Grade HS – Personal Narrative Writing Work Sample: Approaching

Task Prompt: Your class has been discussing different types of adventurous activities: kayaking, surfing, hiking, and many other hobbies. You are given three resources about geocaching, a hobby described as involving hiking and treasure hunting.

Write a story about your own adventures of geocaching. In your story, tell what happens when you find something interesting during one of your treasure hunts. When writing your story, find ways to use information and details about geocaching from the sources to improve your story.

Scores, Justification of Student Evidence, and Suggested Areas of Student Improvement

Ideas and Content: 3

The narrative presents a clear sequence of events and a general purpose, but development is limited and details are often vague or repetitive. While the writer includes basic geocaching actions, the ideas remain surface-level, with minimal elaboration, unclear insight, and occasional off-topic or loosely connected details. The writing shows a basic attempt at storytelling without deeper development.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Purpose and Main Idea Are Present but Not Well Developed** ○ The narrator's goal ("a new cache popped up… I figured why not") establishes purpose but with minimal context or motivation. ○ The main idea of searching for a cache remains consistent but does not expand meaningfully.	➢ **Strengthen the Purpose** ○ Add a clearer explanation of why the narrator decided to geocache and what they hoped to find or experience.
✓ **Details Are Present but Often General, Limited, or Repetitive** ○ Many descriptions are vague: "old garages," "trash cans," "cloudy but also bright," "pieces of wood everywhere." ○ Key elements like the hiding spots, containers, and environment are mentioned but not meaningfully developed.	➢ **Add More Specific and Meaningful Details** ○ Replace general descriptions (e.g., "pieces of wood everywhere") with descriptive, sensory, or geocaching-specific information.
✓ **Some Relevant Details, but Development Is Uneven** ○ Mentions of "GPS kept jumping around," "plastic container taped with black tape," and geocaching notes show relevance. ○ However, the significance of clues ("look down not up") or the "meeting spot for kids" is not explored or connected to the narrator.	➢ **Improve Development of Events** ○ Explain how the narrator interprets clues or reacts to discoveries to deepen engagement.
✓ **Predictable and Surface-Level Plot** ○ Events follow a simple pattern with minimal complexity: walk to location, find container, follow note, find second container. • No deeper conflict, obstacle, or emotional layer elevates the storyline.	➢ **Build a More Engaging Plot** ○ Introduce a small complication, moment of confusion, or unexpected twist to create more narrative interest.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Limited or Shallow Insight** ○ Reflection at the end is brief and general: "it felt like it had a story I didn't know before." ○ Insight is not connected to character growth or a broader idea.	➢ **Expand the Insight** ○ Add one or two reflective sentences explaining what the narrator learned about themselves, geocaching, or the place they explored.

Organization: 3

The narrative is organized in a generally logical order and can be followed without confusion, but the structure feels basic and sometimes uneven. Transitions are simple or missing, pacing is flat, and the beginning and ending are present but minimally developed. The narrative shows an attempt at organization, but it lacks the smooth flow and crafted structure found in higher-scoring work.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Recognizable Beginning** ○ Opens with the narrator explaining why they tried the cache: "I wasn't planning to go geocaching that day…" ○ Introduction is clear but lacks engaging context or setup.	➢ **Strengthen the Beginning** ○ Add a brief description of the narrator's mindset or expectations to create a clearer setup.
✓ **Basic Sequencing** ○ Events occur in chronological order: walking to the alley to finding the first container to following the note to finding the second tin. ○ Sequencing is simple and occasionally abrupt ("When I finally got within about 10 meters…").	➢ **Improve Sequencing Depth** ○ Include one or two sentences showing the narrator's thought process between major steps.
✓ **Limited Transitions** ○ Some transitions are present ("When I got there," "When I finally got within about 10 meters"), but others rely on simple progression or lack connective tissue. ○ Frequent use of "when" and "I" creates redundancy.	➢ **Vary Transitions** ○ Use transitions that indicate mood, time, or reasoning (e.g., "After rethinking it," "A few minutes later").
✓ **Pacing Is Flat and Predictable** ○ Events unfold at a steady pace without variation, tension, or emphasis. ○ Key discoveries (like the second container) are delivered quickly without buildup.	➢ **Adjust Pacing** ○ Slow down the reveal of the second container by adding sensory detail or internal reaction.
✓ **Ending Offers Minimal Closure** ○ Final reflection ("still ugly and muddy… but it felt like it had a story") provides closure but lacks depth or thematic connection.	➢ **Expand Closure** ○ Add a clearer final statement about what the narrator realized or how the experience changed their perspective.

