

ACTIVE YOUNG READERS
GRADES 4–6

ASSESSMENT RESOURCE

Reading Record Masters

Fernando's Friendship Journal

Word Count: 310

Friday

Our teacher told us today that for the next few weeks we will be discussing friendship. I'm going to write in my journal about things I do with my friends. That way, I'll have lots of ideas to discuss.

Saturday

This afternoon, I saw Craig walking all alone on Carter's Beach. I know he's sad because his grandma is sick, but I had other stuff I wanted to do. So, I pretended that I didn't see him and went home and played some video games.

Sunday

Today when we were playing baseball, Deana said she thought we should take turns pitching. I told her to forget about it! I'm the best pitcher, so why shouldn't I stay in until I feel too tired to keep going? No one else said anything, but I think they all agreed with me.

Monday

Today I had a great snack for recess—cheese strings. I know those are Gina's favourite, and she had said she was hungry, but do I have to feed the whole school? When she had her back to me, I ate them all myself.

Tuesday

At lunch, Ivan tripped over my feet. It might have been an accident, but he should be more alert. My feet were only sticking out into his path a little bit! I told him he should open his eyes and watch where he's going.

Wednesday

Today is a very hard day to write about. We talked about friendship in class, and these are some of the things people said friends do:

- Friends take turns.
- Friends help each other.
- Friends share.
- Friends are kind to each other.

When I thought about the last few days, I turned twenty shades of red. I knew I had been everything a friend is *not*. Starting today, I'm going to try to be a better friend.

The Night of the Bear

Word Count: 342

Hi, I'm Madeleine. I turned ten this year, so I got to go with my dad on his annual camping trip.

The first night, the four of us were sitting around the campfire: Dad and I, along with Mr. Travers and his son, Seamus. I'd just helped Dad hang our pack from the limb of a tree. The tree was about thirty metres outside our campsite, and the pack itself was so high up, I couldn't touch it even when I jumped.

"All our food is in that pack," said Dad by the campfire. "We hang it up so the bears can't reach it. A black bear can smell food from two kilometres away."

Seamus got a funny look on his face when he heard that.

"Are there bears around here?" he asked.

That really made Dad and Mr. Travers laugh.

"Of course," said Mr. Travers. "We're in the woods now, you know."

Dad and I were sleeping in one tent, and Seamus and Mr. Travers were in another. In the middle of the night, I woke up because I remembered something horrible! I'd left a bag of peanuts in my knapsack by the firepit. I wondered how many bears were on their way to our camp right then, smelling out those nuts. Should I go get my pack before one of them showed up?

In the tent, it was so dark that I couldn't see anything. But outside I could hear leaves rustling and twigs cracking. Then I heard this awful, really loud growling noise, right outside the tent.

There was only one thing to do. I shook my Dad awake and told him about the bear. At first he looked scared, and then he started laughing.

“You mean that horrible noise out there? That’s no bear, that’s Mr. Travers snoring!”

What a relief! I forgot all about my peanuts and fell fast asleep. In the morning, we discovered that a raccoon had opened my knapsack and eaten all the nuts. Next time I'll know better!

A Change of Heart

Word Count: 290

Katy was pleased to see that the lights were on over the rink. She needed time to think about her problem.

She loved hockey and wanted to play for Team Canada one day. At the same time, her mother was pushing her to take piano lessons. Katy thought that was a wimpy thing to do. Hockey players didn't play piano!

A lone skater circled the rink. It was Terri McNeil, a member of the Canadian women's hockey team and a local hero. Katy admired her and wanted to be just like her.

Terri suddenly came to a halt in front of Katy and said, "Looks like we're the only ones crazy enough to skate outdoors on such a cold night."

"Yeah, looks like it," said Katy. "I don't mind the cold, though. It's better than being stuck inside playing piano. That's where my mom would like me to be. I'm not going to play piano when I grow up, so why do I need to take lessons?"

