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To the Student

This book will help you review, practice, and master the English Language Arts Common Core Standards. Here are the steps to follow to use this book.

1. Take the Tryout Test over Reading Literature, Reading Informational Text, and Language and check your answers. Use the chart at the bottom of this page to find out your strengths and weaknesses in the areas covered. Remember the questions that are hard for you to answer. These will be the types of questions you need to work on the most.

2. Work through the units that follow the Tryout Test. The lessons in each unit review example items and provide a practice test based on the standards. Fill in the Keeping Score chart on page 130 as you complete each practice test.

3. After completing all the lessons, take the Mastery Test. Your score on this test will show your understanding of the Common Core Standards.

4. Work through the Writing Test Workshops section of the book. These lessons will help you learn how to read a writing prompt and how to get your ideas down on paper in a clear and organized manner.

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Standards Key: RL = Reading Literature, RI = Reading Informational Text,
L = Language, W = Writing, RH = Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social
Studies, RST = Reading Standards for Literacy in Science/Technical Studies

Note: A complete correlation of the Grade 6 Common Core Standards can be found in
the Grade 6 Teacher Guide.
Q: How can I figure out how **characters** respond and change?
A: Think about how you would describe the **characters** based upon what they say and do. Describe the characters based upon how they respond to problems or conflicts in the story. Then consider what the character is like at the end of the story. How has the character changed during the story?

Q: How do I describe the **plot**?
A: **Plot** is the series of events or episodes that make up a story. Often plot is described using the following diagram.
Try It

Read the following story and answer the questions that follow.

“This looks like a good spot for our camp.” Kyle’s dad turned off the dirt road and parked the car next to a small juniper tree. Kyle, a lanky twelve-year-old with wild brown hair, jumped out of the car and scrambled up a nearby boulder to get a better view. Fists on his hips, he surveyed the landscape with intense concentration. The sun setting over the Chuska Mountains cast a golden-red glow over the valley. Off to the east, red-brown sandstone cliffs rose up from the valley floor like an ancient fortress.

“I’ve got to remember this,” Kyle thought. Tomorrow they would be heading home to Chicago. Even after ten days of camping in the Southwest, he was eager to see more. Kyle loved everything about New Mexico. He was amazed by the rock formations, and he loved the Native American communities he and his dad had visited.

Kyle had a fascination with Native Americans of the Southwest. He and his grandfather loved to go to the library on Saturday mornings and find books about the Southwestern cultures. When Kyle turned ten, Grandpa gave him a replica of a Navajo arrowhead. Since then Kyle had dreamed of someday finding a real one.

The next morning, Kyle woke up early. He quickly got dressed and rolled up his sleeping bag. He wanted to enjoy every minute of his last day in New Mexico. Kyle took milk and cereal out of the cooler, and the clanking of spoons soon woke his dad.

After they had eaten breakfast and packed everything up, Kyle’s dad pulled out a map to figure out their route back home. Kyle stood and looked around. To either side of him sharp peaks jutted up from the valley, forming jagged silhouettes against the clear blue sky. To the south lay red, flat-topped mesas.

“Grandpa would love this,” he thought. Grandpa had lived in Chicago all his life, but as a young man, he had traveled through the Southwest on a road trip. Of all the places he visited, he liked New Mexico best. “The Land of Enchantment,” he called it.
Kyle and his grandfather had planned this trip out West together, but a few weeks before they were set to go, Grandpa fell. He was steadily improving, but the doctor said that he wasn’t strong enough to go camping. Kyle had wanted to cancel the trip, but his grandpa had insisted that Kyle and his dad go without him.

“What are you thinking about?” asked his dad, folding up the map.

“Grandpa,” Kyle said. “I wish he could see this again.” Kyle had taken plenty of photographs, but he doubted that they could capture the beauty of this land. And they would not make up for Grandpa’s disappointment about missing the trip.

“You’ll have lots of stories to take back to Grandpa,” his dad said. “Let’s take a quick look around before we head out.” The two set off in the direction of a dry creek bed. The cracked brown earth where the water had once flowed looked like pieces of broken pottery.

Near the edge of the creek bed a lizard suddenly darted out from behind a rock. Kyle knelt down to take a closer look, but the startled lizard scurried away.

