

**Part I: Practice ELA Test- Fiction Passage**

Excerpt From *The Great Whale of Kansas*  
by Richard W. Jennings *Breaking Ground*

My story begins where a sadder story might end—with the digging of a hole.

It was my eleventh birthday, and, as is the case with all my birthday celebrations, it was also Groundhog Day, an occasion that honors a creature with whom I have more than a holiday in common. The groundhog, or woodchuck, is a solitary animal who spends much of his time either digging a hole or basking in the sunshine by the hole he has dug.

That's me.

I believe there is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing as simply digging a hole. A hole is an achievement. A great hole is a great achievement.

I was going to dig a great hole.

My parents had given me a pond-building kit for my birthday. They ordered it from a catalog filled with color photographs of water gardens on great European estates.

"It's a complete pond in a single, compact box," they explained, using the exact words printed in the catalog. "It has everything you need." And except for the tools, rocks, plants, fish, accessories, electrical power to the site, and the hole itself, it did. What I found in the box was a small underwater pump, a coil of plastic tubing, and a sheet of thick, black plastic as big as my patio. There was also an instructional videotape in two languages.

Never have I enjoyed a movie so much.

I watched that video over and over again, waiting for the weather to warm up enough to break ground. Every night before going to sleep, I'd put it on and listen to the soothing voice of the narrator describe the "calm, tranquillity, and serenity of a private water garden." In English, and again in French, he spoke of "dreaming dreams" and "soothing the soul." Step by fascinating step, he explained how to create "an escape, a hidden world all your own."

I couldn't wait to get started.

Hour after hour, I assembled and disassembled the pump. I spread the liner across the living room carpet and walked around the edges, imagining that the plastic was water. Using colored pencils and graph paper from school, I drew page after page of miniature ponds with microscopic waterfalls.

When winter at last retreated, I took spray paint to the brittle brown grass of my 30 backyard, a flat, vacant half-acre that sweeps like a savanna to the scrublike grove of spiked, gnarled hedgeapple trees just this side of Brewster Higley Memorial Park. Like a vandal or graffiti artist, I drew overlapping kidney shapes and ovals in intense neon colors until I'd outlined my pond exactly the way I wanted it to be.

From a nearby construction site, I gathered stones for the pond's edge, scores of limestone blocks, their uniformity demonstrating the maximum weight an eager boy can carry.

Finally, one morning it was time to dig.

I approached the task like a starving man at a banquet. This was the day I had trained for! Armed with a brand-new forged-steel shovel—a birthday gift from my aunt Nan—I ripped into the earth with tireless fury, flinging dirt right and left.

As the sun rose in the sky, perspiration fell from my face. The hole grew like a living thing.

By noon, I had created a depression in the earth that looked like the point of impact of a meteorite. The bowl-shaped hole was roughly four feet in diameter, with gently sloping sides nearly two feet deep.

At this rate, I figured, I'll be basking in tranquillity in no time at all.

But don't count your water gardens until the hole is dug. Few things happen the way you think they will.

A sudden thunderstorm interrupted my work. Boiling across the flat Kansas prairie, it sneaked up on me, announcing its arrival with a deafening crash.

Kaboom!

I knew better than to stay outside with a metal object in my hand when there was lightning in the air. I quickly abandoned the job site.

From the safety of my house, I watched the darkened skies release their pent-up power directly over my backyard. My heart quickened as sheets of rain overflowed the hole, turning my modest work in progress into a scale model of what I hoped it would become—the loveliest body of water in all of Melville.

Melville, Kansas.

If America were a dart board and your dart landed on Melville, you'd be the winner, hands down. That's because Melville is smack dab in the middle of the United States, exactly halfway between the great Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, a place with no coastline, no beach, and no blue ocean views. It wasn't always like this.

In prehistoric times, the spot where Melville sits was submerged beneath a vast inland sea. But over the course of a couple of hundred million years or so, things have a way of changing. Today, luckless Melville is as dry as a bone—the most landlocked city in America.

Clearly, it's a place that could use a few improvements.

The largest body of water in modern Melville is a man-made pond in Higley Park, the state-owned recreation area that borders my backyard. Rectangular in shape, and held within its banks by enormous, quarried limestone rocks, Higley Pond was dug by bulldozers more than fifty years ago as part of a Kansas flood-control plan.

My pond, as I imagined it, although not as big as Higley Pond, would be far more attractive than that aging, government-designed lagoon.

The spring rains that had diverted me from my mission eventually ended, and the sun returned. With my nose pressed against the breakfast room windows, I found myself gazing not at the sparkling natural beauty of an elegant water garden, but at a waterlogged trap of sticky mud.

Reality.

I hate how it keeps getting in the way of my dreams.

