

## Grades 6-8, Prompt for Informative / Explanatory Writing Common Core Standard W.CCR.2

Great historical events often have deep effects upon the people who live through them. Depending on the person and the situation, those effects can be very different – or not.

The Great Depression of the 1930s, in the United States, was one of these events. Lasting for nearly ten years, the Great Depression closed thousands of banks, put millions of people out of work, and seared itself into the memory of those who lived through it.

The President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, responded by creating new government programs to help Americans, known as the New Deal.

You are going to read three texts about the Great Depression: a memoir called *Digging In* by Robert Hastings, a poem, “Debts” by Karen Hesse, and a short text about the programs of the New Deal of President Roosevelt. As you read and re-read these texts, think about what the texts show you about how the Great Depression seems to have affected the individual people who lived through it.

Finally, using these texts, you will write an essay, explaining your thinking.

For the essay, your Focusing Question is:

**According to these texts, what effect did the Great Depression have on people who lived through it? Be sure to use evidence from the texts to support and develop your thinking.**

Remember, a good informative essay:

- *Has a clear introduction*
- *States a focus/topic clearly, precisely, and thoughtfully*
- *Uses specific evidence from the text(s) to support and develop the topic and explains that evidence*
- *Concludes effectively*
- *Uses precise language*
- *Shows control over conventions*

You will have three class periods to complete this reading/thinking/writing task. The essay will have a single draft, and you may want to take some time to plan your writing before you begin work. When you have finished, be sure to proofread.

**Informative / Explanatory Writing**  
**Common Core Standard W.CCR.2**  
**6-8**

*Teacher Directions*

- The texts provide the information needed to address the prompt, and students should independently read the texts carefully before writing. Encourage students to refer back to the text while writing and to take notes, and to mark up the text as much as is helpful to them.
  
- Students should be given three sessions for the prompt. Allow approximately 45 minutes for each, but the prompt should not be strictly timed. Students should be given as much time as needed to plan, write, and proofread.
  
- The writing must be done without help, but students may have access to personal dictionaries, or any other resources to support spelling and mechanics that they are accustomed to using while writing.
  - Be sure students have paper to take notes or do whatever pre-planning they might choose to do.
  - If students are writing by hand, provide lined paper from your classroom for writing. If they are using a word processor, make sure they save their work so it can be accessed the next day.
  
- This will be first draft writing, but encourage students to proofread and correct any errors they find.

## Digging In

By Robert J. Hastings

The closing of Old West Side Mine meant the end of anything resembling a steady job for the next eight years. From 1930 on, it was a day's work here and a day's work there, a coal order from the welfare office, a few days on WPA, a garden in the back yard, and a few chickens and eggs.

We weathered the storm because of Dad's willingness to take any job and Mom's ability to stretch every available dollar. It was not so much a matter of finding a job as of filling in with odd jobs wherever and whenever you could, and most of the "jobs" were those you made for yourself.

My diary shows that Dad sold iron cords door to door, "worked a day in the hay," bought a horse to break gardens, rented an extra lot for a garden on the shares, picked peaches, raised sweet potato slips, traded an occasional dozen of eggs at the grocery, hung wallpaper, "painted Don Albright's house for \$5," picked up a day or two's work at the strip mines, guarded the fence at the county fairgrounds, cut hair for boys in the neighborhood, sold coal orders, and when he had to and could, worked intermittently on WPA.

With no dependable income, we cut back on everything possible. We stopped the evening paper, turned off the city water and cleaned out our well, sold our four-door Model T touring car with the snap-on side curtains and isinglass, stopped ice and milk delivery, and disconnected our gas range for all but the three hot summer months. There was no telephone to disconnect, as we didn't have one to start with!

We did keep up regular payments on two Metropolitan Life Insurance policies. Page after page of old receipt books show entries of 10 cents per week on one policy and 69 cents a month on another. As long as we could, we made house payments to the Marion Building and Loan, but a day came when we had to let those go, too.

Fortunately, we were able to save our house from foreclosure. When so many borrowers defaulted, the Marion Building and Loan went bankrupt. Creditors were allowed to pay just about any amount to satisfy the receivers. But that was the catch – who had "just about any amount" to pay? A house behind ours sold for \$25. Many good houses in Marion sold for \$5 to \$100 and were torn down and moved to nearby towns. We settled with the loan company for \$125, or ten cents on the dollar for our \$1250 mortgage. I'll never forget the day Dad cleared it all up, making two or three trips to town to bring papers home for Mom to sign. He was able to borrow the \$125 from his aunt, Dialtha James, who as the widow of a Spanish-American war veteran had a small pension.

