Grade 7 – Expository Writing Work Sample: Exceeds

Task: Your science class is completing a class project about invasive plants. Your teacher has given you the topic of non-native plants and why some succeed in new environments while others become nuisances.

*Read the sources carefully to **write an explanatory article** to explain why some non-native plants succeed in new environments while others become nuisances. Using more than one source, select the most relevant information to support your thesis/controlling idea about non-native plants.*

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

Ideas and Content: 4

The essay presents a clear and relevant controlling idea that some non-native plants succeed while others become nuisances. The writing uses more than one source and provides accurate examples of both successful non-native species (tomatoes) and problematic invasive plants (honeysuckle). Explanations are generally correct but lack depth in places, especially regarding why these outcomes occur. Some statements rely on repetition rather than elaboration, but overall the piece demonstrates solid understanding.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ Introduces the central idea clearly: "Some non-native plants succeed in their new environments, however, some non-native plants end up becoming well-known nuisances, or ○ ven dangerous things to avoid." Repeats this controlling idea in both the introduction and conclusion for coherence. ○ Defines terms accurately: "If the non-native plant thrives and eliminates other organisms, it is classified as an invasive plant."
✓ **Relevant and Accurate Details** ○ Uses multiple correct examples from Source 4 about tomatoes: ▪ "Tomato was native… to Mexico." ▪ "Spanish explorers discovered that the Aztecs had been cultivating tomato for years [Source #4]." ▪ Early fear due to livestock deaths is accurately reported. ▪ Modern popularity supported with a statistic: "over 60 million tons produced… per year." ○ Uses Source 1 accurately for honeysuckle: it "can quickly eliminate other plants in native forests [Source #1]." ○ Correctly defines "invasive species" using phrasing closely aligned to Source 1.
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Provides partial reasoning for tomatoes' initial failure and later success: fear due to cattle deaths to eventual global popularity due to cultivation and acceptance. ○ Provides limited explanation for harm caused by honeysuckle—describes that it "eliminates other plants" but does not explain *how* (rapid reproduction, shading, root competition). ○ The discussion of diversity in paragraph six is correct but underdeveloped ("Sometimes ecosystems may need diversity… but sometimes they can be bad…").
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Stays consistently focused on the prompt: introduces examples, defines non-native and invasive plants, contrasts harmful and successful species. ○ Some concluding statements shift to philosophical or general commentary ("each plant is important to our ecosystem"), which is slightly off-focus but still related. ○ All examples relate to the controlling idea, though some paragraphs rely more on repetition than explanation.

Organization: 4

The essay is clearly organized with an introduction, logical body paragraphs, and a conclusion that revisits key ideas. Transitions help guide readers, though some paragraphs contain multiple ideas that could be separated for clarity. The conclusion reiterates the central message but becomes more general than necessary.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization
✓ **Clear Introduction Establishes Structure** ○ Introduces the topic and defines key concepts: "If the non-native plant thrives and eliminates other organisms, it is classified as an invasive plant." ○ Sets up the contrast between successful and harmful non-native plants.
✓ **Logical Sequencing of Ideas** ○ Follows a logical progression: ▪ – Define non-native vs invasive ▪ – Tomato example (successful non-native) ▪ – Honeysuckle example (harmful invasive) ▪ – Importance of biodiversity ▪ – Conclusion reinforcing the contrast ○ Order helps the reader follow the explanations.
✓ **Transitions Aid Flow** ○ Uses transitions such as "Another example of this," "As seen in Source #4," and "In conclusion…" ○ Some transitions are list-like rather than relational, limiting clarity.
✓ **Conclusion Provides Closure** ○ Restates the key idea: "Some plants can threaten our ecosystems while some help rejuvenate them." ○ Conclusion shifts to generalities ("each plant is important"), which slightly reduces precision.