Then something else caught Kyle’s eye. A small tip of white rock jutted up where the lizard had been just seconds before. Kyle carefully dug it up and brushed it off. It was a piece of flint in the shape of an arrow, with two points at the bottom.

“Hey, Dad!” he called out. “Look what I found.”

“Well, I’ll be . . . ,” said his dad as he walked up. “Looks like you’ve found an arrowhead.”

“How old do you think it is, Dad?” Kyle asked, turning it over in his hand.

“Well, if it’s real—and it probably is out here—it could be 150 years old or more.”

“Wow. I can’t wait to show Grandpa.”

“I hate to break the news to you, Kyle, but we’re on state land. That means that we’re not supposed to take away anything that we find here.”

Kyle’s heart dropped. “But it was just lying here. Would anybody miss it?”

“I’m just telling you the law,” his dad said, shrugging. “Besides, if everybody took what they found here, soon there would be nothing left for anyone else to discover. You know,” he added, patting Kyle on the back, “we should probably get going.” He turned and headed back in the direction they had come.

Kyle stood with the arrowhead in his hand, feeling the smooth, flat surface and the sharp edges. He wanted so badly to slip the arrowhead into his pocket, to take back a real piece of New Mexico to share with his grandfather. He wondered what his grandfather would do if he were here. “Grandpa would leave it for someone else to discover,” he thought. In that moment, Kyle realized that what he shared with his grandfather was bigger than anything he could take home in his pocket.

Kyle knelt down to place the arrowhead in the dirt where he found it. Then he slowly walked back to the car.

1. Which word BEST describes Kyle?
   A. angry
   B. thoughtful
   C. bored
   D. scared
2 What conflict does Kyle face in this story?
   A He wants to take the arrowhead but knows he shouldn’t.
   B He and his father are fighting all the time on their trip.
   C He doesn’t want to leave New Mexico to go home.
   D His grandfather refuses to come to New Mexico with Kyle and his father.

   **Example 1** asks you to think about Kyle’s **character**. Consider what Kyle does and says during the story, and then read the answer choices. There is no support in the story to suggest that Kyle is angry, bored, or scared. We do know that Kyle thinks about his grandfather and considers what his grandfather would do several times during the story. The correct choice is **B**.

   For **Example 2**, you must think about the central conflict of the story. The events of the story lead to the climax of the story in which Kyle must decide whether to keep the arrowhead. The best choice is **A**.

   ☉ **Try It On Your Own**

3 What lesson does Kyle learn from his conflict about whether to keep the arrowhead? How would you describe Kyle at the end of the story? Support your answer with evidence from the text. (3 points)

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

4 What event causes Kyle to want to keep the arrowhead he finds at the state park?
   A Kyle and his dad are camping in the Southwest.
   B Kyle and his grandfather went to the library and found books on the Southwestern cultures.
   C Kyle’s grandfather had given him a replica of a Navajo arrowhead.
   D Kyle’s grandfather fell and hurt himself.
5 Which of the following sentences belongs in the area marked “Resolution”?

A Kyle puts the arrowhead back on the ground.
B Kyle sees a lizard.
C Kyle dreams of finding an arrowhead.
D Kyle and his father arrive home in Chicago.

---

**Test-Taking Tips**

1. Go back to the story to find evidence to support analysis about the text.

2. To make an inference, think about what the text says and what you already know from your own experiences.

3. Questions about theme are asking you to explain the main idea, or the message, of the story. Consider the central conflict of the story, how the main character responds to the conflict, and how the conflict resolves.

4. To answer questions about summarizing a text, think about the main idea and the important details. Do not include minor details.

5. To answer questions about how a character changes in the story, compare what the character says and does at the beginning and at the end of the story.

6. To answer questions about plot, ask yourself, “What happens at the beginning of the story? In the middle? At the end? What conflict is the character facing?” Consider how events in the story cause other events to happen.
1 “Why did I get myself into this mess?” Rani thought, as she tried to steady herself after her third awkward fall on the ice. Her tired ankles wobbled, and her legs slid forward one moment, backward the next, and sometimes in both directions at once.

2 A pair of skaters swooshed gracefully by her, their skates cutting neatly into the ice. Rani watched them enviously, wishing she could skate like that. They made it look so simple!

