



Oakland Unified School District  Process Writing Assessment
Descriptive Writing - Spring

Student Name: _____

Dear Student,

You're one of the oldest students in our school. Many of you have been here for six years. You are all experts on this school, and you know many things about it that others don't. Teachers at this school are always thinking about how to make this school the best it can be. To learn more, we're going to ask upper grade students to write a descriptive essay about our school. In particular, we want to find out about the secrets of our school—things not everybody may know about but that you do.

Writers do their best work when they have time to think, research and plan. During the next few days, you will do the following activities as part of the writing process:

1. Think about what you know about our school that others don't.
2. Identify an audience and controlling idea for your essay.
3. Research and talk with other students to gather evidence for your essay.
4. Plan and write a descriptive essay about our school.



Day One: Brainstorm secrets

Schools have many secrets (secret =something that is known by only a few people). Think about how you would answer the following questions. Make some notes about your answers in the box below. Use just words and phrases, not complete sentences. Be ready to share your thinking.

1. What are some things that students know about this school that you think teachers don't know?
2. What are some things you now know about this school that you didn't know as a kindergartner?
3. What are some secret places that you've noticed in this school?
4. Who are the secret people of this school?
5. What do you think outsiders (people from other neighborhoods or cities) might not know about our school?

My notes:

Working together to find “Hidden” details:

When people think about schools, they usually think about the most obvious things: teachers, students, classrooms, math, reading, etc. But a lot more goes on at schools than what people first think. Students, teachers and many others live here at school for most of the day, and some people are here even at night.

What things about this school do most people (especially adults) not notice, think about, or even know? What things do you think are unique or special about our school? Be ready to share your ideas with a partner or in a small group.

← As you're talking and listening, record details in the topic boxes that interest you the most below:

Secrets of Our School—What I Know

<p>“Hidden” places: <i>Examples: good places to hide, places not everyone goes (the cafeteria kitchen, the boiler room), locked doors</i></p>	<p>“Hidden” people: <i>Examples: the night janitor, parent volunteers, the art teacher</i></p>
<p>“Hidden” activities: <i>Examples: sharing food with friends at lunchtime, recess activities, passing notes</i></p>	<p>“Hidden” events: <i>Examples: the time the class snake got lost for a month, the time our teacher brought her dog to school</i></p>
<p>What we learn here that might surprise you: <i>Examples: how to dissect a chicken leg, how to make ice cream, the geometry of bubbles</i></p>	<p>What kindergartners don't know: <i>Examples: what seems scary but really isn't, rules you should definitely follow, good people to know at this school, what you'll learn here, the best things about this school</i></p>
<p>What some people don't know: <i>Examples: how many languages are spoken at our school, Wednesdays are the best day to be here</i></p>	<p>Other: <i>Examples: what teachers do when we're not here, what happens here at night, what needs to be improved at our school</i></p>

Deciding on an audience for your essay:

What is an audience? Have you ever been in an audience?

As a writer your audience is the people who read your essay. A good writer always keeps his or her audience in mind when writing, to make sure that the ideas and details of the essay are interesting and important to the reader. You already know that part of your audience will be the teachers of this school. But your essay will be more interesting if you define your audience very clearly before beginning to write. The following steps will help you do this.

1. Look back at all your notes "Secrets of Our School - What I Know." You may want to use a highlighter to mark the secrets you're most interested in writing about.

2. **Who** do you think doesn't know these secrets? Circle them.

teachers

the principal

parents

other students

kindergartners

outsiders

other: _____

other: _____

3. Who will be the audience for your essay? _____



Day Two: Choose Your Controlling Idea

You have thought about some topics that are secrets at our school, and have chosen an audience for your essay. Now it is time to select the controlling idea for your own essay. This is the idea that will control what you include in your essay, and what you don't. A good controlling idea is:

1. Interesting to you
2. Interesting to other people
3. Clear and specific

It should also match the details and ideas you already have about a topic.

Help this student find a controlling idea:

Look at this student example of notes on “hidden” topics about her school, and see if you can think of a good controlling idea for her essay. This student wants to become a vet when she grows up, and her audience is general because she believes nobody thinks about her school in quite the same way she does.