Voice: 3

The voice is partially present but inconsistent. While the narrator tells the story in a conversational tone, the writing lacks emotional depth, clarity of point of view, and strong engagement with the audience. Moments of personality appear, but they are limited, and the tone sometimes drifts toward flat or mechanical phrasing.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Mostly Consistent Point of View** ○ First-person narration is steady ("I wasn't planning to go geocaching…"). ○ Perspective is consistent, but personal insight is limited.	➢ **Strengthen Point of View** ○ Add internal thoughts that show what the narrator is thinking or feeling during the search.
✓ **Some Awareness of Audience** ○ Simple explanations of clues and objects show a basic awareness of what readers need. ○ However, meaning is sometimes vague ("weather was kind of weird").	➢ **Increase Audience Awareness** ○ Clarify vague descriptions and explain why specific moments mattered in the experience.
✓ **Limited Expressiveness** ○ Tone is casual but not strongly engaging; language is plain ("nothing dramatic about it," "kind of annoying"). ○ Few moments reveal deeper emotions or thoughts.	➢ **Enhance Expressiveness** ○ Use more descriptive phrasing or unique observations to make the narrator's personality clearer.
✓ **Underdeveloped Emotional Connection** ○ Reactions to events are brief ("I kind of hesitated," "I had nothing else to do"). ○ Lack of internal thinking restricts connection with the reader.	➢ **Build Emotional Depth** ○ Include reactions to key events—hesitation, excitement, confusion, surprise—to create a stronger voice.

Word Choice: 3

Vocabulary is functional but imprecise. Many words are general or repetitive, and sensory or vivid language is limited. Errors in spelling and word use further weaken clarity. The narrative communicates meaning but lacks precision, imagery, and deliberate phrasing.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **General, Imprecise Words** ○ Frequent use of vague words: "weird," "kind of dramatic," "something shiny," "pieces of wood everywhere." ○ Word choice often relies on general language rather than specific description.	➢ **Improve Precision** ○ Replace general phrases with more exact description of objects, locations, or actions.
✓ **Limited Sensory Detail** ○ Some visual details appear ("rust around the edges"), but sensory coverage is minimal.	➢ **Add Sensory Detail** ○ Include sounds, textures, or smells to make the environment more vivid.
✓ **Frequent Clichés or Basic Phrasing** ○ Expressions like "figured why not," "nothing dramatic," and "I had nothing else to do" feel generic.	➢ **Reduce Generic Phrasing** ○ Revise clichés with more original or meaningful wording.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Incorrect or Inconsistent Word Use** ○ Errors weaken word choice clarity ("where" instead of "were," "theres"). ○ Missing words or incorrect forms limit precision.	➢ **Correct Word Usage** ○ Review spelling and homophone errors to strengthen clarity.

Sentence Fluency: 3

Sentences are understandable but often choppy, repetitive, or awkward. The narrative relies heavily on similar sentence beginnings and structures. Frequent grammatical errors and run-ons disrupt fluency, and the rhythm lacks variety. While readable, the writing shows limited control.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Repetitive Sentence Structure** ○ Many sentences begin with "I," "It," or "When," creating monotony. ○ Few complex or varied structures are used.	➢ **Vary Sentence Beginnings** ○ Use different openings (adverbs, prepositional phrases, participle phrases) to avoid repetition.
✓ **Frequent Awkward or Choppy Sentences** ○ Examples include: "The weather was kind of weird," and "It got narrower, and the ground dipped lower…" ○ Run-ons appear ("Walking home I kept thinking… still ugly and muddy…").	➢ **Fix Awkward or Choppy Sentences** ○ Break run-ons into simpler sentences or combine short ones for smoother flow.
✓ **Limited Rhythm and Flow** ○ Sentences do not build momentum or tension; pacing feels flat. ○ Lack of syntactic variety reduces expressiveness.	➢ **Improve Rhythm** ○ Add one or two longer descriptive sentences and mix them with shorter emphasis statements.
✓ **Errors Impact Fluency** ○ Missing commas and capitalization errors create uneven reading.	➢ **Edit Errors** ○ Review punctuation and grammar to improve readability.

