

Oakland Unified School District ♦ Process Writing Assessment
6th Grade Expository Writing:
A Problem Middle School Students Face

Introduction

Students have to deal with many problems in middle school. Some examples of common problems include bullying, fights with parents or friends, peer pressure, and dropping classes. Middle school students themselves know the most about what problems they have to deal with! In this activity, you'll identify, explain, and describe a common problem that middle school students face.

After working through some preliminary activities, you will write an expository essay about a problem. **Expository writing explains and describes.** In this kind of writing, it is important to establish a controlling idea (thesis) and support it with details and evidence. As you write, it is also important to keep in mind that your readers may not know the problem you are describing, so you should provide background information and use appropriate language to help them understand your ideas.

Getting Started

Think about the topic of this year's writing prompt: *A Problem Middle School Students Face*. Work with a classmate to make a list of three problems many middle school students experience at some time or another. Name them, describe them, and/or draw them in the space below.

<i>Three Problems Middle School Students Face</i>		
1.	2.	3.

★ Put a star beside the one problem you can write the most (and the best) about.

Vocabulary

Your writing will be more interesting (and your reading more informed) if you review some vocabulary. Read through the list of Group A words, then find synonyms for them in the Group B words. A synonym is a word that means the same or almost the same thing. Find a synonym for each line.

Group A

1. Clique _____
2. Pervasive _____
3. Problem _____
4. Mend _____

Group B

Issue Gang Group Persistent Repair Reject Fix Challenge

Reading a Professional Writer's Essay

Read about what one professional magazine writer thinks is a common problem for middle school students. In *How Kids Make Kids Feel Left Out* you'll read about the problem of cliques. While you read, "code" in the margin of the article by writing:

- 1 = where the professional writer explains what the problem is
- 2 = where the professional writer describes how the problem makes kids feel
- 3 = where the professional writer describes how or why cliques are formed
- 4 = where the professional writer explains what can be done about cliques

How Kids Make Kids Feel Left Out
adapted from a kidshealth.org article

Have you ever felt purposely left out by a certain group of people at school? Many middle school students dread going to school because of social cliques. Though cliques are groups of friends, not all groups of friends are cliques. A clique is an exclusive group that leaves some kids out on purpose. Usually one or two popular kids control who gets to be in the clique and who gets left out. Once in a clique, kids may act very differently than they did before. Cliques are a serious problem in middle schools that hurt the well-being and emotional health of many students.

Cliques are problematic because they create peer pressure. Often kids who join one may find themselves pressured to say and do things that they might not normally feel comfortable doing. For example, young people who have recently joined a clique of "popular" kids might start to ignore some of the close friends that they used to hang

around with all the time, because their new clique doesn't approve of those people. While it might feel wrong to treat friends this way, the pressure to be a part of the clique might cause kids to behave rudely or inconsiderately to their old friends anyway. Formerly excellent students might start to ignore their grades because the friends in their new clique don't think that getting good grades is cool. When their grades start to fall these kids might end up in serious academic trouble, all because of their need to fit in. The pressure to fit in to a group can cause people to become thoughtless and even self-destructive.

There are many reasons why kids form cliques. For example people who share an interest in something like sports or computer games or music may form one. Kids who get into cliques sometimes want to be popular and feel accepted by those that they feel have social influence at school. At school among large groups of people it is easy for students to feel lonely, isolated, and insecure. Young people may think that belonging to a clique will give them a sense of identity and belonging. Cliques are so common that most kids become part of one at some time or another.

Cliques can cause problems because kids on the outside of a clique sometimes get hurt feelings. They might feel very frustrated, angry, or sad and want to cry or say mean things about the people in the clique when they feel unfairly excluded. Clara was a 7th grader whose friends decided she didn't wear the most fashionable clothes. They started excluding her from their group table at lunch and refused to eat with her. Clara ate by herself for several weeks while the clique shared a table and food. Luckily, a teacher noticed that Clara was upset and sad and talked to Clara about making friends with other students. This didn't take Clara long, and she found other friends to hang out with. Like Clara, many kids feel hurt when they are left out of cliques. When this happens, it is easy for kids to blame themselves and develop low self esteem. Middle school counselors and teachers see cliques as one of the most serious problems that affect students' mental health.

Parents, siblings, other family members, and teachers can help when someone is being left out or treated in a mean way. They might help by giving advice on how to deal with mean kids. Sometimes they can teach kids that it isn't okay to treat others this way and show them ways to treat each other better. Adults can also help kids learn to play together, include each other, mend hurt feelings, and repair broken friendships. They can encourage young people to make friends and belong to a group without leaving others out. Through example, they can show kids how to be popular by treating everyone with respect and kindness.

Cliques are a serious and common problem in middle schools today. Knowing how to recognize clique formation helps kids avoid being a part of a clique. It also helps them know how to respond to a clique if they are left out of one. Since middle school is a delicate time for students' emotional and psychological development, it is important that all students feel a sense of belonging. Standing up against cliques is one way to ensure middle school students are happy.

Thinking, Talking and Planning

Work with a partner to fill in the graphic organizer on the following page to show what strategies this professional writer used.

**What is the problem the author describes
and why does the author think it is important?**

What is the problem? How do you define it?

How do kids who face this problem feel?

What causes this problem?

How can this problem be
solved or avoided?

One example of this problem
that you or someone you
know experienced

Now, think about the problem you have selected to write about. You will use ideas from a **few, not all**, of the boxes on the next page to develop the paragraphs in your essay. After you complete the graphic organizer, mark the boxes you plan to use in your essay.

On Your Own

What is the problem you will write about and why do you think it is important?		
What is the problem? How do you define it?	How do students who face this problem feel?	
What causes this problem?	How can this problem be solved or avoided?	One example of this problem that you or someone you know experienced

Organizing Your Ideas

Use the graphic organizer below to organize your ideas before you write.

Introduction (Controlling idea/thesis)	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
Main Idea #1 _____	
Supporting details:	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
Main Idea #2 _____	
Supporting details:	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
Main Idea #3 _____	
Supporting details:	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
Conclusion (Creatively restate main ideas)	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

Writing

Here's the prompt:

A Problem Middle School Students Face

Teachers want to better understand the problems that middle school students face. Teachers will learn from your writing and know how to better support all students by understanding these problems.

Write an essay about a common problem faced by middle school students. Describe the problem and explain why you think it is important. You may use the notes you took earlier to help you write your essay.

Writing Reminders:

As you write, keep the following points in mind since you won't have time to rewrite.

- ___ Begin in an interesting way that leads to the thesis or controlling idea of your essay.
- ___ Use language and vocabulary that is precise and lively.
- ___ Support your controlling idea (thesis) by including specific information through explanation, experiences and opinions, examples and/or description.
- ___ Organize the main sections of your essay into paragraphs so that the reader can follow your ideas.
- ___ End with a confident conclusion that restates your main point.

After You Write (Editing)

After you write, take time to review the items below. You may make changes right on your paper.

- ___ Give the essay a title (You can choose your title before or after you write the essay).
- ___ Check your punctuation; Use capital letters, commas, periods, and quotations appropriately.
- ___ Check your spelling.