doing. It might be playing an instrument or a sport. Think about what you like to do the most. Write an essay telling your classmates what you enjoy doing and at least three reasons why you like this activity so well.

■ Dream Wish

Everyone has dreamed of having one special wish come true. Before you begin writing, think about what you would like to come true. Think about how that wish would change your life or the lives of others. Now write an essay that explains why you would like to see your special wish come true. Support your choice with examples and details about how this wish would change your life or the lives of others.

■ Exchange Students

Next year, some students will be coming to your school on an exchange program. These students have never visited the United States, so everything will be new and unusual to them. Write an essay in which you describe your school and town for these exchange students. You may want to tell them what your town looks like and what its setting is. You may also want to describe your school's activities. What non-school activities are available in your area? How do students dress and socialize? You may even want to discuss the weather— anything the exchange student will need to know to prepare for his or her stay.

■ Passing the Test

Someone you know has a BIG test coming up in language arts, science, math, or social studies. This person has come to you for advice on how to successfully pass the test. Write an essay explaining three strategies in detail on how to successfully pass the test (honestly or dishonestly).

■ Good Writing

A primary focus for our school this year has been to improve writing and become good writers. You have been chosen to give a talk to fifth grade students. You have to explain to them what makes a good piece of writing.

Write an essay in which you explain what traits are necessary for a good piece of writing. Explain what those good traits are and give examples and details when you can to clarify these traits to the fifth grade students. You might also include ideas on how good writing improves reading. Wow these students with your knowledge!

■ You're the Expert

Think of something you know how to do that may be difficult for others to do. Maybe it's something most people don't even know you can do. Some examples could be skateboarding tricks, cross stitching, jewelry making, spinning a basketball, or something else. Think of a skill that is something you could actually demonstrate in class. Write an essay teaching your classmates how to perform that skill. Think about how you acquired the skill originally. Explain why you like this skill and how you got so good at it. Detail the process of how to do this skill or activity. (Remember, your audience does not know how to do this skill, so be specific.)

■ Tour Guide

There is a new sixth grade student coming to school today. You are going to be a tour guide and help him transition throughout the day. Write an essay explaining how to survive throughout the school day. Think about how you arrive to school, transition throughout the school day, teacher expectations, appropriate behavior in the cafeteria, and leaving at the end of the day. Include tips to making the day successful.

■ Fifth Grade vs. Sixth Grade

As a sixth grader, school is different than it was last year. Think about your schedule, your classes, your amount of homework, the cafeteria, the teachers, the lockers, and other parts of your day. Think about the differences from last year. Think about the things that are still the same. Write a compare/contrast essay detailing the similarities (compare) and differences (contrast) between your fifth grade year and your sixth grade year.

■ The Car of the Future

The automobile has changed a great deal in the slightly more than a hundred years since it first appeared on our roads, and it will probably continue to change. What changes in design or technology would you like to see in automobiles of the future? Write an essay in which you discuss the changes you would like to see in future automobiles. Describe their various new features in detail, making clear how they differ from present-day automobiles, and explain why these changes are necessary or desirable.

■ Barter System

Suppose you have a CD player that another person wants, and that person agrees to give you guitar lessons in exchange for the CD player. This transaction is an example of the barter system, a system in which goods or services are exchanged. This ancient system is still in use, though to a great degree it has been replaced by the monetary exchange system— in other words, money. Would people be better off if we eliminated money and went back to the barter system? Write an essay in which you explain the possible benefits and drawbacks of returning to the barter system. Discuss how the world would be different. Be sure to provide specific details to support your ideas.

■ New Club

As a student in today's world, you probably have many interests and face many challenges. Schools try to help you identify these interests and face these challenges. They try to do this through classes you take and clubs you participate in at school. Write a letter to the principal proposing the addition of a new club or class. Be sure to explain exactly why you think the new club or class should be offered and who would benefit from joining it.

■ Stop Teasing

Students are often cruel to one another for lots of reasons. Maybe students pick on one another because of how they look, what they wear, how much they weigh, how smart they are, or how they act. Maybe you have been the student who has been picked on. Or, you have just watched another student who has been picked on. Write a persuasive essay to your classmates to persuade them to stop teasing another student. Explain why they should stop teasing the other student, give advice on how to treat others in a kind way, and encourage students to think about how that student might feel.

■ Hour of Free Time

Suppose you enter a writing contest and are asked to write a persuasive essay titled “The Best Way to Spend an Hour of Free Time Without Spending Money.” What would you say in your persuasive essay? What activity would you describe? What makes this activity the best way to spend an hour of free time without spending money? Write a persuasive essay describing your activity. Try to convince your readers that your activity is the best way to spend an hour of free time without spending money.

■ Summer School

Suppose that your parents are considering sending you to summer school. Think about whether or not this is a good plan for you. Write to your parents to persuade them you should or should not go to summer school.

■ Dress Code

The school board has just announced yet another new dress code (it changes every year at your school). This year, the fashion theme for the dress code is hats. Boys may choose between propeller beanies or 5-foot-wide sombreros. Girls must wear either leather aviator's caps or black top hats. You have strong feelings about hats, and you decide to write a letter to the school board expressing your view. Write a letter that either supports or attacks the new dress code.