Conventions: 2

Errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage occur throughout the narrative. While meaning is generally understandable, the frequency of errors disrupts clarity. The writing demonstrates limited control of conventions and does not meet the expectations of consistent accuracy.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Frequent Errors in Spelling** ○ Examples include "theres," "dont," "go to close," "where new." ○ Errors recur and distract the reader.	➢ **Improve Spelling Accuracy** ○ Review frequently misspelled words and use spell-check tools to catch common errors.
✓ **Inconsistent Grammar Usage** ○ Missing commas and run-on sentences ("Walking home I kept thinking… still ugly and muddy"). ○ Incorrect verb forms and inconsistent phrasing ("the garages where new").	➢ **Strengthen Grammar Control** ○ Practice correcting run-ons and reviewing subject-verb agreement.
✓ **Weak Punctuation Control** ○ Missing apostrophes ("theres," "dont"). ○ Some sentences contain splice-like constructions.	➢ **Fix Punctuation Errors** ○ Focus on using apostrophes correctly and adding commas where needed.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Errors Affect Readability** ○ The frequency of mistakes requires the reader to slow down to interpret meaning.	➢ **Edit Carefully for Clarity** ○ Reread the narrative aloud to catch confusing or incorrect constructions.

Suggestions for Teaching Strategies to Support the Student Sample:

The following contain suggestions for teaching strategies and do not encompass a complete list of possible strategies.

Ideas and Content:

Purpose Clarification Routine

- Have students write a one-sentence purpose statement and revise the introduction to align with it.

Detail-Expansion Workshop

- Guide students in transforming general nouns ("wood," "mud," "garages") into specific descriptions.

Clue Interpretation Mini-Lesson

- Teach how narratives can show thinking through reactions, questions, or predictions when clues appear.

Plot Complexity Exercise

- Model adding a small challenge or misunderstanding to increase depth and avoid a predictable sequence.

Reflection-Building Prompting

- Use sentence starters ("This made me realize…," "Now I understand…") to help students develop more meaningful insights.

Organization:

Beginning-Building Routine

- Teach students how to establish context, place, and motivation in the opening lines.

Transition Variety Mini-Lesson

- Provide a list of transitional words/phrases grouped by purpose (time, contrast, reflection).

Pacing Through Detail

- Use mentor texts to show how slowing a moment through sensory detail adds narrative tension.

Event-to-Thought Modeling

- Demonstrate how to insert brief reflective lines between events to improve cohesion.

Reflection-Writing Prompts

- Guide students to write deeper closure using prompts such as "This made me think…" or "What I understand now is…"

Voice:

Internal Thinking Modeling

- Show how authors reveal character through thoughts, not just actions.

Audience Clarity Check

- Have students identify places where readers may be confused and revise for specificity.

Voice Development Workshop

- Use mentor texts to analyze how consistent tone and word choice create a narrative personality.

Emotion-on-the-Page Mini-Lesson

- Help students revise by adding emotion-oriented sentence stems (e.g., "I wondered…," "I felt…").

Suggestions for Teaching Strategies to Support the Student Sample:

The following contain suggestions for teaching strategies and do not encompass a complete list of possible strategies.

Word Choice:

Precision Vocabulary Exercises

- Have students revise vague words by generating more specific alternatives.

Sensory-Detail Brainstorming

- Use a guided chart to identify potential sensory additions for setting and discovery scenes.

Anti-Cliché Revision Practice

- Provide examples of clichés and have students rewrite them with fresher language.

High-Frequency Error Correction

- Focus mini-lessons on common misspellings and confused word pairs (were/where, there/their).

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Variety Practice

- Provide patterns (e.g., "After + verb-ing," "As + subject…") to help students diversify sentence openings.

Run-On and Fragment Mini-Lesson

- Teach students to identify and revise common fluency errors.

Rhythm Modeling

- Use mentor texts to show how authors build pacing through sentence length.

Guided Editing Stations

- Have students rotate through fluency, punctuation, and structure checks.

Conventions:

High-Frequency Error Intervention

- Provide targeted lessons on the specific spelling and usage errors found in the narrative.

Grammar and Usage Practice

- Use short exercises focused on run-ons, fragments, and verb errors.

Punctuation Correction Drills

- Teach apostrophe use, comma placement, and sentence boundary rules.

Read-Aloud Editing

- Encourage students to read their writing aloud to catch missing words, confusing syntax, and mechanical issues.