

Grade 10 Sample Compositions

We wanted to share with you some samples of Grade 10 compositions that received 4s during last spring's TAKS administration. As you will see, the names and other identifying information in the compositions have been changed to protect the identity of the student writers. We hope that these papers will help deepen your understanding of the rubric and of the variety of approaches that students can take when responding to a TAKS prompt. Remember that these compositions were based on the 2003 TAKS prompt, which can be found on page 59 of the Grade 10 Scoring Guide.

I've always believed where you are is who you are. But what if you move? Have you lost yourself, left behind where it is impossible to regain?

I ask myself this question twice a year: at the end of May and beginning of August. School ends and I earn 782 frequent flier miles to leave Bush Intercontinental Airport bound for Kentucky, then drive 45 minutes to my father's house in southern Indiana. For two and a half months I am free. No school, just endless weeks of swimming, lookouts and camping, with the occasional chore. I miss somethings: trips to the mall every other day, movies, and friends who spend all year making summer plans that inevitably exclude me, friends who have summer homes in Miami and Vermont. The first couple of days away are lonely, but then I get back into my routine of feeding rabbits and picking tomatoes from the garden; duties I've neglected.

I never leave myself behind completely. The city in me comes out when I'm forced to touch road kill or when I run out of time to do laundry and have to wear two day jeans. I do run out of time, away from the hustle-bustle of Houston I'm occupied with explorations, cooking, and learning about my entire extended family living in a 10 mile radius.

When I run out of time for good, there is a bitter-sweet feeling of contentment: regret, longing, fulfillment, hope - all rolled into one. I'm home but I'm going home. I board the plane and take my 782 miles. It's over just like that.

School starts soon, and looking out the window I want to cry. No lakes or grass - just endless horizons of pavement in every direction. I can't see wheat fields from my bedroom window, and car stereos alarms, and sirens keep me up all night.

I'm no longer that city girl. I'm the one who would rather wear dirty overalls than designer jeans. But in the next ten months I'll transform, then I'll keep morphing back and forth until I make my own decision as to where I live. Even then the future is in someone else's hands.

But I'll adapt to what I'm given. Parts of me will always stick around, the important ones. I'll always do what I have to do. Take your beach house and have fun tanning, but it's only a summer house.

I have a summer home.

Score Point: 4

In the year 2008, the project on building a biosphere was renewed with refreshed vigor. In 2036 it was perfected and by 2123 no one lived in anything but the synthesized environment. By 2221 no one could ever remember anything beyond the biosphere life. On a whole, the people were happy.

Elaine Colette Sanford, however, was not.

She tired of the unreasonably perfect 74.2 degrees it always remained. She tired of the delightful drizzle they got every Wednesday between 1 and 6 p.m. She tired of flowers forever blooming and trees forever green because they had no fear of winter freeze or summer drought.

"Why don't you transfer to a new sphere?" suggested the eighth person since Tuesday. "I once went on vacation to a rainforest sphere. It was quite lovely. Go there for a time."

"I went last year, remember? It was a constant 88 degrees and rained ten minutes every hour on the hour."

"At least be grateful you're here instead of outside," she replied with undaunted cheer.

"I'd rather be outside, where when I wake up I don't know what kind of a day it'll be!" Elaine's friend started to speak, but Elaine interrupted her. She knew what she was going to say, "I know, I know, I can't because of the acid rain. I'm not going to, I just wish I could."

"Well," she shrugged, and said the something everyone else in sphere 88 had said, "I certainly can't relate."

They parted company, and Elaine's friend went back to the McDonalds before returning to her office because she always went to McDonalds on her lunch break and she always ordered a salad with lowfat dressing because she was always

watching her weight. Elaine, however began the long trek toward the museum, where there was a window that looked out over all that was beyond the sphere.

It was a partly cloudy day in the real world. The grass was a little brown because it hadn't been getting quite enough rain for a while. She glanced at the clouds. "It might rain soon" she mentally told the grass. "Then again, it might not. I can never tell for sure." She sighed. She seemed to sigh a lot recently.