"I play to relax," said Terry. "After an exhausting game, it's a nice way to unwind."

Katy was shocked. "*You* play the piano?"

"Sure," Terri said. "My parents insisted I take lessons. They thought everyone should try to do something creative. A lot of hockey players have hobbies like that. Our goalie paints, and another player sings in a choir."

Katy thought about it. Maybe she could be a professional hockey player *and* play the piano. “Thanks for talking to me about this,” she said.

“No problem,” Terri said. “Now, we’d better get moving before we freeze out here!”

“OK,” Katy said, “and when I go home, I’m going to tell my mom I’ve had a change of heart.”

That Pest

Word Count: 264

The saucy grey squirrel leaped off the bird feeder and scurried up a tree, scolding Jerry as it ran. As usual, it had climbed the feeder pole and stuffed itself with birdseed. Jerry shook his fist at it. After all, his hobby was feeding the birds, not That Pest!

After school, Jerry cut out a big cardboard circle and poked a hole in the centre. Then he stuck the feeder pole through it and taped the cardboard to the pole. He set up the feeder again and sat down to watch. When the crafty squirrel couldn't climb over the cardboard, it ran up a tree and scampered along a branch. With a flying leap, it landed right on the feeder.

The next day, Jerry found an old metal hanger in the garden shed. He carefully nailed the hanger to the tree trunk and hung the feeder on the end. That Pest must have been watching, for a moment later it ran down the tree trunk. Then, like an acrobat, it swung over to the feeder and started munching.

“That does it!” muttered Jerry, and he put the feeder away. He watched That Pest search for it, with a puzzled look in its beady eyes. It chattered to itself, then sat up, grooming its whiskers, its coat shining in the sun. It was pretty cute, thought Jerry. And it didn't eat all *that* much. Besides, he would miss the birds. So he hung up the feeder again.

“You win,” he told the squirrel.

Snickety-snickety-chrrr-chrrr-chrrr! said That Pest.

It sounded a lot like laughter.

The Klondike Box

Word Count: 268

Heather had to do a project about her family for school. She had to find something interesting to share about her family's history. She complained to her parents that there was nothing interesting to tell. That evening when she was in bed, her dad brought her a little wooden box to look at. He told Heather that it had belonged to her great-great-grandfather, who had panned for gold in the Klondike gold rush. Inside the box was a small lump of gold, and a little dried-up object that her dad said was a rattle from a rattlesnake. Also in the box was a metal tag with the name "Smoky" on it. "What a strange collection," Heather thought.

With the box still in her hand, Heather drifted off to sleep. Next, she saw forest all around. A man was crouched down beside a stream, swishing water around in a pan. Heather could see the gleam of gold in it. Beside the man sat a big, grey husky. Suddenly, there was a rattling sound. The dog barked just as a snake bit the man.

The man clutched his leg. "Smoky, go find George," he gasped in pain, and the dog ran away. Not long afterward, Smoky returned with a man behind him.

The injured man hugged the dog as his friend took care of the snakebite. "Thanks, Smoky," he whispered. "You're a hero."

The next thing Heather knew, it was morning. Looking at the box in her hand, she thought, "It wasn't just a dream. It really happened. Now I know the secret of the Klondike box."

Operation Babysit

Word Count: 351

Becky looked at her list for Operation Babysit:

Emergency phone list? Check.

Basic first-aid supplies? Check.

Entertainment materials? Check.

She rang the doorbell and was invited in. “The twins are just finishing their dinner. Please have them in bed by 8:30. We’ll be home by 11:00. The number is by the phone.” With a flurry, Mr. and Mrs. Jones were off.

Becky dreaded babysitting the Terrible Two. She still had gum in her hair. A mustard bomb had ruined her favourite T-shirt. Her math book was still missing.

Sighing, she went to the kitchen and found the seven-year-olds. “I have a surprise for you when you’ve cleaned your plates,” she said. The twins quickly finished their dinner.