Looking back, I find it amazing what we did without. A partial list would include toothpaste (we used soda), toilet paper (we used the catalog), newspaper or magazine subscriptions, soft drinks, potato chips and snacks, bakery goods except bread and an occasional dozen of doughnuts, paper clips, rubber bands and restaurant meals. We had no water bill, sewer bill, telephone bill, no car expenses – gasoline, tires, batteries, licenses, insurance, repairs – no laundry service, no dry cleaning (we pressed woolens up with a hot iron and wet cloth), no bank service charge (no bank account), no sales or income tax. We sent no greeting cards except maybe half a dozen at Christmas...

Typical of the simple economies Mom practiced was keeping the electric bill to \$1 a month and the gas bill to \$1 a month in June, July, and August....Since our only appliance was an electric iron, the chief use of electricity was for lighting. With only a single bulb suspended by a cord from the ceiling of each room, there weren't many lights to burn...On winter evenings, Mom would turn on the kitchen light while she cooked supper. If I had lessons I brought them to the kitchen table or sprawled on the floor between the kitchen and dining room.

After supper we "turned off the light in the kitchen" and moved to the dining-sitting room, where another light was switched on. If we wanted to read on winter afternoons, we sat as near a window as possible, with the curtains pinned back, to save the lights until it was nearly dark...

Dad had some old-fashioned shoe lasts, and he would buy stick-'em-on soles at the dime store to patch our shoes in winter. With simple barber tools he cut my hair and that of other kids in the neighborhood, for maybe ten cents a head. In cold, wet weather, when he worked outdoors on WPA, he often cut strips of cardboard to stuff in the soles of his shoes and keep his feet warm.

We took care of what we had. Every cotton cloth was used over as a dish cloth, wash cloth, dust cloth, shoe-shining cloth, window-washing cloth, to scrub and wax floors, make bandages, make quilt pieces, make kite tails, or to tie boxes and papers together. The cotton bags from flour, salt, and cracked chicken feed were washed, bleached, and cut into dish cloths and towels. Some neighbors made curtains or even dresses from feed sacks. Every paper bag was saved for lunches or cut and used for wrapping paper. String was wound into balls for later use.

Each August Mom would find someone who was a year ahead of me in school, and buy his used books. One exception was a spelling book used in all eight grades. Since it was to be used for eight years, we decided it would be a wise investment to buy a new one when I started first grade. In the seventh grade, I dropped that speller in the snow. I thought Mom was unfair when she sent me all the way back to school, retracing my steps to look for the book...

Before the Depression, we hung a four-cornered black-and-white cardboard sign in the front window each morning. The figures in the corners told the iceman how many pounds to bring – 25, 50, 75, or 100. But ice was one of the casualties of the Depression, although we managed a small piece two or three times a week for iced tea. About eleven in the morning I would pull a little wagon, filled with a gunny sack and assorted old quilts and tarpaulins, down to the neighborhood ice house to buy a “nickel’s worth of ice,” which was half of a 25-pound chunk. By wrapping it carefully and storing it in a cool, damp spot under the house, we could stretch that piece of ice for two or three days. In rainy, cool weather, maybe four days! It was our glistening prize, and any left over from tea was emptied back into a pitcher of ice water, or used for lemonade that afternoon. So as not to waste any, we chipped only what was needed, with much of the same care used by a diamond cutter.

Whatever was free was our recreation. This may have included playing records on our wind-up victrola or listening to the radio. You might watch a parachute jump at the airport or a free ball game at the city park, with perhaps a free band concert afterwards...the band concerts survived only the first two years of the Depression...

We liked music, and one of my earliest memories is of Dad singing to me:

Two arms that hold me tight,  
Two lips that kiss goodnight;  
To me he’ll always be,  
That little boy of mine.

No one can ever know,  
Just what his coming has meant:  
He’s something heaven has sent,  
That little boy of mine.

At one point in the Depression, the cupboard was literally bare of money. We weren’t hungry, but we were penniless. Then Dad went back in the pantry and came out with a jar in which he had saved a few nickels and dimes for such an emergency.

Later, Mom said to me, “I’ve learned that whatever happens, your Daddy always has a little dab of money put back somewhere...”

