Grade HS – Personal Narrative Writing Work Sample: Does Not Yet Meet

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: 2

The narrative attempts to tell a story about searching for a geocache, but the purpose is loosely developed, ideas are unclear or repetitive, and details often lack relevance or depth. Much of the writing relies on general description or off-topic observations, and the "interesting" discovery required by the task is underdeveloped. Insight is minimal, and the ending does not clearly connect to a meaningful realization or experience.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Purpose Is Vague or Minimally Developed** ○ The narrator's motive for geocaching changes mid-sentence: "I was gonna go… but then I didn't really feel like it… but then my cousin text me…" ○ The purpose of the search is not revisited or deepened throughout the narrative.	➢ **Clarify the Purpose** ○ Explain clearly why the narrator chooses to geocache and what they hope to find.
✓ **Details Are Often Too General, Repetitive, or Off-Topic** ○ Many descriptions lack specificity: "trash bags all over," "a bunch of sticks," "some metal pipe," "just bugs." ○ Several observations do not advance the geocaching storyline (e.g., old noodles in a takeout container, kicking a pipe, slipping and getting mud on pants).	➢ **Add More Relevant, Specific Details** ○ Describe the environment, clues, and containers with precision instead of relying on general phrases like "trash bags" or "a bunch of sticks."
✓ **Limited Development of Events** ○ The search consists mostly of false leads ("thought I seen a plastic box… just a takeout container," "thought maybe it was the pipe… it was just a pipe"). ○ The final discovery ("cache moved try agen later") receives little elaboration and does not connect meaningfully to the rest of the experience.	➢ **Develop Events More Fully** ○ Explain how the narrator interprets clues or reacts to discoveries rather than jumping from one object to the next.
✓ **Ideas Rely on General Observations Rather Than Specific Narrative Detail** ○ Statements like "I wasn't sure why," "didn't look like any place someone would hide something," and "I kept getting lost" show limited development. ○ No deeper conflict, complication, or personal reflection emerges.	➢ **Replace General Observations** ○ Add description of what the narrator sees, thinks, or feels to make the search more vivid and meaningful.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Insight Is Minimal or Missing** ○ The ending ("didn't feel like a real hunt… probly was all messed up") offers no real understanding or reflection tied to geocaching or the narrator's experience.	➢ **Expand the Insight** ○ Add a final reflection explaining what the narrator learned or realized, even if the hunt was unsuccessful.

Organization: 2

The narrative follows a loose chronological order, but the structure is uneven and sometimes confusing. Transitions are repetitive or missing, pacing is flat, and the beginning does not clearly establish direction. The ending lacks purposeful closure and simply stops without a developed resolution. Overall, the writing shows minimal organizational control.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Beginning Is Present but Weakly Developed** ○ The story starts abruptly with shifting motivation ("was gonna go… didn't really feel like it… cousin text me"), creating an unfocused opening. ○ No clear setup of setting, narrator goal, or context.	➢ **Strengthen the Beginning** ○ Clarify why the narrator is geocaching and set up the setting and situation before the search begins.
✓ **Sequencing Is Inconsistent** ○ Events occur in order but with jumps that hinder clarity ("I walked more but I wasn't sure why," then immediately "Then I saw this metal pipe…"). ○ Several key actions are rushed or under-explained.	➢ **Improve Sequencing** ○ Add brief explanations between events to show why the narrator moves from one spot to another.
✓ **Limited or Repetitive Transitions** ○ Frequent reliance on "then," "after that," or "I walked" creates monotony. ○ Missing transitions make some shifts abrupt ("I slipped once and got mud on my pants. By the time I got home…").	➢ **Vary Transitions** ○ Use transition words that indicate time, reasoning, or contrast to improve flow.
✓ **Pacing Lacks Control** ○ All events are told at nearly the same speed, whether the narrator is interpreting clues, wandering, or encountering obstacles. ○ No buildup to the moment of discovery.	➢ **Adjust Pacing** ○ Slow down important moments—especially when the narrator believes they found the cache or solves a clue.
✓ **Weak or Underdeveloped Ending** ○ The story ends abruptly with dissatisfaction ("didn't even care about the cache anymore"), offering no resolution or deeper reflection. ○ The ending does not connect back to the task or to any internal change.	➢ **Develop the Ending** ○ Add a final reflection that ties the experience together or explains what the narrator learned about geocaching.

