



Advanced | Exemplar Essay

A Rough Road Ahead

The Cyclist's Journey



Clarity and Focus

The essay contains a clear, focused, and effective central idea that thoroughly addresses the prompt ("However, the description of the setting every step of the way sets the tone for the cyclist's emotional and physical journey"). The central idea is meaningful and fully engages the audience ("The journey...was supposed to be a great one. For this unfortunate cyclist, however, the journey was rather treacherous").



Development

The central idea is developed with well-chosen, relevant quotes that connect to the topic ("The author characterizes it as 'fitting the traditional image of a ghost town'"), followed by meaningful explanations ("The negative image of the decrepit town does not bother him"). The essay provides concrete examples throughout to address the audience's understanding of the main idea sufficiently.



Organization

The essay enhances ideas with appropriate, varied transitions ("in the beginning," "continuing on," and "just when"). The organizational structure provides an engaging introduction, followed by descriptive body paragraphs that develop the main idea. There is a sense of cohesion throughout, ending with a reflective conclusion ("whose vision of the world no longer corresponds to the shifting changes in environment").



Language and Style

There is an established, formal style that conveys information clearly, but still hooks the audience's attention ("While he had a map, he chose to take the advice of a few kindly old men"). The essay uses mostly correct, varied sentence structure and uses precise, advanced language to address the complexity of the topic ("treacherous," "lackadaisical," and "populous").



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.

A Rough Road Ahead



Notes

The Cyclist's Journey

The journey to Yosemite National Park was supposed to be a great one. For this unfortunate cyclist, however, the journey was rather treacherous. Instead of going for a long and pleasant ride, he ended up on a barren, bumpy, and rugged trail filled with beaming sunlight, tall hills, and little chances for water. While he had a map, he chose to take the advice of a few kindly old men "who haven't left the confines of their porches since Carter was in office." What started out as a great biking trip ended in a horrid mishap, and the description of the setting every step of the way sets the tone for the cyclist's emotional and physical journey.

In the beginning, the cyclist is lackadaisical, happy, and willing to trust in the wisdom the old men that direct him toward a path that will "slice hours from [his] ride," making it seem like an ideal strategy for the protagonist to follow this path. The first town the cyclist comes to on his ride is long past its prime, which he describes as probably being "before the last world war." The author characterizes it as "fitting the traditional image of a ghost town." At that point in his journey, he feels comfortable enough to laugh about the ghost town and move on. He is feeling very positive, anticipating "the cool pines and rushing rivers" he will see at Yosemite. The negative image of the decrepit town does not bother him. He recalls hardly noticing the somewhat unpleasant heat of the sun. At this point, the tone of the piece is lighthearted and confident.

It is apparent that the cyclist appreciates the natural setting around him and sees value in reaching his destination of Yosemite. However, the next description of setting gives the reader the sense that the cyclist is starting to feel anxious and



exhausted. The route was proving to be very different than the one described by the gentlemen and he was clearly distraught over his dwindling water supply. As arrives to the town, he feels troubled by the sight of a "ramshackle shed, several rusty pumps, and a corral that couldn't hold in the lamest mule..." Here he mentions that he is aware that he is travelling through the deserts of California in June. When he reached a promising water sourced at an old rusted pump, only "a tar like substance oozed out, followed by brackish water feeling somewhere in the neighborhood of 200 hundred degrees." Unable to obtain any water from the pump, the cyclist gathers his courage to keep riding, but the tone has taken a turn for worse.

Continuing on, the lone cyclist encounters an increasing number of challenges that range from rolling hills to the absence of civilization as a whole that test his sanity and endurance to their limits. He stops at an abandoned Welch's Grape Juice factory with a sign that he describes as "a sandblasted picture of a young boy pouring a refreshing glass of juice in his mouth", giving the reader the sense that the mere existence of the sign is mocking the protagonist. The stretch he trekked across was proving to be so barren of life, it was a shock that there was even a road to follow. The only life that appeared to the cyclist seemed to be "tumbleweeds crossing his path and a ridiculously large snake - that really did look like a diamondback - blocking the majority of the pavement in front of him." He is now fully convinced that he has made a big mistake. He recalls how he laughed sadly and hopelessly at the folly of trusting the old guys. The reader notices eventually that the cyclist now reports a list of things he doesn't see: no buildings, no cars, no structures, and certainly no people. At this point, it is clear that the setting is getting the best of the biker, and that he's so desperate to not be where is, that he'll start to imagine where he is not.

Just when all seems lost, the cyclist rounds a bend and all his "troubles, fear, and thirst, and fear were all behind [him]." He had come to Gary and Wilber's Fish Camp, where he "stumbled into a rather modern bathroom and drank deeply from the

sink." It is apparent to the reader with this description of the setting being "modern", with water flowing freely, that the cyclist has arrived to his saving grace. With this immediate sense of relief, the rider becomes adamant in seeking out Gary and Wilber to buy some of their bait in a display of gratitude. Suddenly, the energy he used to survive the miles before, can now be used to show his appreciation. The reader's sense of this pleasant setting makes the cyclist's happiness of survival clear.

Many factors contributed to the overall disaster that was the cyclist's trip. The desolate and arid land presented him with no place to stop, and the lack of shade allowed the blistering heat to reach him. Additionally, the rugged terrain forced the cyclist to use his strength to carry him up and down hills, while the lack of populous took away any chance of getting water. The cyclist learned his lesson and vowed to himself that he will never again trust the advice offered by well-meaning but ignorant strangers, whose vision of the world no longer corresponds to the shifting changes in environment that occur with time.