Excerpted from “Digging In”, 1986. Found in *Dark Days*, Perfection Learning, 2006  
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## Debts

By Karen Hesse

Daddy is thinking  
of taking a loan from Mr. Roosevelt and his men,  
to get some new wheat planted  
where the winter crop has spindled out and died.  
Mr. Roosevelt promises  
Daddy won't have to pay a dime  
till the crop comes in.

Daddy says,  
"I can turn the fields over,  
start again.  
It's sure to rain soon.  
Wheat's sure to grow."

Ma says, "What if it doesn't?"

Daddy takes off his hat,  
roughs up his hair,  
puts the hat back on.  
"Course it'll rain," he says.

Ma says, "Bay,  
it hasn't rained enough to grow wheat in  
three years."

Daddy looks like a fight brewing.

He takes that red face of his out to the barn,  
To keep from feuding with my pregnant ma.

I ask Ma

how, after all this time,

Daddy still believes in rain.

“Well, it rains enough,” Ma says,

“now and again,

to keep a person hoping.

But even if it didn’t

your daddy would have to believe.

It’s coming on spring,

and he’s a farmer.”

March 1934

## The New Deal

In 1932 [Franklin Delano Roosevelt](#) was elected overwhelmingly on a campaign promising a New Deal for the American people. Roosevelt worked quickly upon his election to deliver the New Deal, an unprecedented number of reforms addressing the catastrophic effects of the Great Depression. Unlike his predecessor, [Herbert Hoover](#), who felt that the public should support the government and not the other way around, Roosevelt felt it was the federal government's duty to help the American people weather these bad times.

Together with his "brain trust," a group of university scholars and liberal theorists, Roosevelt sought the best course of action for the struggling nation. A desperate Congress gave him carte blanche and rubber-stamped his proposals in order to expedite the reforms. During the first 100 days of his presidency, a never-ending stream of bills was passed, to relieve poverty, reduce unemployment, and speed economic recovery.

His first act as president was to declare a four-day bank holiday, during which time Congress drafted the Emergency Banking Bill of 1933, which stabilized the banking system and restored the public's faith in the banking industry by putting the federal government behind it. Three months later, he signed the Glass-Steagall Act which created the FDIC, federally insuring deposits

The [Civil Conservation Corps](#) was one of the New Deal's most successful programs. It addressed the pressing problem of unemployment by sending 3 million single men from age 17 to 23 to the nation's forests to work. Living in camps in the forests, the men dug ditches, built reservoirs and planted trees. The men, all volunteers, were paid \$30 a month, with two thirds being sent home. The [Works Progress Administration](#), Roosevelt's major work relief program, would employ more than 8.5 million people to build bridges, roads, public buildings, parks and airports.

The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) and the National Recovery Administration (NRA) were designed to address unemployment by regulating the number of hours worked per week and banning child labor. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), created in 1933, gave \$3 billion to states for work relief programs. The Agricultural Adjustment Act subsidized farmers for reducing crops and provided loans for farmers facing bankruptcy. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) helped people save their homes from foreclosure.



While they did not end the Depression, the New Deal's experimental programs helped the American people immeasurably by taking care of their basic needs and giving them the dignity of work and hope.

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**File Name: I6P Effects of The Great Depression**

**Informative / Explanatory**

**Grade 6**

**On-Demand Writing, Uniform Prompt**

### **Effects of The Great Depression**

The Great Depression affected the people that lived through it in many ways. The things that I am going to explain are some of the things that affected the people who lived through the Great Depression. Having barely any money was one of the things that affected them. Also having less supplies affected them too. Having to take care of kids too also might have affected the people during the Great Depression.

First, I am going to talk about how having almost no money affected the people. It affected them because they were getting their money by working. Then their jobs were shutting down so their amount of money was shrinking and shrinking. They would do neighborhood favors and jobs but the amount of money they would get was five dollars. They also had to pay a bill for electricity every month. They had to pay for gas if you had a car and their house. That is why having almost no money affected them a lot.

Another reason the Great Depression affected the people was they were having less of the supplies they had. Like some of the people stopped delivery

**Focus / topic of the piece is clearly stated**

**Introduces the topic clearly: The writer gives no context, but does lay out the ideas she will discuss in the essay to follow**

**Organizes ideas, concepts, and information by category, within an overall cause-effect structure. Here, writer discusses the effect of no money. Develops the topic with relevant, accurate facts and concrete details using domain-specific vocabulary to explain the effects of a lack of money during the Great Depression.**

**Uses appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts**

for several things such as milk and ice. They were also using less electricity and selling their cars. Those are some of supplies they had a shortage or had to not use as much.