“Hidden” places: Between the walls, in the ceiling, the pine tree in the yard, classroom pet cages, aquarium in Room 207, school garden, ???	“Hidden” people creatures: <i>Pets: mice, snakes, hamsters, turtle, pollywogs, hermit crab, ???</i> <i>Wild: mice, squirrels, pigeons, seagulls, robins, worms, spiders, roly poly bugs, ???</i>
“Hidden” activities: Stealing food, eating mice, hiding nuts	“Hidden” events: turning into frogs, the time Rodrigo’s tarantula got lost in the classroom
What we learn here that might surprise you: What hermit crabs eat, how caterpillars turn into butterflies, how often a snake needs to eat, different kinds of webs spiders spin	What kindergartners don’t know: Schools are not just for people, you can bring your pet to school for show and tell, Mr. James on the third floor has a pet boa in his classroom, the seagulls will steal your lunch if you’re eating outside

This student’s controlling idea could be:

Deciding on your controlling idea:

Now think about the essay you will be writing. Remember your audience.

My controlling idea is: _____

Evidence and Details

Wow! You have your **topics**, **audience**, and a **controlling idea**. Now you are ready to make some notes about the details and evidence that will support your controlling idea. You only want to include notes about the secret you will write about. In the spaces below, write the **details** about your secret that support your controlling idea. You can use your notes from “Secrets of Our School - What I Know.”

Who is involved and what happens?	Where is the secret?
What is surprising?	When is the secret happening?
More...	



Day Three: RESEARCH (OPTIONAL)

Your teacher may give you time to research your school and gather more evidence to support your controlling idea. Be sure to make notes about everything you learn about the school.



Day Four: Planning an Essay

Good writers organize their ideas before they begin writing. They identify which details are the best evidence to support their controlling idea, then group that evidence into paragraphs that make sense and put the paragraphs in order.

Here is an example of a student's outline:

Introduction (Introduce your school and write your controlling idea) When people think about Flynn Elementary, they usually think about the people who come here. But one of the most interesting secrets of our school is that it is full of animal life.
Point #1 Classroom Pets Evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Ms. Rodriguez' hermit crabs,● Mr. James' boa Rosalind,● hamster in 208,● mice in 1st grade
Point #2 Wild animals too. Evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● seagulls at lunch time,● the garden for tiny animals,● injured squirrel we found in 3rd grade
Point #3 can learn a lot about animals at this school. Evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● what hermit crabs eat,● how caterpillars turn into butterflies,● how often a snake needs to eat,● different kinds of webs spiders spin
Conclusion (Creatively restate controlling idea) Animals are the hidden life of this school. Everywhere you look you can see evidence of animal life. Even at night, when all the people all go home, this school belongs to the animals...

Making an outline for my essay:

Now, use your notes to complete an outline for your essay. You will use this outline tomorrow when you write. As you choose the evidence and details to include in your essay, be sure to think about two things:

1. How does this evidence and details support my controlling idea?
2. What order should I present my evidence and details? This will be the sequence of my paragraphs—first, second, third, etc.

Introduction (Introduce your school and write your controlling idea) <hr/> <hr/>	
Choose two or three points (topics) to support your controlling idea. Then list the evidence that supports those points.	
Point #1	
Evidence:	
Point #2	
Evidence:	
Point #3	
Evidence:	
Conclusion (Creatively restate controlling idea) <hr/> <hr/>	



Day Five: Writing Your Essay

Here's the Prompt:

The Secret of Our School

You are an expert on our school. In fact, you know many things about it that others may not. What is the most interesting secret of our school that you would like teachers and others to know before you leave? Describe our school from the perspective of this secret. Include lots of details and observations, and as much descriptive language as possible. Be sure to look back at your notes and outline while writing.

Writing Reminders:

Keep the following points in mind since you won't have time to rewrite:

- Introduce your house/apartment with a sentence that captures the reader's attention.
- Organize your ideas so that they are easy to follow.
- Use precise and vivid vocabulary to describe your house/apartment.
- Use a variety of sentence types.

After you write:

- Check your punctuation. Use capital letters, commas, periods, quotation marks and spelling correctly.
- Give your essay a title. (Write a title that will help your reader know what your essay is about).
- Go back and check that you have done everything on this checklist.