Voice: 4

The narrative shows some personality through casual, conversational language, but the voice is inconsistent and often flat. Emotional reactions are brief or vague, and the narrator's perspective lacks depth. The tone sometimes drifts into disengagement or unclear intention, which weakens the reader's connection to the story.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Inconsistent Engagement** ○ Statements like "I didn't really feel like it" and "I wasn't sure why" signal a lack of investment in the experience. ○ The voice fluctuates between mildly humorous and indifferent.	➢ **Increase Engagement** ○ Explain why the narrator cares about geocaching or what they hoped would happen to strengthen the voice.
✓ **Limited Audience Awareness** ○ Explanations are unclear or incomplete ("arrow thing kept spinning," "kind of dry except when it rains"). ○ The narrator assumes the reader understands slang or incomplete references.	➢ **Improve Audience Clarity** ○ Clarify vague statements and provide context so readers understand the situation.
✓ **Minimal Emotional Depth** ○ Emotional reactions are simple ("annoying," "made me mad," "kinda wanted to go home"). ○ Few internal thoughts add understanding or connection.	➢ **Add Emotional Depth** ○ Include brief thoughts or feelings when things go wrong or the narrator encounters obstacles.
✓ **Flat or Mechanical Tone at Times** ○ The narration reads like a list of events without reflection or variation in tone. ○ The ending expresses frustration but no deeper takeaway.	➢ **Strengthen the Tone** ○ Revise one or two key moments with more expressive language to avoid a flat or mechanical feel.

Word Choice: 4

Word choice is general, vague, and sometimes incorrect. Descriptions rely heavily on basic phrasing, and some incorrect or informal word uses reduce clarity. There is little sensory detail or vivid imagery, and repeated vague words weaken the effectiveness of the narrative.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **General or Vague Vocabulary** ○ Frequent nonspecific words: "weird," "kind of dry," "something shiny," "a bunch of sticks." ○ Phrasing lacks clear description or imagery.	➢ **Replace Vague Words** ○ Use more specific nouns and verbs to describe objects, locations, and actions.
✓ **Very Limited Sensory Detail** ○ Only one mild sensory reference ("old noodles… smelled bad"). ○ No sound, touch, or visual specifics that enhance setting.	➢ **Add Sensory Details** ○ Incorporate sounds, textures, or movement to make scenes more vivid.
✓ **Informal or Incorrect Word Use** ○ Errors such as "probly," "theres," "I seen," and "to close" weaken clarity. ○ Slang ("lol") does not support meaning or tone.	➢ **Correct Word Usage** ○ Review informal or incorrect words and revise them for clarity and accuracy.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Repetition of Basic Words** ○ Repeated use of "just," "kinda," "then," and "looked" contributes to monotony.	➢ **Reduce Repetition** ○ Vary verbs and descriptive terms to avoid repeated phrasing.

Sentence Fluency: 4

Sentences are often choppy, repetitive, or grammatically incorrect. The narrative relies heavily on similar sentence beginnings and structures, and run-ons or missing punctuation disrupt readability. There is little variety in rhythm or structure.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Frequent Choppy Sentences** ○ Examples: "It was just a pipe." "Just bugs." "After that I kinda wanted to go home." ○ Short, abrupt sentences reduce rhythm.	➢ **Smooth Out Choppy Sentences** ○ Combine related short sentences or expand them with descriptive detail.
✓ **Repetitive Sentence Beginnings** ○ Many sentences begin with "I," "Then," "After that," or "It," creating monotony.	➢ **Vary Sentence Beginnings** ○ Use different openings, such as prepositional phrases or participle phrases.
✓ **Run-Ons and Punctuation Problems** ○ "Walking back I kept getting lost because the trees kind of all looked the same." ○ Missing commas and incorrect joining of ideas weaken flow.	➢ **Fix Run-Ons** ○ Add punctuation or split overly long sentences to improve clarity.
✓ **Limited Structure Variety** ○ Most sentences follow a simple subject-verb pattern with few complex or compound forms.	➢ **Add Structural Variety** ○ Include at least one compound sentence and one complex sentence per paragraph.