3 Earlier that day, Rebecca had approached her in the hallway. “Hey, Rani,” Rebecca called. “A group of us are going skating tonight. Want to come?”

4 “Sure. Sounds fun,” said Rani casually. She tried to act cool, but she couldn’t stop a warm blush from creeping onto her cheeks. She turned to shove some books in her locker in order to mask her embarrassment. Rani’s family had just moved to town three weeks ago, and she was having trouble making friends at her new middle school. Rebecca and her friends were the most popular kids in the sixth grade.

5 “You don’t need lessons, do you? We would have to go early for those,” Rebecca explained.

6 “No, I’ll be fine. I used to skate a lot when I was younger,” answered Rani.

7 “Great. My mom and I will pick you up around 7:30.”

8 It wasn’t until they pulled up to the rink and Rani saw the words “Fun on Ice” that she realized she had gotten herself into trouble.

9 “Why didn’t I ask Rebecca what kind of skating?” Rani groaned, as she brushed the powdery ice off her pants after yet another clumsy wipeout. She had been roller-skating plenty of times, but she quickly learned that ice-skating was entirely different.
Frustrated, she moved to the railing and clutched it with relief. It wasn’t so much that she was afraid of falling, but she had so hoped to impress the other kids and make new friends. Instead she was making a fool of herself with all her slipping and sliding, while they were zipping around the rink as if they had been born on ice.

Just then she heard laughing and looked up to see Rebecca weaving a figure eight around her friends, Kevin and Jennifer. “Every other person here skates better than I do,” thought Rani gloomily. “These kids will think I’m a freak.” The other day when she’d scored a point in “Math Olympics,” Kevin and Jennifer had given her high fives. But tonight she was earning only low zeros.

“I may as well turn in my skates. I’ve had it,” she sighed. Suddenly she felt a firm grip around each of her arms. Before she realized what was happening, Rani found herself whooshed out to the center of the rink. Kevin and Rebecca held her safely upright. She was skating—fast! Her legs didn’t feel like her own. In disbelief she cried, “Guys, take me back to the trail! I can’t ice-skate.”

“Sure you can,” Kevin said, grinning at her. “All you need are a few lessons from friends.”

Based on paragraphs 9 and 10, we can infer that Rani—

A has never ice-skated before.
B is not good at sports.
C lives in a warm climate.
D has taken roller-skating lessons.

Which of the following BEST summarizes the story?

A Rani is new at school. Rebecca asks her to go skating. Rani agrees to go, and she learns that ice-skating is much more difficult than roller-skating. She decides to turn in her skates.
B Rani agrees to go skating with some new friends from school. When they pull up to the ice rink, Rani knows she is in trouble. She watches her friends zip around the ice as if they were born on ice.
C Rani is new at school. Rani goes ice-skating and falls down a lot. She remembers how her friends reacted when she scored a point in the “Math Olympics.” Rani’s friends take her out to the center of the rink.
D Rani agrees to go skating with some new friends from school. She finds out they are going ice-skating, not roller-skating. Rani is embarrassed because she can’t ice-skate. Her new friends offer to help her learn.
3 This diagram shows the plot of the story.

- **3. Climax**
  - Rani decides to turn in her skates.

- **2. Rising Action**
  - Rani realizes it's an ice-skating rink.
  - Rani keeps falling down.

- **1. Introduction/Exposition**
  - Rani is a new girl at school.
  - Rebecca invites Rani skating.

- **4. Falling Action**
  - Kevin, Rebecca, and Rani skate together.

- **5. Resolution**

Which sentence belongs in the box marked “Resolution”?

A Rani learns she will be ice-skating, not roller-skating.
B Rani scores a point in the “Math Olympics.”
C Rani falls down for the last time.
D Rani realizes that she has made new friends.

4 At the rink, Rani can BEST be described as—

A fearless. C discouraged.
B bored. D cheerful.

5 Describe how Rani changes throughout the story. Be sure to give evidence from the story to support your conclusions. (3 points)

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

6 Which sentence BEST expresses the story’s theme?

A Sometimes all you need is a little help from friends.
B Ice-skating can be dangerous.
C Teaching someone to skate is hard work.
D Pretending to be clumsy can help you make friends.