**Develops the topic with relevant, facts and concrete details about the effect of the Great Depression on**

Also if they had kids they would need to do extra work and be able to care for them. They also had to pay more money if they had kids because they have to feed them too. They also had to take care of them. The parents have to care for them. If they are sick they can not just leave them at home they have to take care of them. They also might worry about them. If you had kids during the Great Depression not only would you worry about your kids and family.

**Analyzes evidence**

That is why if you had kids during the Great Depression it might be more difficult.

**Establishes and maintains a reasonably formal style**

Now you can see how living through the Great Depression was very difficult and affected many people who lived through it. It affected people in many ways like having no money or having a very little amount of it. Also if you had kids it might have been a little more difficult. They also had to live with less supplies. That is why I think the Great Depression affected the people who lived through it.

**Provides a concluding section that restates and follows from the explanation presented**

In this on-demand assignment, students were asked to explain the effects of the Great Depression on people who lived through it. This writer gives no background about the Great Depression in the introduction (a weakness), but does state her topic / focus that the Great Depression affected people who lived through it in many ways and lays out what she will discuss in the writing to follow.

The writer organizes the evidence clearly by category (various effects of the Great Depression) to support the topic, and uses basic but appropriate transitions to clarify relationships between ideas and concepts. Within each chunk of text, the writer uses some domain-specific vocabulary (“*neighborhood favors and jobs*”, “*stopped delivery for...milk and ice*”) to name and explain / analyze the evidence about the effects, which she has taken from the texts she has read. This makes the writer’s thinking and understanding easy to follow.

While the language is sometimes basic and informal (“*I am going to tell you*”), the bulk of the essay has an appropriately formal style for this grade level. The conclusion, while a bit repetitious, follows from the information presented.

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**Informative / Explanatory**

**Grade 6**

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The Great Depression affected the people that lived through it in many ways. The things that I am going to explain are some of the things that affected the people who lived through the Great Depression. Having barely any money was one of the things that affected them. Also having less supplies affected them too. Having to take care of kids too also might have affected the people during the Great Depression.

First, I am going to talk about how having almost no money affected the people. It affected them because they were getting their money by working. Then their jobs were shutting down so their amount of money was shrinking and shrinking. They would do neighborhood favors and jobs but the amount of money they would get was five dollars. They also had to pay a bill for electricity every month. They had to pay for gas if you had a car and their house. That is why having almost no money affected them a lot.

Another reason the Great Depression affected the people was they were having less of the supplies they had. Like some of the people stopped delivery for several things such as milk and ice. They were also using less electricity and

selling their cars. Those are some of supplies they had a shortage or had to not use as much.

Also if they had kids they would need to do extra work and be able to care for them. They also had to pay more money if they had kids because they have to feed them too. They also had to take care of them. The parents have to care for them. If they are sick they can not just leave them at home they have to take care of them. They also might worry about them. If you had kids during the Great Depression not only would you worry about your kids and family. That is why if you had kids during the Great Depression it might be more difficult.

Now you can see how living through the Great Depression was very difficult and affected many people who lived through it. It affected people in many ways like having no money or having a very little amount of it. Also if you had kids it might have been a little more difficult. They also had to live with less supplies. That is why I think the Great Depression affected the people who lived through it.

**File Name: I6R Lyddie's Choices**

**Informative/Explanatory**

**Grade 6**

**Range of Writing**

### **Lyddie's Choices**

Lyddie Worthen is the main character in Katherine Patterson's *Lyddie*. Lyddie is a young girl living on a Vermont farm in the 1840's. This is the time of the Industrial Revolution. Lyddie's father has abandoned the family and Lyddie's mother leaves her and her brother behind thinking that the world is coming to an end. The only thing Lyddie has left is her farm which she desperately wants to hold on to. In order to keep her farm Lyddie has to work off the debts on her farm, but the job she has isn't paying enough, so she leaves to begin a new life as a factory girl at the newly developed textile mills in Lowell Massachusetts. Because of working in the Lowell mills Lyddie gets a broader sense of herself. She is able to make some choices about who she wants to be in her life.

Lyddie is working at a place called Cutlers Tavern for very low wages. If she keeps working like this she will never be able to pay off her debts, so she decides to go to Lowell and work in the mills so that she can make more money.