“Let’s tidy up, and then we’ll start,” Becky said. To her surprise, they cleaned up. She got her bag and took out paper bags, craft scissors, glue, and decorations. Together, they made puppets and then giggled as they performed several silly plays. Afterward, the twins even agreed to help put things away.

Next Becky said, “I brought another treat—my brother’s *ThunderStrike 2* video game.” The twins cheered. For half an hour they battled each other for control of the universe. Becky took a turn and marvelled at how well behaved the twins were.

When Becky moved to turn off the game, they protested only slightly. “Wash your faces and get on your pyjamas. I’ll get you a bedtime snack and meet you in your room.” The twins cheered, then raced each other up the stairs.

Ten minutes later, Becky found the boys ready for bed. They ate their snacks while Becky read to them. They laughed at the antics of the book’s characters, and only resisted a little when Becky insisted that it was time for them to brush their teeth and go to sleep.

Becky walked downstairs, amazed at how smoothly Operation Babysit had gone this time. With a smile, she said to herself, “Well, I’ve finally got them trained.”

Upstairs, the twins peered at each other across the room, and one whispered softly, “Well, we’ve finally got her trained.”

Dream Horses

Word Count: 203

The moon shone down on a boy cast ashore by the tide, and on the broken mast he still clung to. Around him, a herd of shaggy horses cropped the tough beach grass. One of them tugged at a clump beside the boy's head, and its warm breath fanned his cheek. Matthew roused fearfully, remembering the crash of the falling mast and the weight of the sail that swept him overboard. For a moment he stared wide-eyed at the horses, pale in the moonlight. Then, listening to their gentle breathing, he drifted off to sleep again.

Someone was calling his name. Matthew awoke to bright sunlight dancing on the waves, and saw the longboat from the wrecked clipper ship riding in on the tide. He stumbled down the beach to meet it just as the first mate stepped ashore. The mate said they had searched the whole island for him.

"An island? But I saw horses!" Matthew whispered, remembering the comfort of them in the night, wondering if he had dreamed them.

"Aye, lad. You've seen the wild horses of Sable Island," said the mate, pointing.

At their feet, the tide was erasing the half-moon prints of hoofs from the sand.

Dear Diary

Word Count: 350

Sept. 7

Dear Diary,

I feel really optimistic about my new school. It seems to be a big improvement over my former one. I've already made a friend.

Her name is Rebecca, and she's hilarious. We laugh a lot.

Sept. 16

Dear Diary,

Another new girl named Brooke arrived at school this week, and she doesn't like me. She liked Rebecca from the start, though, and they started sitting together at lunch. I tried sitting with them, but they ignored me. I was furious because Rebecca was my friend first.

I also discovered that Rebecca had a sleepover last weekend and didn't invite me. I told my mom, and she said to just ignore it. But how can I? I also saw a piece of paper that was circulating around class. It was a survey asking people if they liked me or not. I started to cry when I saw it, and when my teacher heard about it, she got sad and told me I was beautiful. I think she might just be saying that, though.

Sept. 20

Dear Diary,

Looking on the Internet today, I discovered a Web site where people discuss bullying. There are many stories from kids just like me. Someone said that bullies are chickens and that we should rise above them. I admired that.

I've started to understand that the problem is the bully's, and that just because a person doesn't look or act the same as everyone else doesn't mean they're not as good. My teacher told me last week that we are all special in our own way, and now I believe her.

Sept. 22

Dear Diary,

Today something inside me exploded. I confronted Brooke and said, "You're just a chicken. You pick on me because you don't feel good about yourself. Your words can't hurt me anymore." And then I just walked away. It felt awesome.

Rebecca also told me that she's sorry she stopped being my friend. I think she was afraid that Brooke might be mean to her. I accepted her apology. I'm glad I rose above it.

Minou of Grand Pré

Word Count: 274

Madeleine cuddled her cat against her cheek. Around her, Acadian families stood weeping on the shore with their belongings. It was October 8, 1755. British soldiers were putting people aboard longboats, which would carry them out to waiting ships. Soon the Acadians would be sent across the sea to far lands.