■ Too Much Trash

Littering has recently become a problem in your community. While many people use proper receptacles, plastic bottles, soda cans, and papers continue to litter parks, shopping malls, and sidewalks. A citizens' committee has been organized to address this problem. Think of a creative solution to the problem of litter in your community. Then write a persuasive letter to the citizens' committee in which you describe your solution and how it will affect both the community and its litter problem. Be sure to include specific reasons why your solution will solve the problem of littering in your community.

■ Dining Out!

You are going out to dinner with your family tonight. Unfortunately, your parents have selected a restaurant that you do not care for. Which one is it? Write a letter persuading your parents to take you to the restaurant of your choice... not theirs. Where do you want to eat tonight and why? Give several reasons in an attempt to change their minds. Be sure to include information that would help to convince your parents they would like your choice, too. Be sure to use strong opinion words to create a convincing argument and persuade your parents that your choice is best.

■ Improving the School

Your principal has asked students to think of a project that could be done to improve the school. What do you think? How could your school be improved? Write a letter to your principal that describes your idea and aims to persuade him/her that your project would be the best one to work on next. Give several reasons why your project would help your school. Be sure to use strong opinion words to create a convincing argument and persuade your principal that your project is best.

■ Please Play My Favorite Game

What is a favorite game that you enjoy playing? It may be a board game, a card game, an action/sporting game, or a computer/video game. Think about which game you like the most. Persuade someone to play your favorite game, offering at least three reasons why this game is your favorite. Use persuasive language to convince your audience to play.

■ The Perfect Gift

Everyone loves gifts. If you could receive the perfect gift, what would it be? Would it be store bought? Would it be homemade? Would it be something you could hold in your hands?

Write an essay persuading a special person in your life to give you this one perfect gift.

■ Convincing a Friend

Zeena loves chocolate-covered marshmallows. She eats them for breakfast, for snacks, and for dessert. Whenever friends say it is not good to eat so many, Zeena just laughs and keeps eating. She says the chocolate gives her energy, and she loves to sink her teeth into the sticky marshmallows. They are also a cheap treat! Convince Zeena that too many chocolate-covered marshmallows could be bad for her. Include at least three reasons in your persuasive essay.

■ Guest Speaker

If you could invite someone to be a guest speaker in one of your classes, whom would you choose? This could be an adult or a child. This individual could be alive or from history. This could be someone well-known or someone only you know.

■ Role Model

You are to select someone to speak to your class who would be a positive role model and have much to offer eighth graders. Write a persuasive essay for a teacher in which you discuss reasons why this individual would be of interest to your classmates. Be sure to include convincing reasons that will persuade the teacher to invite your choice of speaker.

■ A New National Holiday

If you look at any monthly calendar we use in the United States, you will see days set aside to honor special people—Lincoln, Washington, and Rev. Martin Luther King’s birthdays, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, to name a few. What special person in your life do you feel should be added to our national list of holidays? Write an essay persuading our law makers to adopt your special person to honor on our national calendar. You do not need to know the specific date at this time. Use detailed examples as to why this person deserves such an honor.

■ Exit Exams

A law has been passed that requires high school students to pass exit tests before they graduate from high school. Consider carefully the advantages and disadvantages of passing required exit tests. Do you agree or disagree with making high-stakes exit tests, such as the ISTEP Test, a requirement for high school graduation? Write an essay in which you persuade the reader to support your point of view. Support a position with specific reasons and examples.

■ Celebrity Salaries

Many celebrities— such as actors, musicians, models, or athletes— make a great deal of money. Some people think celebrities make more money than they deserve. Other people think celebrities' wealth is deserved because of the enjoyment they bring to the public. Do you agree or disagree that celebrities make more money than they deserve? Now, write an essay in which you persuade the reader that your side of the issue is correct. Use facts and examples to support your argument.

■ Late Arrival

Current research suggests that because teenagers have different sleep patterns, they would benefit from beginning the school day at a later time. Suppose your Board of Education has proposed that all high school schedules begin at 9:30 a.m. and end at 4:30 p.m. Do you agree or disagree that this later schedule would be beneficial? Now write an essay in which you persuade the Board of Education to agree with your opinion. Support your position with reasons and examples.

■ School Policy

Due to potential problems, many school systems have adopted a policy that bans cell phones and pagers on school grounds. However, some parents have provided these items out of concern for safety. Do you agree or disagree that cell phones and pagers should be banned on school grounds? Now write an essay in which you convince the reader of your opinion. Support your position with specific reasons and examples.

■ Delay in Driving

A law has been passed changing the driver's license system to a graduated system. A young person can be issued a restricted learner's permit at age 15, an intermediate license at age 16 and a full license at age 17. Both the learner's permit and intermediate license limit the number of passengers allowed in a car and limit the hours the person can drive. The full license carries no restrictions. Consider carefully the advantages and disadvantages of the graduated driver's license system. Do you agree or disagree with the graduated license system? Now, write an essay in which you persuade the reader to support your point of view. Support your position with specific reasons and examples.