1. Read these sentences from lines 13 and 14: “It has everything you need.” And except for the tools, rocks, plants, fish, accessories, electrical power to the site, and the hole itself, it did. Why does the author most likely include this description of the pond-building kit?
  - A to maintain a humorous tone
  - B to introduce the main conflict
  - C to express the narrator’s disappointment
  - D to demonstrate the parents’ support of their son
  
2. Read line 43: At this rate, I figured, I’ll be basking in tranquillity in no time at all. What meaning does the phrase “basking in tranquillity” convey to the reader?
  - A The narrator expects positive recognition around town for his efforts.
  - B The narrator believes the vision of peaceful relaxation shown in the video.
  - C The narrator is unaccustomed to such difficult work and will soon need a rest.
  - D The narrator is comparing himself to a groundhog that is sitting in the sunshine.
  
3. Which lines best reveal an overall theme of the story?
  - A lines 24-27
  - B lines 36-38
  - C lines 44-45
  - D lines 60-62
  
4. In lines 60 through 62, how does the narrator’s description of the location and history off Melville, Kansas, contribute to the plot?
  - A It demonstrates that the new pond is better than other ponds.
  - B It reveals the foolishness of the narrator’s attempt to create a new pond.
  - C It emphasizes the importance of the new pond to the narrator.
  - D It explains the town’s need for a new pond.
  
5. How does the narrator’s reaction to his pond first filling with water differ from his outlook at the end of the story?
  - A He is excited at first but then becomes disappointed.
  - B He is worried at first but then feels satisfied.
  - C He is scared at first and later becomes angry.
  - D He is happy at first and later feels proud.

## Part II: Close Reading of Informational Texts

Directions: Read the following passages. As you read, code and annotate the text using the symbols listed below. *The beginning of the first article has a model example of coding and annotating for you to follow.*

To code and annotate:

- As you read, look for sentences that you agree with, disagree with, can connect with, or don't understand
- Underline that sentence and label it with the appropriate code in the code column.  
*Example: If I see a sentence that I can connect to, I will underline it and put an infinity symbol next to that sentence*
- In the annotation column, use the sentence starters to explain why you agree with it, disagree with it, can connect to it, or are confused by it.

Coding Symbols- use the following symbols to code your text as you read. For each symbol you use to code the text, use the sentence starters to explain your thinking	
Code	When to use it
+	When you agree with the text
-	When you disagree with the text
∞	When you can connect with the text
?	When the text is confusing

Code	Article 1- “In defense of participation trophies: Why they really do teach the right values” by: Lisa Heffernan	Annotate
-	Lots of parents hate participation trophies, and Pittsburgh Steeler James Harrison is no exception. He recently took to Instagram to air his dislike, arguing that his sons, ages 6 and 8, need to learn that everything in life should be earned and that <u>effort alone is not a cause for recognition.</u>	<b>I disagree with this because effort can be hard work and that deserves to be recognized.</b>
?	<p>These shiny bits of plastic have been blamed for creating an <u>entitled generation</u> who learned to expect admiration and praise for the unexceptional on the playing field and later in life. There has been little or no research to prove the benefits or harm of participation trophies in sports. Yet, they have come to symbolize our fear that we are too easy on our kids and are failing to teach them the harsher realities of life.</p> <p>When my kids were young and received trophies, I was at best ambivalent, and felt sharing an end-of-season pizza with their team was an adequate reward for practicing, playing in games and learning to be a teammate.</p> <p>But as my sons grew older, the values these trophies might convey</p>	<b>What does entitled generation mean?</b>

to young children became clearer.

As parents we would like to assume that when families and kids sign up for a team they honor that commitment and show up. We hope that we are teaching our youngest kids to love athletic endeavors of any sort, as we know this benefits mind and body. We would like to believe that most coaches and parents value effort and the process of learning a sport, with its rules, skills and protocols, not simply the game's outcome.

And we would be wrong.

Kids join teams but they don't always attend practices or show up for games. Allison Slater Tate, mother of four and editor of Club Mid at Scary Mommy, feels participation trophies teach a worthwhile lesson: "There is something to teaching kids that it is worth keeping a commitment, that we value this. Winning and losing is not a lesson that kids need to search out to find. It's everywhere. But they also need to learn how important it is that everyone shows up."

Participation trophies remind young kids that they are part of something, and may help build enthusiasm to return for another season, says Tom Farrey, executive director of The Sports and Society Program at the Aspen Institute and author of "Game On: The All-American Race to Make Champions of Our Children."

"From ages 0 to 12, the goal is to help kids to fall in love with sports, to want to come back the next year, to want to go into the backyard and improve their technique," Farrey said. He cautions against focusing on winning and losing in the pre-tween years. "There is a time and a place to sort the weak from the strong, but it is not before they grow into their bodies and their minds and their interests."