It was like the end of the world, Madeleine thought. And the soldiers were not going to let her take Minou. They said there was no room for pets on the ships. For Madeleine, Minou would be a small comfort in these terrible times.

“I won’t leave you, Minou,” vowed Madeleine.

But how to hide her? They could take only a few bundles. There was no room in any of them for a cat. Then Madeleine felt a tug on her skirt. It was her little sister, Marie-Blanche. She was clutching her doll in its blanket, and Madeleine’s eyes opened wide. The big doll wore a long-sleeved dress and a frilled cap.

In a moment, Madeleine was undressing the doll. Marie-Blanche was too surprised to cry. Madeleine slipped the dress over Minou’s head and tucked her paws into the sleeves. Then she pulled the cap right down over the cat’s ears, so that only Minou’s furry face peeked out. She wrapped the doll in its blanket again, and handed it back to Marie-Blanche.

She wasn't a moment too soon, for a soldier was ordering them aboard a longboat. Madeleine hugged Minou, praying she wouldn't wriggle, praying the soldiers wouldn't notice....

And so it was that Minou, the greatest mouse catcher in all Grand Pré, journeyed to a far land.

Mr. Morse Saves the Day

Word Count: 421

I looked across the garage at my friend Idib, hoping our captor wouldn't notice. Idib looked back, his eyes filled with fear, but at that moment our captor looked up and said sharply, "I told you no eye contact and no talking!" With a sigh, I sat back in my chair and thought about how we had come to be in this situation.

Earlier that afternoon, Idib, two other friends, and I had agreed to play a game of "capture" with Joe and his friends. We should have known better than to play with the school bully. We split up, and Idib and I hid in the garage, sandwiched between the lawnmower and the snow blower. Unfortunately for us, Idib sneezed just as Joe walked by the garage door. Allergies! Before long we were tied up and Joe had a garden hose pointed directly at us, ready to send a stream of cold water in our direction if we dared to move. Now, here we were, trapped, with no way of signalling for help. *Signalling...signals....* Suddenly my mind started to form a plan.

The month before, we had studied the inventor Samuel Morse and the telegraph. Idib and I and some others had really gotten into it and had learned Morse code. Sometimes we even tapped messages to one another in class. Now I wondered if Morse code could get us out of this mess.

Very softly, I started to tap my fingernails on the wooden arm of my chair. *Short short.* Long pause. *Long short short.* Pause. *Short short.* Pause. I continued on, hoping it would sound like nervous tapping to our captor, but that Idib would get my message.

After a few seconds, I saw Idib straighten up and start to listen intently. I finished my message, which was *I distract, you run*, then repeated it. When I finally stopped, Idib gave a slight nod.

Suddenly I shouted, “I think my appendix is bursting!” and fell to the floor, rolling around in obvious pain. Joe ran to my side and, in a flash, Idib was able to undo the rope he was tied up with. He ran out the door toward the tap, which luckily was close at hand. He quickly turned off the water supply.

Some people may think that, with so many other forms of communication, no one needs to learn Morse code. Maybe they’re right. All I know is that, when I needed him, Mr. Morse saved the day.

The Weather Whiz

Word Count: 296

Lee's dad was in a bad mood again, because the weather forecast he presented on TV was wrong. He had said there was a hundred percent chance of rain, and then the sun had shone. Now people would phone the TV station and say all sorts of nasty things. Lee sighed, and went back to trying to think up a science project. Leaning his chin on his hand, he watched their elderly neighbour, Mrs. Henderson, sitting in her yard with her wash, which was drying in the sunshine. "I wonder how she knew it wouldn't rain," thought Lee.

The next day was Saturday, and his dad had predicted sunshine. But Lee saw Mrs. Henderson set off to go shopping wearing a raincoat and carrying an umbrella. About an hour later, there was a heavy downpour. His dad stood at the window and gloomily watched the rain drumming on the road.