Points Earned/Total = ____/8
Writing Test Workshops
To the Student

Why Do I Need This Book?
This book will help you practice taking writing tests. You will learn how to—
• read a writing prompt
• get your ideas down on paper
• write a narrative
• write to explain
• write about an opinion

How Will My Writing Be Scored?
Your writing test will be scored by test readers who use rubrics, or scoring guides. The rubric below lists six qualities of good writing. Read through each characteristic so you know how your writing will be graded.

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How to Manage Your Time During an Essay Test
You may have only 20 to 45 minutes to complete a writing test so it’s important to have a plan.

If you have 20 minutes,

- read the prompt, circle key ideas, brainstorm, and organize ideas (5 minutes)
- write the essay (10 minutes)
- edit and proofread (5 minutes)
How to Read a Writing Prompt

A prompt is the assignment for a writing test. The prompt gives you directions. It also tells you what to write about.

◎ Step 1
Read through the entire prompt. Decide what the topic is.

◎ Step 2
Read through the prompt a second time, underlining key words (explain, compare, tell) that will help you focus your writing.

◎ Step 3
Look for key words or phrases you might use in your main idea statement.

Emilio’s Prompt

Here is a prompt for Emilio’s test. Look at the key words he underlined. They helped Emilio understand exactly what he was supposed to do.

Sample Prompt

Your school board is considering having schools go to a four-day week. A four-day school week would require that 75 minutes be added to the end of the day. Before the school board makes a decision, it would like to hear from the public. Write a letter expressing your opinion, supported with convincing reasons.

The prompt tells Emilio that he must write a persuasive letter. His main idea will be his opinion on a four-day school week and will most likely include words such as should or should not. Finally, he will need to include reasons to support his opinion.

Try It On Your Own

Read the prompt below. Underline any key words and phrases that might be helpful to you as a writer.

Prompt

A leading doctor claims that to do their best in school, students under 16 should get 11 hours of sleep at night. Based on her advice, your parents are considering making your bedtime 8:00. You disagree. Write a letter to your parents that explains your position.
Argumentative Writing

Review the Standards (W.6.1.a–e, W.6.4, W.6.5)

- Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence
- Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
- Develop and strengthen writing by planning, revising, editing, and rewriting

Argumentative writing is focused on developing an argument to convince your reader that your opinion is right. You make a claim, and then you use reasons and evidence to support your claim.

**Introduction**
- state your main idea (claim) in one sentence

*Cutting the sixth-grade drama program would hurt the quality of education for students at our school.*

**Body**
- develop your argument with clear reasons and relevant evidence

*Reason: Participating in school plays gives students confidence to speak in front of people.*

*Evidence: Many jobs require people to speak in front of both small and large groups of people.*

**Conclusion**
- restate the main idea
- review reasons
- end with a strong thought

*In conclusion, I believe that any cuts to our drama program would hurt the students at our school.*

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**Good reasons are**—
- based on logic
- supported with evidence such as facts, quotations from experts, and examples

**Emotional appeals**—
- use emotion to motivate the reader
- are not as persuasive as logical reasons
- should be used sparingly
- are most effective in the introduction and conclusion
Alex’s Prompt

Below is a prompt that Alex was given on a writing test. Notice the key words Alex underlined in the prompt.

Your school district is considering requiring all fifth- and sixth-grade students to take band. Instruments would be rented at a reasonable fee for those who did not want to purchase them. What is your opinion of such a requirement? Write an argument stating your viewpoint and supporting it with convincing reasons.

First, Alex decided whether he was for or against all students having to take band in fifth and sixth grades. Then he organized his ideas about the issue. Look at the organizer Alex created. Notice that he placed a star next to the most important ideas.

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<th>Issue: Whether fifth- and sixth-grade students should be required to take band</th>
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<td>Main Idea/Claim: Requiring all fifth- and sixth-grade students to take band would be difficult for both the families and schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason/Evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students get enough music in music class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some students may already be taking instrumental lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Some families may not be able to afford to rent an instrument. Instruments can cost thousands of dollars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band concerts could interfere with other activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Some students have no interest in music. Only one-fourth of sixth-graders currently take band.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Extra band teachers would have to be hired.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Words you might find in a prompt that requires you to write persuasively:

agree, disagree  
argue, argument  
convince  
opinion  
oppose  
position  
should  
should not  
stand  
support
Alex’s Writing

Requirements! Requirements! Requirements!
Students get more requirements thrown at them every year. They’re so busy doing the required things that they don’t have time to choose what they want to do.