She tried to figure out why the predictability of the weather bothered her so much. She was comfortable in the 74.2 degrees and she loved nothing better than to stand out in the rain every Wednesday and feel it falling on her face and arms.

She wanted to cry. One's surroundings were supposed to help mould one's life and one's person. Suddenly she knew what bothered her. It was not the weather, it was the people!

Outside the clouds were growing darker. She touched the glass and felt a light rumble of thunder from the world beyond. A synthesized world left synthesized people. Living androids made of flesh and blood. Mindless golums. Thoughtless...

"Hello Elaine," the museum manager's voice interrupted her thoughts.

She looked at him, numbly said, "I want to get away from the sphere."

He blinked for a moment, collecting his thoughts. "Oh?" he finally managed to ask, still blinking dumbly. Then Elaine laughed as the museum manager became the ninth android since Tuesday to suggest "Why don't you transfer to a new sphere?" No one knew just how much one's surroundings affect one's life. No one but Elaine Colette Safford in Biosphere 88.

A person grows through stimuli in his environment, and depending on that stimuli, he may turn out to have different views, preferences, or mindsets than other people. The surroundings in which one grows can have long-term, significant effects and can ultimately change a person's life altogether.

I know from experience that growing up in a certain surrounding or culture can influence one's mind and thinking process. For example, my growing up in China caused me to have an extreme respect for my elders and my traditions. This was a result of my parent's teachings and the traditional culture of the Chinese people. Although I live in the United States now, the cultural traditions I experienced at such an early age caused my respect for my elders to become turned into my natural mindset. Furthermore, growing up in the Chinese environment reflected in my personality. Due to the fact that younger children are supposed to remain quiet in front of adults, I turned out to be somewhat shy. The influence of my Chinese heritage set off a chain reaction that affected my life; by causing my shyness, it also caused me to become less social, resulting in a lesser number of friends. For me, surroundings have had a profound effect on my life, defining who I am and how I see myself.

Sometimes, though, a person's exposure to a new environment causes him to adapt and reshape his character. For example, in the excerpt from On Willow Creek, Rick discovers the incredible characteristics of the wild, causing him to leave behind his civility and realize that the wild is a blessing to take away the "crippling fever of too-much civility." Rick's mindset changes gradually, starting when he was just a little boy.

who had gone to fetch water from a frozen creek. He is mesmerized by the fish under the ice and later by the geese trying to land in the fog. He comes to see himself in a new way because of his gradual recognition that nature is both beautiful and mysterious. By experiencing nature in all its wildness, Rick develops a different understanding of himself and his place in the world.

Like Rick, I have also undergone profound changes because of exposure to a new environment. Since my arrival to the United States ten years ago, I have experienced a new culture and a new way of life. Moving to Texas was the beginning of a whole new world in which I would slowly be reshaped to fit an American lifestyle. I still retain much of my Chinese heritage, but my surroundings now have a continuous effect on me, slowly influencing my actions and my life a little more everyday. Though I still respect my elders, I am no longer afraid to speak my mind. I have more friends and like the changes I see in myself. I know, though, that I am a product of all my surroundings. Part of me will always be Chinese, and part will always be American. To keep growing, I have to accept both selves, and I will.

Score Point: 4

February 29, 1992 - Today was so wonderful! Waking up to Henry (our new rooster) every morning is such an awesome feeling - and to top it all off, there was a fresh, beautiful blanket of snow covering the pasture! Today I also turned 16 - well, 4 if you only count the leap years! The cake Annie made me was also a fun surprise - usually it is mom who does that. The best part of it all was my only present - a new guitar! The dark mahogany neck slides perfectly into my fingers, and all those old songs I know sound even sweeter on it. Berkeley didn't even hawl at me when I started playing Donovan! I guess I'm one step closer to my dream of all dreams - to live in New York and play folk music to people for a living! No chores, no school - what a life! My best friend Joel still thinks I'm crazy for it, but we get along anyway. We have all the same passions... I love knowing there's at least one other person in this world who understands me that deeply, besides my parents.