Lee told him that Mrs. Henderson had known it would rain. His dad said that was ridiculous, but Lee went next door anyway and asked Mrs. Henderson how she knew.

"My kitchen drawer was sticking," said Mrs. Henderson. "Catchy drawer and sticky door, coming rain will pour and pour."

"But why did you leave your wash out yesterday?" asked Lee.

Mrs. Henderson chuckled. "Dew on the grass, rain won't come to pass," she said.

Lee began keeping score. He discovered that Mrs. Henderson was right more often than his dad was, and she had all sorts of neat rhymes and sayings that explained why. Lee wrote it all down. He was pretty sure he had a blue-ribbon science project. And the day he caught his dad peeking over the fence to see what Mrs. Henderson was up to, he was certain of it.

The Candy Dance

Word Count: 312

It was Molly's first powwow, and Grandpa said there would be singing and dancing and storytelling. But Molly didn't know any songs or dances, and she didn't have a special outfit to wear. Would people think she wasn't a real Mi'kmaq?

Grandpa was splendid in his buckskin clothes decorated with beadwork. He looked every bit his Mi'kmaw name, Running Wolf. He wore an eagle feather in his hair, and Molly knew it was a sign of honour. She wished her family didn't live far away in Montreal—it meant she didn't get to see her grandpa very often.

A drum was throbbing. It sounded like a heart, Molly thought, but bigger, like the heartbeat of the whole world. Her foot tapped the grass as she and Grandpa stood watching the dancers. Some were not much older than she was, and one wore a really gorgeous dress with coloured bands and fringes. How Molly wished she was that girl, stepping proudly to the rhythm of the drum.

“There will be a dance for you, Molly,” promised Grandpa.

Molly waited and waited. There was more dancing, then they sat and listened to stories. At last Grandpa pushed her gently toward a circle of children, and tall dancers stepped forward to join them. There was something on the ground in the middle of the circle....

It was a mound of wrapped candies! The drum throbbed, and voices sang. Half embarrassed, half thrilled, Molly stepped this way, that way, following the others. Suddenly the music stopped, and the children dashed for the candy. Molly was too slow to grab any, but a laughing boy poured some of his into her hands.

Next year, Molly promised herself, she would practise for the powwow, and maybe learn a story to tell. The beat of the drum in her heart danced her all the way home.

Rabbit Snares the Moon

A Mi'kmaw Tale

Word Count: 253

Long ago, a clever hunter named Rabbit lived in the woods, where he set snares to catch food. But one day someone began robbing his snares, and Rabbit got hungrier and hungrier. He decided to catch the thief. He fashioned a snare from a loop of bowstring, and he rose before dawn to set it. Then he concealed himself behind a tree and held the end of the bowstring.

At first there was brilliant moonlight, but then the heavens darkened and a strange radiance appeared among the trees. When the light hovered above the snare, Rabbit yanked the bowstring, and the loop tightened. At once there was a terrific struggle, and a flash of dazzling light hurt Rabbit's eyes. Rabbit tied the bowstring to a sapling and scampered to a nearby stream. Grabbing mud from the bank, he hurled it at the light, trying to put it out.

“Stop!” ordered a silvery voice.

Quivering with terror, Rabbit ventured closer. There lay Moon Man caught in the snare, his radiant face all spotted with mud!

“Give me my freedom!” he demanded.

“P...Promise never to steal from me again,” faltered Rabbit, his voice squeaking with fear.

Moon Man promised. Squinting his eyes against the glare, Rabbit gnawed through the bowstring. The snare loosened, and Moon Man floated free into the sky.

Moon Man kept his promise, but if you gaze at the full moon you can still see the marks of the mud that Rabbit cast at him.