She is told by a customer who works in the mills "you'd do well in the mill you know. You'd clear at least two dollars a week. And' she paused 'you'd be independent.'" (p. 25)

Lyddie then makes the choice to go to the mill. She realizes that at the mill she will be able to pay off the farm debts faster. This is a hard choice for Lyddie, if she stays at the tavern she knows that she will continue to make money and eventually pay off the debt. If she goes to the mill she has a chance of not getting the job at all but if she does get the job she will be able to pay off the farm debts much faster. This is when Lyddie

**Introduces the topic clearly, including naming the title and author of the novel; provides context of for the story, including naming identifying characters and main central ideas of the novel**

**States focus / topic of the piece**

**Develops the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, and quotations, or other information and examples from the text. The writer explains the meaning of the quotation he has chosen, with details about context (what was going on here). He also explains details that clarify the relationship among the ideas / topic he is working with in the piece.**

begins to take her life into her own hands and makes the choice to take a chance at the mill.

When Lyddie begins working at the mill, she starts making much more and with that money she is able to buy a book. Lyddie does not have a good education and people at the mills by her roommate Betsy she becomes passionate about reading so she goes to buy a book.

“I-I come to purchase at book...” “what book do you have in mind...” “uh-uh *Oliver Twist* if you please sir” (p.83-84) she then pays with two silver dollars.

By making the choice to purchase that book she opens the doors to education and becomes a smarter person who loves to learn. She also changes from a thrifty penny pincher to someone who realizes that money isn't always the most important thing in life.

Because of Lyddie's love for reading she makes the choice to leave the farm that she has just returned to, and leave Luke, the man who loves her to go to Oberlin College in Ohio.

“I'm off” she said ‘to Ohio, there's a college there that will that will take a women just like a man’’. (p.181)

By making the choice to go to college Lyddie is showing that she won't give up on her education and won't give up on an adventurous life. Even though things haven't been great for her she is still ready to start another chapter in her life.

What does the author want us to understand about the power of the Industrial Revolution? I think that in Lyddie it is showing that the Industrial Revolution gave people many opportunities in their lives. The Industrial Revolution also had lots of hard moments where people would get sick, break a bone, or even die. The Industrial Revolution seemed to rule a lot of people's lives and ruin their families. Lyddie took advantage of

**Develops the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples: the writer explains the meaning of the quotation he has chosen.**

**Establishes and maintains a reasonably formal style**

**Uses appropriate, varied transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts**

**Uses precise word choice, and domain-specific vocabulary about the Industrial Revolution**

**Provides a concluding section that follows from the explanation presented by restating the main point and reflecting on the topic**



the Industrial Revolution well and through the choices she made was able to pull past just being a factory girl and take different paths in life.

In this assignment, students were asked to reflect on the question “How did the work in the Lowell mills change Lyddie’s life?” after they had read the book *Lyddie* by Katherine Paterson. Class discussion helped students to arrive at the focus statement that this writer uses. He provides enough context about the book in the introduction that even people who have not read the text can follow the writer’s thinking in the piece that follows.

The writer clearly organizes his evidence using three quotations from the text. In each case, he gives some context for the quotation he uses and follows the quote with a well-elaborated explanation that makes the relationship between the quote (evidence) and the topic / focus clear. He uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts. Throughout the piece, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to make his thinking clear.

The writer uses a formal, academic tone as he explains his thinking. The conclusion follows from the main point and, although not required by the Standards, provides some thoughtful reflection on the topic.

**File Name: I6R Lyddie's Choices**

**Informative/Explanatory**

**Grade 6**

**Range of Writing**

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Lyddie is working at a place called Cutlers Tavern for very low wages. If she keeps working like this she will never be able to pay off her debts, so she decides to go to Lowell and work in the mills so that she can make more money.

She is told by a customer who works in the mills "you'd do well in the mill you know. You'd clear at least two dollars a week. And' she paused 'you'd be independent.'" (p. 25)

Lyddie then makes the choice to go to the mill. She realizes that at the mill she will be able to pay off the farm debts faster. This is a hard choice for Lyddie, if she stays at the tavern she knows that she will continue to make money and eventually pay off the debt. If she goes to the mill she has a chance of not getting the job at all but if she does get the job she will be able to pay off the farm debts much faster. This is when Lyddie begins to take her life into her own hand and makes the choice to take a chance at the mill.

When Lyddie begins working at the mill, she starts making much more and with that money she is able to buy a book. Lyddie does not have a good education and people

at the mills by her roommate Betsy she becomes passionate about reading so she goes to buy a book.