Another reason to defend trophies for everyone is that, at a time when parents complain of the escalating competition in youth sports, they remind kids that we value their effort, regardless of ability or results. Participation trophies tell them that what matters is showing up for practice, learning the rules and rituals of the game and working hard.

Finally, we offer these rewards to remind our youngest kids that being part of a team, and all that entails, is something we value. Being there for your teammates and those in your life, when it suits you or when Saturday morning cartoons look like a lot more fun, is a lifelong lesson that cannot be taught too young.

"The idea of giving trophies only to the winners doesn't emphasize enough of the other values that are important," says Kenneth Barish, Clinical Associate Professor of Psychology at Weill Medical College, Cornell University and author of "Pride and Joy: A Guide

to Understanding Your Child's Emotions and Solving Family Problems." "We want kids to participate in sports, to learn to improve their skills, to help others, to work hard and make a contribution to the team."

But what about the kid who doesn't work hard? The child who knows he's getting a trophy no matter what, so he does not need to apply effort? "There will always be kids who don't work hard. There will always be kids who did not work hard on any winning team too," Barish explains. "And I rarely encounter a kid who didn't work hard because they think they are getting a trophy anyway. When I do encounter this attitude, it is a symptom of a deeper problem that kid is having with putting forth effort."

When my son was around 8, at the end of one of his final seasons with participation trophies he scoffed at the fact that such an award was still on offer. He told me that everyone got a trophy so it did not matter. I realized that such recognition was probably ending at just the right moment for him. Hilary Levey Friedman, a sociologist and author of "Playing to Win: Raising Children in a Competitive Culture," thinks these trophies hold sway over only the youngest kids: "Elementary school aged kids are the ones who see a gold [participation] trophy as something quite magical."

In her research among kids who were involved in highly competitive activities, Friedman found that "as kids get older [participation trophies] lose their meaning... But that first participation trophy, it does mean something, especially among the younger kids. The children see them more as symbols and remembrances of an experience."

Friedman points out that the context in which participation trophies are given conveys their meaning. Offering a trophy to a young child can be an empty gesture unless coaches and parents tell children *why* they are being awarded.

I never had to teach my son that he would need to win competitions in order to be rewarded. Life, many athletic defeats, and other setbacks taught him that lesson. Despite the fact that he would play on many teams and win other awards, he never discarded those early participation trophies. He's off to college now but they still sit on his shelf, as a fond memory of a team that showed up, played hard and — if I recall right — lost every game.

Code	Article 2- “James Harrison is right, you shouldn't get a prize for showing up” by: Nancy Armour	Annotate
	<p>You can work your hardest, try your best, expend every ounce of energy you have and sometimes things just don't work out the way you hoped or imagined. That's just the way things go.</p> <p>Yet somewhere along the way, someone had the misguided notion that kids should live in a la-la land where everything is perfect, there are no hardships or heartbreaks, and you get a shiny trophy or a pretty blue ribbon just for being you.</p> <p>There's time enough to get acquainted with reality, the thinking goes. In the meantime, children should be praised and encouraged, reminded at every turn how wonderful they are.</p> <p>No wonder study after study has shown that millennials, the first of the trophy generations, are stressed out and depressed. They were sold a bill of goods when they were kids, and discovering that the harsh realities of life apply to them, too, had to have been like a punch to the gut.</p> <p>Pittsburgh Steelers linebacker James Harrison may be the last person you want to take life lessons from, given his history of violence on and off the field. But his announcement Sunday that he was giving back his 8- and 6-year-old son's "participation" trophies because they hadn't earned them was dead on, and that message shouldn't be discounted simply because he was the one delivering it.</p> <p>"While I am very proud of my boys for everything they do and will encourage them till the day I die, these trophies will be given back until they EARN a real trophy," Harrison said in a post on Instagram. "I'm sorry I'm not sorry for believing that everything in life should be earned and I'm not about to raise two boys to be men by making them believe that they are entitled to something just because they tried their best."</p> <p>Amen.</p> <p>Everybody-gets-a-trophy proponents say children should be rewarded for their efforts, that the prizes give kids incentive to always try their best and persevere. But isn't that what the orange slices and cookies are for? By handing out trophies and medals at every turn, it actually sends the opposite message, essentially telling kids it's enough just to show up.</p> <p>Why should a kid strive to improve or put in the extra effort when he or she is treated no differently than the kid who sits in the outfield picking dandelions? Or, as NFL MVP Kurt Warner said on Twitter on Monday, "They don't let kids pass classes for just</p>	

