

## Writing Prompts

1. What do you believe is the cause of Amanda's illness? How do you feel that she will be able to overcome her situation? Cite events in chronological order, and discuss the progression of her physical impairment to its present state.
2. Compare and contrast the school environment experienced by Lou and Oz. How is their new school like and unlike their former school? How are they treated by their new classmates? How does Lou adapt to the changes? What advice do you feel that Lou and Oz should be given to help them access what they need academically?
3. Discuss the children's adventure as they traveled to Dickens. Why is it important for Lou to go through so much trouble to get to Dickens? What are the basic lessons learned by the children from their escapade?
4. There are obviously different levels of poverty in the towns in and around Louisa Mae Cardinal. In a well-written paper, discuss the economic situations of at least four people in the story. How do their issues differ from the issues faced by Louisa? Is there a solution to the problem that will satisfy all of the persons concerned?
5. Tragedy strikes Lou in several different forms. In a well-written paper, validate this statement by using specific examples from the novel.
6. Is it possible that the story told by Diamond about the wishing well is in some way connected to rumors about Jack Cardinal's parents? Do you believe that Diamond ever used the well?
7. At one point in the story, the people on the mountain show an enormous amount of support for one of their own. What has happened? Discuss the cause of the need for the support and the implications the actions may have on Lou.
8. What is the significance of the letter written by Jack Cardinal when he was fifteen? What is the relevance of the letter to Lou and Louisa? What questions are answered by reading the letter?
9. In the midst of confusion, Lou's assistance in bringing a child into the world touches the heart of two unlikely people. Who are they? How will the relationship with these people change?
10. Write an ending to the novel that will explain what happens to George Davis after the trial has ended. Be sure to include all of the characters needed to bring closure to the person he has become at the end of the novel.
11. Louisa explains to Lou that "she must learn the land" before she can write about it. At which point in the story do you believe Lou achieves this goal? Cite specific examples from the novel to support your belief.

(Teacher's note: Papers written in response to these prompts can be assessed by using general rubrics such as those on the following pages.)

# Secondary English Writing Rubrics

## Composing Rubric

- Score 4: The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control of the composing domain's features. The piece is generally unified in that all of the parts contribute to the creation of a dominant impression or idea. The sharply focused central idea is fully, but not exhaustively, elaborated with key examples, illustrations, reasons, events, and/or details. In all successful responses, layers of elaboration are present. Surface signals, such as transitions, logically connect their respective statements into the whole of the paper. In all types of writing, a strong organizational plan is apparent. Any minor organizational lapses that occur do not significantly detract from the presentation. The writing provides evidence of unity by exhibiting a consistent point of view (e.g., not switching from "I" to "you"), a lack of digressions, appropriate transitions both within paragraphs and across the entire piece, the presence of careful logic, and a strong lead and closure.
- Score 3: The writer demonstrates reasonable, but not consistent, control of the composing domain's features; the writer may control some features more than others. The clearly focused central idea is purposefully elaborated with key examples, illustrations, reasons, events, and/or details. Occasionally, some thinness or unevenness in elaboration may occur. In all types of writing, an organizational plan is apparent. Any minor organizational lapses that occur do not significantly detract from the piece. Although there may be occasional lapses in coherence or cohesiveness, unity is evidenced by the fact that few, if any, digressions or shifts in point of view occur. Transitions are, on the whole, appropriate. The opening and closing show some skill but not the sophistication of a 4 performance.
- Score 2: The writer demonstrates inconsistent control of several features, indicating significant weakness in the composing domain. At this score point, ideas often compete, or no one idea emerges as central. Even if a single idea dominates, the paper may lack focus because of little or no elaboration. The paper may be a list of general, underdeveloped statements, or it may be the skeleton of a narrative. In the case of persuasive writing, it may consist of a few unelaborated reasons accompanied by inappropriate attempts (begging, pleading, negotiating) to persuade. Typically, the writer extends ideas with a few brief details and moves on, though chunks of irrelevant material may appear as well. Often, no more than a hint of organization is apparent. Even though an opening and closing may be present, the lack of a logically elaborated central idea prevents unity from emerging.
- Score 1: The writer demonstrates little or no control of most of the composing domain's features. The focus on a central idea is lacking, or the piece is so sparse that the presence of a clear focus is insufficient for it to earn a higher score. Typically, the writing jumps from point to point without a unifying central idea. No overall organizational strategy is apparent. The writing seems haphazard, and sentences can be rearranged without substantially changing the meaning. Bare statement is the norm, but even in responses that are several pages long, no purposeful elaboration is present.