May 20, 1995 - It finally happened! First of all, I quit my job at the factory after getting my last paycheck. It was such a tremendous feeling of relief and freedom after all those months of the same ol' drone. Even greater, I managed to save enough money to make it to New York and (hopefully!) pay the first few months' rent! I'm on the bus now, and the scenery is getting more metro-politan by the minute! Earlier, the fields and fences were so beautiful - it really is like a dream come true. I promised to write Mom and Dad and Annie as

soon as I got time to sit down, and then Joel - he's also really excited for me. Mom wasn't sure she wanted me coming up here; she says there are a lot of "drugs and criminals and low-class women and lazy ex-hippies" here to "drag me down." I could never get involved with anything like that, though; life's too good as it is to risk messing it up there. I guess she's only worried because she cares. I don't know how long I'll stay. We'll see how long the dream lasts!

Jan. 1, '00 - It's so hard to write, even think when it's this cold. Mr. Scrooge, my landlord, turned off my heat after I couldn't raise the money to make rent. I only wish I could find something blacker to write with... I can hear them celebrating in Times Square, even from here. Almost sickening, isn't it, hearing everyone so excited and getting drunk over a little number? I can't stand this city anymore... it's always bright, always loud, always fast, always cold. Why did I ever fall for the "la vie Bohème" dream? There are so many of us here, now; we all shared that dream. Now we're just tired, broken-down, drugged-up, lonely wrecks. Joel stopped writing back a few months ago, but Mom's always calling. She likes to hear the weather's fine, I'm getting plenty to eat, having fun. Sure, no chores, no school - what a life, right? All this city's given me is John Lennon's words... "the dream is over, what can I say? The dream is over... yesterday."

Each day I trudge to school, wistful, in the cold gray morning for a warm heap of blankets and a land innocent of all knowledge of alarm clocks. I shake off my gloom as I enter the building, and proceed to go through the necessary motions. I punctually report to all my classes, and take notes, and look excruciatingly attentive, yet all the while, I have the greatest urge to rear down the hallway, screaming nonsensical gibberish. Another, less exposed alternative I have developed is to melt into an indistinguishable goo & terrorize my fellow students with my "yuckiness."

"Why do I have those urges?" I often wonder. What is it about school that makes one want to scream, or even liquify? My friends have tried to convince me that it is the disgusting excuse for food which I regularly consume in the Cafeteria, or the conspiracy developed by our teachers who are so "devoted" to us that they deprive us of sleep & then subject us to full 50 minute lectures on the shells of diatoms. Oh yes, a great many sadistic hypotheses are muttered in the dark corners of the hallways as we pass from room to room. My theory, however, is much simpler, and involves no plan to don army fatigues & vandalize waterfountains in a manner that would make Guevara proud. It is simply this: There are no windows.

I kid you not. In fact I cordially invite you to come and inspect the main building of our campus, sir or madam, and should you find a speck of a window, I shall treat you to a steak dinner. One might wonder what exactly windows have to do with my feelings, and understandably so. Here I shall divulge to you the connection.

In our current window-less state, the only light we are allowed

is a seemingly dull, brownish-yellow stream of radiance, emitting from a series of 23 year old tube lights above our heads. It is my firm belief that these brownish-yellow beams have come to make me feel that same dull color. They drain from my poor, tired body any energy it had been able to muster that morning. I look at this place of mine, this school, bathed in such a light and I think to myself, "What's the point? Why come to such a depressing place?" These questions I have asked myself many times these past few years.

However, at the end of the day, when my fellow students and I gather outside to await our parents, a completely different effect is observed. We are energetic! We are enthusiastic! We care! As I go home, I know that naught but homework and piano practice await me. I know that I shall feel the wrath of my father when he sees my last chemistry exam, yet I care not! I can think only of those sixteen glorious fenestrations which line the posterior of my home. I can think only of the sunlight.

Score Point: 4