Voice: 4

The voice is appropriate for informational writing: formal, clear, and objective. The student shows engagement through thoughtful commentary but occasionally shifts to generalized or inspirational tone that weakens informational focus.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice
✓ **Appropriate Tone for Informational Purpose** ○ Maintains formal tone when defining invasive species and discussing examples. ○ Avoids second-person and emotional appeals throughout most of the essay.
✓ **Engaged and Sincere Voice** ○ Shows interest in topic through phrases like "well-known nuisances" or describing tomatoes' historical reputation.
✓ **Occasional Shifts Toward Generalization** ○ Conclusion becomes inspirational: "each plant is important to our ecosystem and the Earth." ○ This reduces the scientific tone established earlier.
✓ **Consistent Third-Person Explanatory Style** ○ Avoids conversational phrasing and keeps focus on plants and ecosystems.

Word Choice: 4

The essay uses mostly precise and appropriate vocabulary, including scientific terms. A few words are general or repeated, and some descriptions could be more specific, but overall language choices support clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice
✓ **Domain-Specific Vocabulary Used Correctly** ○ Includes terms such as “invasive,” “eliminates other organisms,” “ecosystem,” “non-native,” and “cultivating.”
✓ **Effective Word Choice for Explanation** ○ Uses factual descriptions like “thrives,” “well-known nuisances,” and “harmful invasive species.”
✓ **Some Vague or Broad Word Choice** ○ Uses general words such as “important,” “good,” and “dangerous,” which could be made more specific. ○ Phrases like “very helpful” or “well-known nuisances” could be revised with more precise ecological terminology.
✓ **Repetition in Conceptual Language** ○ Uses “non-native” and “invasive” frequently without introducing synonyms or more nuanced descriptors.

Sentence Fluency: 5

Most sentences flow smoothly, with clear structure and correct punctuation. Some sentences are long or contain multiple clauses, and a few repetitive patterns appear, but fluency is generally strong.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable and Varied Sentences** ○ Uses both short and extended sentences effectively, such as the historical explanation of tomatoes.
✓ **Varied Sentence Beginnings** ○ Begins sentences with phrases like “Another example,” “As seen in Source #4,” “In conclusion,” showing variation.
✓ **Some Long or Multi-Idea Sentences** ○ Example: “Some non-native plants succeed in their new environments, however, some non-native plants end up becoming well-known nuisances…” ○ Could be split into two for clarity.
✓ **Occasional Repetition** ○ Multiple sentences begin with “Some…” or “Another,” reducing variety slightly.

Conventions: 5

The writing demonstrates strong command of conventions. Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar are consistently correct. Minor issues are rare and do not impede meaning.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions
✓ **Correct Spelling Throughout** ○ Spells challenging content-area terms such as “invasive,” “ecosystem,” “eliminates,” and “cultivating” correctly.
✓ **Accurate Punctuation and Sentence Structure** ○ Commas, periods, and quotation marks are used correctly. ○ No run-ons or fragments detected.
✓ **Consistent Capitalization** ○ Capitalizes proper nouns such as “Mexico,” “Spanish,” and “Aztecs.”

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions
✓ **Minimal Errors** ○ Very few punctuation inconsistencies; those present do not disrupt understanding.

Use of Sources: 4

The writer uses information from multiple sources accurately and appropriately. Evidence is relevant and supports the controlling idea. Citations are included but not consistently formatted. Some examples need clearer explanation to show why they illustrate success or harm.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources
✓ **Uses Multiple Sources** ○ Uses Source 4 extensively for tomatoes, including origin, cultivation, and modern production statistics. ○ Uses Source 1 for honeysuckle's destructive behavior.
✓ **Evidence Is Accurate and Relevant** ○ Describes how tomatoes were initially feared because "livestock… were accidently killed by eating the leaves [Source #4]." ○ Accurately cites that honeysuckle "can quickly eliminate other plants in native forests [Source #1]."
✓ **Inconsistent Citation Formatting** ○ Uses brackets and source numbers but lacks consistent spacing and labeling.
✓ **Limited Explanation of Evidence** ○ Repeats examples but does not always explain the *mechanism* behind success or harm (e.g., what traits made tomatoes successful, or how honeysuckle spreads).