## Written Expression Rubric

- Score 4: The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control of the written expression domain's features. The result is a purposefully crafted message that the reader remembers, primarily because its precise information and vocabulary resonate as images in the reader's mind. Highly specific word choice and information also create a purposeful tone in the writing and enhance the writer's voice. If metaphors, similes, personification, or other examples of figurative language are present, they are appropriate to the purpose of the piece. The writer repeats or varies sentence construction for effect and appropriately subordinates ideas and embeds modifiers on a regular basis, resulting in a rhythmic flow throughout the piece.
- Score 3: The writer demonstrates reasonable, but not consistent, control of the written expression domain's features. On the whole, specific word choice and information cause the message to be clear; occasionally, a few examples of vivid or purposeful figurative language may be present. Along with instances of successful control, some general statements or vague words may be present, flattening the tone and voice of the piece somewhat. Overall, the writing is characterized by a smooth rhythm created by the effective use of normal word order and competent variation in sentence length and complexity. An occasional awkward construction or the lack of structural complexity is not distracting.
- Score 2: The writer demonstrates inconsistent control of several features, indicating significant weakness in the written expression domain. Some specificity of word choice might exist, but generally the piece is written in imprecise, bland language. As a result, the writer's voice rarely emerges. The selection of information may be uneven and/or consist of an attempt to tell everything that the writer knows about a topic. A relative lack of sentence variety may make reading monotonous, and occasional awkward constructions may be distracting enough to

make the writer's meaning unclear. While a few brief rhythmic clusters of sentences may occur, an overall sense of rhythmic flow is not present.

Score 1: The writer demonstrates little or no control of most of the written expression domain's features. Both word choice and information are general, vague, and/or repetitive. A lack of sentence variety makes the presentation monotonous. The existence of several extremely awkward constructions reduces the paper's stylistic effect. The writer's lack of control of vocabulary and information prevents both tone and voice from emerging.

### **Usage/Mechanics Rubric**

Score 4: The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control of the domain's features of usage/mechanics. The writing demonstrates a thorough understanding of usage and mechanics. The author demonstrates capitalization, punctuation, usage, and sentence formation and applies the structural principles of spelling. A few errors in usage and mechanics may be present; however, the writer's control of the domain's many features is too strong for these mistakes to detract from the performance.

Score 3: The writer demonstrates reasonable, but not consistent, control of most of the domain's features of usage/mechanics. The writing demonstrates a basic understanding of usage and mechanics. For the most part, the author appropriately applies both the rules of capitalization, punctuation, usage, and sentence formation and the structural principles of spelling expected of high school students. Most of the errors contained in the piece are not elementary ones.

Score 2: The writer demonstrates inconsistent control of several features, indicating significant weakness in the domain of usage/mechanics. Evidence of the author's knowledge of features of this domain appears alongside frequent errors. In terms of both usage and mechanics, the writer inconsistently applies the rules of capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, and sentence formation. Often, the writing exhibits a lack of control of tense consistency, meaningful punctuation, and the principles of spelling, thus making it difficult for the reader to follow the writer's thought. The density of errors that emerges across features outweighs the feature control present in the paper.

Score 1: The writer demonstrates little or no control of most of the domain's features of usage/mechanics. Frequent and severe errors in usage and mechanics distract the reader and make the writing very hard to understand. Even when meaning is not significantly affected, the density and variety of errors overwhelm the performance and keep it from meeting minimum standards of competence.