Requiring all fifth and sixth grade students to take band would be difficult for both families and schools.

One reason these students should not have to take band is that some kids just don’t have an interest in music. Music is not for everybody. I have a lot of friends who don’t even like going to music class. They would really hate being forced to take band! Some students are more into sports or dance or scouting. Making these students take band would be a waste of time because they wouldn’t like it.

Another reason is that some parents might not be able to afford the instrument rental. Some families don’t make much moola. They don’t have a lot to spend on things like musical instruments. They have enough to do to pay their bills. I have a friend in sixth grade who has a brother in fifth grade. Their parents would have to pay two rentals. How fair would that be?

My final reason is because the district would have to hire at least one more band teacher. Their are three fifth
and four sixth grades at our school. That’s almost 200 students. Ain’t no way Ms. Jenkins could handle that many kids in one day! That means one or two teachers would have to be hired. Everyone’s always talking about how the school doesn’t have any money. Then how could it afford to hire more teachers?

Fifth and sixth grade students should not be required to take band. Period.

Looking at Alex’s Writing

- Does Alex’s introduction grab your attention? Why or why not?
- Circle Alex’s main idea. Is his claim clearly stated?
- Underline the reasons Alex has included that support his main idea. Now look back at his organizer. Are these his strongest reasons?
- Put a check mark next to places where you think Alex uses an inappropriate style to express his ideas.
- Mark and correct any problems in mechanics (spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar).
- Underline Alex’s concluding statement. Could it be improved?
Try It On Your Own

**Directions:** Now it’s your turn to write an argument. Follow the steps in order. If your teacher gives you a time limit, make a plan by filling in the amount of minutes you have to complete each step.

**Step 1**—Read the prompt and underline any key words. ( _____ minutes)

**Step 2**—Brainstorm for ideas on a separate piece of paper. ( _____ minutes)

**Step 3**—Fill in the graphic organizer to help you organize your paper. ( _____ minutes)

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**Prompt**

A litter problem has developed at your school. Students are throwing trash on the ground and leaving empty cans and bottles outside on benches. Your principal has asked students to pick up after themselves, but the litter problem continues. The principal has reacted by canceling all after-school activities until the problem is taken care of and stays taken care of for two weeks. What is your position on this issue? Write an argument that includes a claim. Support your claim with good reasons and evidence.

---

**Issue:**

**Main Idea/Claim:**

**Reasons/Evidence**

---

**GO ON**
How Did You Do?

**Directions:** Complete the following tasks. Then fill in the rubric below.

1. **Ideas/Content** Underline your main idea/claim.
   - Number the reasons that support your position statement. (1, 2, 3, etc.)
   - Put a check mark by your strongest reason.
   - Put an E by evidence used to support your reasons.

2. **Organization** Can you identify the introduction and conclusion? Write I and C next to them.
   - Put a box around linking words such as first, next, second, finally, and also.

3. **Voice** Does the writing communicate a positive, confident attitude, or does the writer seem angry or sound like a know-it-all?

4. **Word Choice** Circle any words that seem especially fresh or vivid.
   - Cross out any words that are not exciting or precise. Also cross out any slang or language that is too informal.

5. **Sentence Fluency** Put a check next to any sentences that seem too choppy or too long.
   - Try combining sentences that are too short or creating two sentences from an overly long one.

6. **Conventions** Check for any errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

**Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Score: 1 is the lowest; 5 is the highest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas/Content—focuses on one main idea; the details add to the main idea</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization—has a clear beginning, middle, and end; the order is easy to follow</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice—communicates feelings and personality; the writing is unique</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice—uses colorful, fresh words in the right places</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Fluency—uses both long and short sentences that flow smoothly</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions—few or no spelling, capitalization, and punctuation errors</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One way I can improve my writing is by ____________________________________________________________