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“uh-uh *Oliver Twist* if you please sir” (p.83-84) she then pays with two silver dollars.

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**File Name: I6R Center of Life**

**Informative/Explanatory**

**Grade 6**

**Range of Writing**

### **Center of Life**

The saguaro cactus is a huge cactus that lives in deserts. It can live up to 150 years old! Even though it grows very very slowly, it grows up to be one of the tallest plants in the desert! The saguaro cactus is very adapted to desert life and this makes it a good home and food for many animals.

The saguaro cactus is adapted to survive in the deserts in many different ways. Because of the heat in the desert, saguaro cacti have waxy skin to prevent moisture loss. Many more adaptations help the saguaro keep water, though. It holds water in its stem, that's pleated like an accordion so that it can expand and hold more water. The roots also help it get more water. They spread out very far, almost as wide as the cactus is tall so that helps. The roots are also very close the surface, as little as 3 inches below ground. Because of this, if it rains, the cactus can get lots of water before the ground sucks too much up.

The cactus is also a home and food for lots of animals that live in the desert. Snakes can find a home, and many birds can perch on the big cactus. Many small flying creatures eat the nectar from the flowers. The cactus also bears fruit. After a while in the sun, the fruit splits in half and birds and insects eat the oozing sweet stuff from inside the fruit. Other fruit falls to the ground, where lots of animals eat them. Other animals eat the seeds. But after a long time, the cactus dies and falls down. Still, it is a place for small ground dwelling animals. Scorpions can take shelter from the sun. Jackrabbits can make a home there.

The saguaro cactus is really and amazing plant. It's also a good place for animals to live and find food. If one day I could go to see one, I totally would. If I was stuck in a desert, I think I would go to the nearest saguaro cactus to wait for help.

**Introduces the topic:**  
The writer provides context in the form of background information on the saguaro cactus and then states the main point / focus

**Focus / topic of the piece is clearly stated**

**Organizes ideas, concepts, and information: the writer describes the adaptation of the cactus to desert life using various categories**

**Uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary within evidence to develop and support topic of saguaro adaptation**

**Uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts**  
**Uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to develop and support topic.**

**Provides a concluding section that follows from the information presented by restating the main point and reflecting on the topic**

In this assignment from a science unit, students were asked to explain how the saguaro, a desert plant, has adapted to desert life and provides a home and food for desert creatures. The writer gives some background about the saguaro in general in the introduction and then states his main point (the saguaro is well-adapted to desert life and provides a home and food for desert creatures).

The writer organizes information and ideas clearly by category to support the main point. Within each chunk, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to convey information about the saguaro. He uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts. This makes the writer's thinking and understanding easy to follow.

While the language is sometimes a bit informal ("*If one day I could go to see one, I totally would*"), the bulk of the essay has a formal style. The conclusion follows from main point and, although not required by the Standards, provides some reflection on the topic.

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### **Center of Life**

The saguaro cactus is a huge cactus that lives in deserts. It can live up to 150 years old! Even though it grows very very slowly, it grows up to be one of the tallest plants in the desert! The saguaro cactus is very adapted to desert life and this makes it a good home and food for many animals.

The saguaro cactus is adapted to survive in the deserts in many different ways. Because of the heat in the desert, saguaro cacti have waxy skin to prevent moisture loss. Many more adaptations help the saguaro keep water, though. It holds water in its stem, that's pleated like an accordion so that it can expand and hold more water. The roots also help it get more water. They spread out very far, almost as wide as the cactus is tall so that helps. The roots are also very close the surface, as little as 3 inches below ground. Because of this, if it rains, the cactus can get lots of water before the ground sucks too much up.

The cactus is also a home and food for lots of animals that live in the desert. Snakes can find a home, and many birds can perch on the big cactus. Many small flying creatures eat the nectar from the flowers. The cactus also bears fruit. After a while in the sun, the fruit splits in half and birds and insects eat the oozing sweet stuff from inside the fruit. Other fruit falls to the ground, where lots of animals eat them. Other animals eat the seeds. But after a long time, the cactus dies and falls down. Still, it is a place for small ground dwelling animals. Scorpions can take shelter from the sun. Jackrabbits can make a home there.

The saguaro cactus is really and amazing plant. It's also a good place for animals to live and find food. If one day I could go to see one, I totally would. If I was stuck in a desert, I think I would go to the nearest saguaro cactus to wait for help.