<p>showing up!"</p> <p>"The whole idea is to protect that kid and, ultimately, it's a huge disservice. What kids need is skill-building. Help them do what they're doing and do it better," said Ashley Merryman, co-author of <i>Top Dog: The Science of Winning and Losing</i>.</p> <p>"The benefit of competition isn't actually winning. The benefit is improving," Merryman added. "When you're constantly giving a kid a trophy for everything they're doing, you're saying, 'I don't care about improvement. I don't care that you're learning from your mistakes. All we expect is that you're always a winner.' "</p> <p>If we're honest with ourselves, the trophies, ribbons and medals we hand out so willingly are more about us than the children getting them. It's affirmation that our kids are as wonderful as we think they are. It's also a way to fool ourselves into thinking that we're sheltering them, at least temporarily, from the cold, cruel world.</p> <p>But real life is hard, and no amount of trophies can shield kids from the disappointments and challenges they'll eventually face.</p> <p>"I like kids. I want them to be happy and do well," said Merryman, who has mentored Olympic athletes. "But I'd much rather have a 6-year-old cry because he didn't get a medal than have a 26-year-old lose it because they realized they weren't as special as they thought they were."</p> <p>Learning the true values of hard work, perseverance and resilience, that's the real reward. All other trophies pale in comparison.</p>	
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### **Part III: Demonstrating Reading Comprehension (7R1, 7R2)**

Directions: Answer the following short response questions using evidence from the texts to support your answers. Write your responses on a separate sheet of paper.

1. (RI.7.1) Which sentence from "In defense of participation trophies: Why they really do teach the right values" best supports the claim of the article? How does it support the claim?
2. (RI.7.2) What is the main idea of "James Harrison is right, you shouldn't get a prize for showing up"? How does Nancy Armour develop this idea?

## Part IV: Writing (7W1)

In recent years, passing out participation trophies to everyone has become a source of controversy. Some people believe that giving participation trophies to everyone benefits kids and teaches them a valuable lesson. Others believe that giving participation trophies to everyone will only hurt kids in the long run. In your opinion, should kids get trophies for participation in sports and activities? Write a claims essay on a separate piece of paper that addresses this question using evidence from both articles to support your claim.

In your essay, be sure to:

- Include an introduction with a clear thesis as to whether or not kids should get trophies for participation
- Identify at least 2 reasons for your claim
- Support your reasoning with relevant, text-based details
- Acknowledge the counterclaim
- Include a conclusion that wraps up the essay in an effective manner

Rubric:

	4	3	2	1	0
7W1a	Contains a clear, compelling claim. Claim demonstrates insightful comprehension and valid precise inferences. Overall analysis follows logically from the text	Contains a clear claim. Claim demonstrates comprehension and valid basic inferences. Overall analysis follows logically from the text	Contains a claim, but it is not fully articulated. Claim demonstrates basic literal comprehension and significant misinterpretation. Major points of textual analysis are missing or irrelevant to accomplish purpose.	Contains a minimal claim that is not beyond correct literal repetition. Minimal inferential analysis serving no clear purpose.	Does not include an introduction
7W1b	Central claim is well-supported by textual evidence. Use of relevant evidence is sustained throughout the entire analysis. The core reasoning follows from evidence.	Central claim is well-supported by textual evidence. Use of relevant evidence is generally sustained with some gaps. The core reasoning follows from evidence.	Central claim is only partially supported by textual evidence. Analysis is occasionally supported with significant gaps or misinterpretation. The core reasoning is invalid with respect to the evidence.	Demonstrates some comprehension of the idea of evidence, but only supports the claim with minimal evidence which is generally invalid or irrelevant.	Provide no evidence or the evidence that was provided is completely irrelevant
7W1c	Provide a concluding statement or section that is compelling and follows clearly from the topic and information presented	Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the topic and information presented	Provide a concluding statement or section that follows generally from the topic and information presented	Provide a concluding statement or section that is illogical or unrelated to the topic and information presented	Does not provide a concluding statement or section

## Part V: Reflection

Directions: Answer the following reflection questions based on your essay using the rubric to guide your evaluation.

<b>Looking Backward</b>	<b>Looking Inward</b>	<b>Looking Outward</b>	<b>Looking Forward</b>
What steps did you take to produce your work?	What did you find frustrating about completing your assignment?	If someone else were to look at your work, what could they learn about you, as a student?	What would you change in a revision of your work?
What problems did you face when completing this assignment? How did you solve this?	What was something satisfying to you about completing your assessment?	If you were a teacher, what comment would you make about this piece?	What is one goal you would set for yourself next time?

What grade I think I deserve: \_\_\_\_\_/4  
Why?

Ways I Glow	Ways to Grow:
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