Conventions: 4

Errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage are frequent and often interfere with clarity. Many mistakes repeat and indicate lack of control over basic conventions. The piece would require extensive editing to meet grade-level expectations.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Frequent Spelling Errors** ○ Examples: "probly," "theres," "to close," "agen," "wasnt," "dont," "didnt."	➢ **Correct Spelling** ○ Review high-frequency errors using spellcheck or a targeted word list.
✓ **Many Grammar Errors** ○ Incorrect verb forms: "I seen," "I was gonna go," "trees kind of all looked the same." ○ Subject-verb agreement errors ("garages where new" from earlier sample behavior still appears in tone here).	➢ **Improve Grammar** ○ Practice standard verb forms and subject-verb agreement patterns.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Punctuation and Capitalization Issues** ○ Missing apostrophes (“dont,” “wasnt”). ○ Missing commas and incorrect sentence boundaries lead to run-ons and unclear meaning.	➢ **Fix Punctuation** ○ Add needed apostrophes and commas to clarify sentence boundaries.
✓ **Errors Interfere with Clarity** ○ Multiple errors per paragraph force the reader to pause and interpret meaning.	➢ **Edit for Readability** ○ Read the story aloud to identify unclear 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-Setting Mini-Lesson

- Have students write a one-sentence purpose at the top of the draft and revise the introduction to reflect it clearly.

Relevant-Detail Practice

- Teach students to identify details that advance the plot versus those that distract from the central action.

Event Development Modeling

- Show how to slow down key moments by adding thinking, sensory detail, or specific observations.

Observation vs. Reflection Routine

- Help students distinguish between describing what happened and explaining why it mattered.

Ending/Insight Workshop

- Provide sentence starters ("I realized…", "What surprised me was…", "Next time I would…") to deepen closure.

Organization:

Opening Clarity Mini-Lesson

- Teach students how to set up context, motivation, and setting in the first 2–3 sentences.

Sequencing Strategy: "Why This Next?"

- Have students write one sentence between major events explaining why the narrator moves or reacts.

Transition Variety Practice

- Provide lists of temporal and reflective transitions and have students revise a paragraph using three new ones.

Pacing Through Zoom-In/Zoom-Out

- Teach students to slow down key events using sensory detail and internal thinking.

Ending-Resolution Workshop

- Model how narrative endings connect back to purpose, theme, or emotional growth.

Voice:

Narrator Intention Exercise

- Have students identify what their narrator wants in the story and revise sentences to reflect that desire.

Audience Awareness Mini-Lesson

- Teach students how to revise unclear phrasing using the "Would a reader know this?" test.

Emotion-on-the-Page Routine

- Provide stems ("I wondered…," "I felt…," "I hoped…") to help students reveal inner thinking.

Voice Consistency Workshop

- Use mentor texts to demonstrate how consistent tone strengthens personal narratives.

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:

Narrator Word Choice Station

- Have students replace vague words in a paragraph with more descriptive ones.

Sensory Detail Expansion

- Guide students to add one detail for each of the five senses in at least one scene.

Common Error Mini-Lessons

- Focus on correcting high-frequency errors such as “I seen,” “theres,” “probly.”

Synonym Variety Practice

- Build vocabulary texts to demonstrate how consistent tone strengthens personal narratives.

Sentence Fluency:

Smooth Out Choppy Sentences

- Combine related short sentences or expand them with descriptive detail.

Vary Sentence Beginnings

- Use different openings, such as prepositional phrases or participle phrases.

Fix Run-Ons

- Add punctuation or split overly long sentences to improve clarity.

Add Structural Variety

- Include at least one compound sentence and one complex sentence per paragraph.

Conventions:

Spelling Intervention Sets

- Provide a personalized list of corrected spellings from the draft for repeated practice.

Grammar Foundations Review

- Teach correct verb forms, agreement rules, and common patterns of spoken vs. written English.

Punctuation Workshops

- Model correct apostrophe use, comma rules, and end punctuation using examples from the draft.

Guided Editing Sessions

- Walk students through targeted revisions using color-coding for errors and corrections.