Grade 7 – Expository Writing Work Sample: Approaching

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: 3

The essay presents a clear controlling idea that some non-native plants can be harmful while others are not always invasive. It includes multiple relevant examples from the sources, but explanations are often basic, repeated, or incomplete. The writing shows developing understanding of ecological relationships but lacks a precise explanation of why some non-native plants succeed while others become nuisances. Several statements oversimplify or misinterpret source ideas.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ Introduces a central idea: "Most people say non-native plants are harmful… but that is not always true." ○ States that some are invasive, some are not, which aligns partially with the prompt. ○ Purpose is generally clear but does not fully define *why* these differences occur.
✓ **Relevant and Mostly Accurate Details** ○ Uses an accurate example from Source 2 about ballast introducing seeds: "the soil holding down the ballast can have seeds in it… when they reach their destination… the seeds will be transported." ○ Includes an example from Source 3 about kudzu in North Carolina: "kudzu took over the fence… they brought in goats to eat the invasive plant but it grew back worse." ○ Correctly references Source 2/4 information about New Zealand: "only wiped out three of New Zealand's native plants." ○ Some statements are overly broad or unsupported, such as "plants… can become extinct" without citing source evidence.
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Attempts explanation: unmanaged non-native plants "can crowd the native plants" and cause animals to "die or migrate," which shows partial understanding of ecological impact. ○ Explanations are occasionally simplistic or incomplete—e.g., stating "non-native plants are also adding things to our food web every day" but not explaining how. ○ Does not clearly explain ecological reasons why some non-native plants remain controlled (predators, climate, slow reproduction).
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Mostly stays focused on harmful vs. non-harmful non-native plants. ○ Sometimes repeats ideas ("can wipe out native plants but not usually"; "crowd native plants… but add new things") without deeper meaning. ○ Conclusion restates the main idea but does not synthesize ecological processes.

Organization: 3

The essay follows a logical order and includes an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. However, transitions are basic, some ideas are repeated rather than sequenced, and paragraphs occasionally shift topics without clear signals. The conclusion restates the controlling idea but lacks synthesis.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization
✓ **Introduction Establishes Topic but Lacks Specific Preview** ○ Begins with a general idea about harmful vs. helpful non-native plants: "Most people say non-native plants are harmful… but that is not always true." ○ Does not preview *why* these differences occur, which the prompt requires.
✓ **Logical Sequence of Ideas** ○ Orders ideas clearly: introduction → harmful effects → transportation of species → examples (ballast, kudzu) → conclusion. ○ Sequence mostly supports understanding but mixes explanation with repetition.
✓ **Basic or Abrupt Transitions** ○ Uses simple transitions such as "another example," "for example," but these do not explain relationships. ○ Shifts abruptly from harmful impacts to ballast example without a transition showing how they relate.
✓ **Conclusion Provides Closure but Lacks Depth** ○ Restates: "not all non-native plants are harmful," but does not summarize ecological reasons behind this. ○ Ends with a broad statement ("some good… some bad") instead of synthesizing key insights.

Voice: 3

The voice is generally appropriate and sincere, but there are moments of conversational tone, direct address, and informal phrasing. These weaken the informational style expected for an expository task.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice
✓ **Appropriate Voice With Occasional Informality** ○ Mostly uses a neutral explanatory tone but occasionally shifts into direct address: "If people don't keep it maintained…" ○ Uses conversational phrases: "not always good" and "this can wipe out plants."
✓ **Some Engagement With Topic** ○ Shows interest in examples like kudzu and ballast, contributing to a committed voice.
✓ **Inconsistent Academic Tone** ○ Uses informal vocabulary ("goes wild," "not usually," "wipe out") that does not always match the scientific nature of the prompt.
✓ **Minimal Emotional Language** ○ Avoids overly evaluative tone but sometimes drifts into general evaluation ("can be harmful" repeated without explanation).

Word Choice: 3

The vocabulary is clear and understandable but sometimes general or repetitive. Domain-specific terms are present but used inconsistently, and some explanations would benefit from more precise ecological vocabulary.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice
✓ **Correct Use of Some Domain Vocabulary** ○ Uses “non-native,” “invasive,” “ecosystems,” “native plants,” and “food web.”
✓ **General or Vague Language** ○ Uses words like “good,” “bad,” “harmful,” “not usually,” which lack specificity.• Statements such as “adding things to our food web” are imprecise.
✓ **Repetition Without Precision** ○ Repeats “can kill native plants” and “wipe out” without expanding on the mechanism.
✓ **Occasional Misinterpretation** ○ Claim that non-native plants “can also be beneficial” is correct, but the explanation (“add things to the food web”) is vague and unsupported.

Sentence Fluency: 3

Sentences are generally readable, but some are repetitive, choppy, or overly long. Sentence structures often begin the same way, and transitions between ideas can be abrupt.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable But Repetitive Sentence Patterns** ○ Many sentences begin with “This can…,” “They…,” or “Non-native plants can…” ○ Creates a predictable rhythm.
✓ **Choppy or Fragmented Sentences** ○ Example: “This can wipe out native plants.” ○ Very short and disconnected from the surrounding context.
✓ **Overly Long Sentences With Multiple Ideas** ○ Example: “If not kept in check they can go wild and wipe out native plants and cause animals to die or migrate and then it ruins the food web.” ○ Needs separation into multiple clear statements.
✓ **Abrupt Paragraph Shifts** ○ The switch from harmful effects to ballast occurs without fluency markers.

Conventions: 3

The writing shows general control of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, but errors occur with inconsistent grammar, punctuation omissions, and occasional awkward constructions. Errors do not completely obscure meaning but weaken clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions
✓ **General Spelling Accuracy** ○ Most common words are spelled correctly; occasional misspellings appear but do not impede meaning.
✓ **Some Punctuation Errors** ○ Missing commas after introductory clauses ("If not kept in check they can go wild"). ○ Some long sentences lack proper separation or conjunctions.
✓ **Inconsistent Grammar** ○ Sentences such as "This can wipe out native plants but not usually" lack clarity and formal structure.
✓ **Capitalization Generally Correct** ○ Proper nouns are typically capitalized correctly; minor inconsistencies appear.

Use of Sources: 3

The essay demonstrates partial use of sources by providing examples from ballast transport, honeysuckle, and kudzu. However, citations are inconsistent or missing, source details are only lightly explained, and the writer sometimes repeats details without deeper analysis.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources
✓ **Use of Multiple Sources** ○ References ballast transport from Source 2 (soil carrying seeds). ○ Shows knowledge of kudzu and goat grazing from Source 3. ○ Mentions New Zealand having "only wiped out three… native plants" (Source 2 or 4).
✓ **Evidence Is Generally Accurate** ○ Kudzu example ("took over the fence… grew back worse") matches the source broadly. ○ Ballast example accurately reflects how seeds move with ships.
✓ **Inconsistent Citation or Attribution** ○ Uses occasional brackets, e.g., "[source #3]," but without consistent formatting. ○ Some claims lack citation or repeat examples without attribution.
✓ **Limited Explanation of Evidence** ○ States examples but rarely explains *why* they demonstrate invasive or non-invasive success.