

Sixth Grade Language Arts – Composition

A Gallant Gesture

At ten o'clock of the battle day, when the shells were rolling down every street, and the bridge under heavy cannonade, a courier dashed over and, rushing up the steps of the house where I was, placed in my hand a crumpled piece of paper, a request from the lion-hearted old surgeon on the opposite shore, establishing his hospitals in the very jaws of death:

"Come to me," he wrote. "Your place is here."

The faces of the rough men working at my side grew ashy white as they guessed the nature of the summons, and they begged me to send them but save myself. I could only allow them to go with me if they chose, and in twenty minutes we were rocking across the swaying bridge, the water hissing with shot on either side.

Over into that city of death, its roofs riddled by shell, its every church a crowded hospital, every street a battle-line, every hill a rampart, every rock a fortress, and every stone wall a blazing line of forts.

Oh, what a day's work was that! How those long lines of blue, rank on rank, charged over the open acres, up to the very mouths of those blazing guns, and how like grain before the sickle they fell and melted away.

An officer stepped to my side to assist me over the debris at the end of the bridge. While our hands were raised in the act of stepping down, a piece of an exploding shell hissed through between us, just below our arms, carrying away a portion of both the skirts of his coat and my dress, rolling along the ground a few rods from us like a harmless pebble in the water. The next instant a solid shot thundered over our heads, a noble steed bounded in the air and with his gallant rider rolled in the dirt not thirty feet in the rear. Leaving the kind-hearted officer, I passed on alone to the hospital. In less than a half-hour he was brought to me – dead.

Directions: Read the above text aloud. Then, read it again to yourself. Look up any difficult or unfamiliar words before you continue. (The rest of the directions are on the next page.)

On a separate piece of paper, answer the following questions. **Do not copy over the questions onto your new piece of paper. Instead, make sure your answers are complete even without reading the questions.**

For example, you might remember the Guided Commentary we did on “A Long and a Glad Day”, in which the family was returning home for supper after a long day working in the bog. In that commentary, one question was:

“How does the author convey the idea of satisfying fatigue?”

In this case, your answer should **not** look like this:

By saying that they all are tired and that they have appetites that are the envy of kings and they have glad, tired limbs.

This answer does not make any sense unless you read the question first. It is also not a complete sentence, and does not explain what the author means when he says these words. It looks more like a list than an explanation. Instead, when you write a complete answer, it should look more like this:

The author shows us that the workers were “tired and songless”, but that it was a satisfying fatigue. Because they worked so hard, they are hungry; but it is clearly a good sort of hunger, because the author says that their appetites would be “the envy of a king”. A king would only envy something that is good and worth having, because he already has everything he needs. The author also notes that, while they have “sleep-filled heads” after a long day, they have “glad, tired limbs”. By saying that their limbs are “glad”, he shows that they were not upset by being tired, but that the feeling was satisfying, because they became so tired by doing work they enjoyed.

In this version of the answer, you can see that the answer makes sense without re-reading the question. It uses complete thoughts, so that the reader does not have to go back to either the question or the text to complete the thought. This paragraph also uses quotation marks to show where it is borrowing words from the original text. Notice how this paragraph *explains* the parts of the text that show “satisfying fatigue”. It is good to notice them and mention them in your answer, but it is especially important that you explain *how* those words show “satisfying fatigue”, because it might not be as obvious to your reader as it is to you.

Answer each of the following questions as completely as you can. If necessary, divide your answer into separate paragraphs. Each answer should be able to stand alone.

What details in the text tell us where this story takes place? What can we tell about the speaker?

Consider the line “The faces of the rough men working at my side grew ashy white as they guessed the nature of the summons.” Why did their faces grow “ashy white”? Why would this have stood out to the author?

The author uses many poetic devices to describe the people and events of the scene. What are some of these devices, and why do you think she uses them? What effect do they create?