



Advanced | Exemplar Essay

Trophies for Everyone

The True Purpose of Trophies



Claim and Focus

An interesting, arguable, and precise claim (“Trophies represent success that comes from hard work and perseverance, and therefore should reward achievement, not attendance”) situates the reader, and a strong focus is maintained on defending the argument. Counterclaims are addressed and the demands of the task are thoroughly met.



Support and Evidence

The most relevant and valid evidence is quoted to support the claim (“they “[fail] to distinguish the accomplishments that deserve it, from those that don’t”) and set up the refutation of the counterclaim (“it may be all they get”). Multiple sources are referenced and full reasoning of each piece of evidence or anecdotal example is provided.



Organization

Transitional phrases enhance the relationships between ideas (“To that end,” “But one might counter”), and there is a logical progression of ideas in support of the claim. The introductory paragraph provides effective context for the argument, and the conclusion clearly follows from the ideas presented.



Language and Style

A formal style and objective tone are maintained throughout the essay. Precise, vivid vocabulary (“resilient,” “aforementioned,” “altruistic,” “entitlement”) engages the reader and builds a definitive perspective (“tugs at the heart strings”). Sentence structure tends to be complex but is clear and appropriately varied.



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.

Trophies for Everyone



The True Purpose of Trophies

Participation in organized sports offers children the opportunity to learn many life lessons. A lesson worth learning is to be resilient, and unfortunately, one has to experience losing to fully understand this concept. In recent years, however, many parents, coaches, and booster organizations have normalized the idea that participation merits its own reward. This is an issue that is highly debated in the school sports arena. When considering whether or not to give all students trophies for simply participating in school sports, it is crucial to examine both sides of the argument when choosing one's stance. When all perspectives have been considered, it becomes clear that not all high school students should be given trophies. Trophies represent success that comes from hard work and perseverance, and therefore should reward achievement, not attendance.

Participation in organized sports can foster values beyond athleticism, including perseverance, resiliency, and teamwork. The best coaches model these behaviors throughout the season and reinforce them by recognizing positive and negative examples, addressing them as they arise, whether in the locker room or on the field. As a result, when a tangible reward is given to a teammate for one of these behaviors, the team is fully aware of the qualities and actions he displayed to truly earn it. However, when trophies are mandatory for all, regardless of those who demonstrated skill, progress, or any of the aforementioned characteristics, children learn to expect rewards rather than having to earn them. Vivian Diller in Source 4 highlights the dangers of "overly protective and narcissistic parents" who demand their children be rewarded just for showing up. When they remove obstacles from

children's lives, they "[fail] to distinguish the accomplishments that deserve it, from those that don't." Although arising from good intentions, this practice of protecting them from life's harshness only adds to "a generation of kids set up for failure." To that end, adults rarely have this barrier between life's realities and their daily interactions, so what benefit is there to creating this false sense of entitlement for their children?

Jorge Perez, vice president of youth development and social responsibility for the YMCA, tugs at the heart strings when he advocates for all kids to get participation trophies, because according to him, "it may be all they get." But one might counter, "If you give someone the power to give you self-esteem, you are also giving them the power to take it away." If a child's self-esteem is tied solely to whether or not he receives a plastic trophy, then the adults are reinforcing a flawed perception of achievement. Furthermore, the end of a season should not be the only time a player feels validated for his contributions or accomplishments. This can be done throughout the season through verbal praise, both privately and publicly, to encourage a team culture where values and expectations are transparent and recognition is objectively aligned. It is unlikely that a trophy alone is enough to keep a child coming back to a sport he doesn't enjoy. Alternatively, positive, public reinforcement of culturally accepted values will no doubt increase the student athlete's self-esteem and confidence, which is the purported goal of participation trophies in the first place.

Another defense of participation trophies asserts that giving trophies to all "tell[s] children] that what matters is showing up for practice, learning the rules and rituals of the game and working hard." Despite this altruistic intention, it does not always play out this way in real life. Instead, every child on the team gets handed a trophy no matter how infrequently they showed up for practice, whether or not they know the rules of the game, and how little effort was put forth. The kids who do show up and unfailingly give their best, as well as those who demonstrated progress or excellence at the sport, are recognized equally as those who didn't. Diller explores this false equivalency and



poses the following paradigm shift: "Perhaps if we let them lose and teach them to congratulate those who win, we would help them build the motivation and endurance needed to face real life challenges – e.g. sustaining a long-term marriage or securing employment – two very elusive trophies in today's world." As a parent, willfully allowing your child to experience failure - when success is in no way deserved - may be easier said than done. But what if this struggle is exactly what the child needs to learn from his mistakes and put forth the appropriate effort next time? If children learn these lessons early in life, they will be less likely to repeat these errors in adulthood, when the stakes of the game (relationships, employment, etc.) are even higher.

There is no feeling quite like the excitement of accomplishing or exceeding a goal, especially when that goal is shared with a close-knit team. Setting such goals gives both children and adults something to strive for, and work together to achieve. Reserving trophies for the recognition of progress or achievement fosters a commitment to the shared values of the community. In high school sports, this practice will enhance the resiliency, dedication, and work ethic of the next generation, who will carry these characteristics off the field and into their personal and professional lives.