■ Required Service

At the present time, young Americans volunteer to enlist for military service. To maintain our present military operations, more people may be needed. Do you agree or disagree with the opinion that all Americans, both men and women, should be required to perform two years of military service? Write an essay in which you persuade the reader to support your point of view. Support your position with specific reasons and examples.

■ Student Custodian

In some countries, students are responsible for the basic daily cleaning of their school buildings. Fifteen minutes are set aside each day for all students to sweep, dust, and clean their classrooms and corridors. Think about how you would feel if students were responsible for cleaning your school. Do you agree or disagree that American schools should adopt this policy? Now, write an essay in which you persuade the reader why this is or is not a good idea. Defend your position with specific reasons supported by several detailed examples.

■ Cutbacks

Imagine that your school district has proposed saving money by eliminating extracurricular sports (e.g. football, basketball and baseball) from the high school program. Think about the possible effects of cutting sports from the school program. Decide whether you are for or against this proposal. Now write an essay in which you persuade the reader why this is or is not a good idea. Defend your position with specific reasons supported by several detailed examples.

■ Community Service

Many schools require all students to perform some type of community service such as working in nursing homes or hospitals. Think about how you would feel if you were required to perform a community service. Now write an essay in which you persuade the reader that students should or should not be required to perform community service. Defend your position with several detailed reasons. Develop those reasons with supporting examples.

■ Curbing School Violence

Since schools have seen a rise in gang violence, stealing, and discipline problems, many schools and school districts are considering requiring students to wear uniforms. Think about how you would feel if you were required to wear a school uniform. Are there benefits or drawbacks to requiring students to wear school uniforms? Now write an essay in which you persuade the reader that school uniforms should or should not be required. Defend your position with specific reasons.

■ Year-long School

A school board is considering keeping school in session all year. Instead of a long summer vacation, there will be many shorter breaks throughout the year. Think about the effects of a twelve-month school year. Do you agree or disagree that schools should be in session all year? Now, write an essay in which you persuade the reader why this is or is not a good idea. Defend your position with specific reasons supported by several detailed examples.

■ Favorite Character

There are many types of books and stories. The characters in books make the stories come alive. The characters may be people or animals. Before you begin to write, think about a character that you like the most. What is your character like? What does your character do in the story? Now write an essay that explains why you selected this character as your favorite. Support your choice with specific examples and details from the story.

■ Part-Time Job

Many students work part-time while going to school. Do you think teens should work during the school year? Give reasons for why you think working part-time is a good idea or not.

■ Friendship

Friendship is important to most young people. Who are some of your good friends? Whom have you befriended in the past? Think about the qualities of a friend. Why are these important to you? Now write an essay describing the qualities of a good friend. These may be the characteristics of your best friend or qualities you try to exhibit as a friend to others. Support your reasons with examples and details.

■ Favorite Season

If you had to choose one season of the year as your favorite, which one would you choose? Before you begin to write, think about the season you have chosen and why it is your favorite. You might be thinking about the weather, certain activities in this season, or both. Now write an essay in which you explain why this one season of the year is your favorite. Support your ideas with examples and details.

■ Postage Stamp Model

The U.S. Postal Service has honored many individuals from presidents to singers to cartoon characters by placing their portraits on postage stamps. Whom would you nominate to honor with a postage stamp? Before you begin to write, think about why this person should have his or her own stamp. Now write an essay to tell the reader whom you would choose and explain why that person should be honored with a postage stamp. Support your ideas with examples and details.

■ Important Item

Everyone has one item that is important to him or her. Before you begin writing, think about one item that is important to you and why. It could be something you found, made, or had given to you. Now explain in an essay why this one item is important to you. Support your ideas with examples and details.

■ Favorite Music

Everyone has a favorite type of music. It may be rock, country, rap, classical, or some other kind. Before you begin to write, think about your favorite kind of music and why you like it. Now explain in an essay why this one type of music has become your favorite. Support your music choice with examples and details.

■ Embarrassing Moment

Sometimes friends or relatives may say or do something that embarrasses you. Think of one time this has happened. Write a story about the embarrassing incident and how you coped with it. Include the sort of details that would entertain your reader.

■ Forgetfulness

Forgetting can cause problems. Think about a day when you forgot something. Before you begin to write, think about what you forgot and what happened. Now, write a story about what happened the day you forgot something.

■ An Accomplishment

All of us have experienced a time when we, or someone we know, celebrated an accomplishment. For many, this is a vivid memory that will never be forgotten. Think of a time when you felt successful, and write a short narrative story telling about this experience. Explain and describe the situation and events that occurred, the people involved, emotions you felt, and how it ended or was resolved.

■ A Memorable Experience

Everyone has had some experience in life that will never be forgotten. It might have been sad or humorous, major or minor. For one reason or another it has left a lasting memory. Think of something that happened to you that you remember clearly. As you retell this story, include all important details that describe your experience, such as who was involved, where you were, what happened, and why it was memorable.