It All Adds Up

Word Count: 356

Chris smiled to herself as she looked out over the Atlantic Ocean from the deck of the *Juno*. The *Juno* belonged to her cousin Owen, who ran cruises out of Halifax. In mid-August, Owen had asked Chris if she'd like some work until school started. Chris had been thrilled. There were lots of little jobs, like taking tickets and loading supplies, that a twelve-year-old could do. The best part, of course, had been going out to sea every day. What made Chris smile, though, was remembering the agreement they had come to about how much she would get paid. What Chris had asked for was this: her pay would start at just a penny for the first day, but the amount would double each day. Owen had thought it over for only a few seconds before saying, "Sure, kid, that's, ummm, 1 cent, 2 cents, 4 cents, 8 cents, 16 cents, 32 cents, 64 cents...no problem! Let's see, that's just \$1.27 for a whole week's work! It's a deal, but I thought *you'd* be better at math than *that!*" Chris had just ducked her head and grinned. Now, three weeks later, it was the last day of summer vacation, and time to teach Owen a little math lesson of her own.

After the *Juno* had docked and the last tourist had left, Owen asked Chris how much he owed her. Chris worked on a calculator for a few minutes, then said, "You owe me \$20,971.52."

"What!?" Owen gasped and grew pale. "You started at only a penny a day! There's no way a penny could grow to that amount in three weeks—is there?"

“Ah, the magic of mathematics, my friend...” Chris started to say in a deep voice, but she burst out laughing at the sight of Owen’s horrified face. “OK, since you’re my favourite cousin, and since you let me go out in your boat every day, I’ll let you off the hook. You can just pay me minimum wage—I did keep track of my hours. But really, Owen, I thought *you’d* be better at math than *that!*”

The Penguin

Word Count: 353

It was a beautiful morning. Officer Terrell was sitting in her car enjoying the sunshine. She was waiting for something to happen, something out of the ordinary. The past few days had been quite uneventful, but she hoped today would be different.

Officer Terrell was taking a sip of her coffee when she saw something a little strange drive past. She recognized Mr. Wallace driving his car, but she couldn't distinguish what was in the passenger seat next to him. Thinking that this might be interesting, she set off after him.

After trailing Mr. Wallace for a few minutes, Officer Terrell signalled him to pull over. She hopped out of her car and walked around to Mr. Wallace's window. She peered in at the passenger seat.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed. "Is that a penguin?"

Mr. Wallace nervously bit his lip. "Yes, Officer, it is."

"Well, I think the appropriate thing to do would be to get this penguin somewhere safe," said Officer Terrell. "Yes, I think it would be best if you took it to the zoo."

Mr. Wallace thought for a moment, and then agreed that *would* be a good idea. He drove off and Officer Terrell got back in her car. She leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes. This had certainly turned out to be an interesting day.

The next day Officer Terrell was positioned in her regular spot, once again just waiting for something to happen. It wasn't long before she looked into her rear-view mirror and saw Mr. Wallace's car approaching. Wondering how he had made out with taking the penguin to the zoo, she got out of her car and cautiously waved him over. Officer Terrell walked over to Mr. Wallace's window and looked in. She was astonished at what she saw. The penguin was still with him!

Confused, she said, "Mr. Wallace—I thought I told you yesterday to take that penguin to the zoo!"

Mr. Wallace replied very calmly, "Yes, and so I did. And we had so much fun that I thought I'd take him to a baseball game today!"

Gordy the Great

Word Count: 401

The first basketball game of the season was about to begin. Gordy was extremely confident that he'd be starting as the point guard for the Pine Ridge Panthers, just as he did every year, so he began to saunter out onto the basketball court. Suddenly, though, his coach said the words that Gordy never thought he'd hear: "Sorry, Gordy, I'd like you to sit out this time."

Sitting on the bench a few minutes later, still reeling from the shock, Gordy tried to make sense of what exactly had gone wrong. That pipsqueak Matthew McRae had somehow taken his position. What had happened? Gordy started to think back over his recent encounters with Matthew.

He remembered one time several weeks earlier when he'd seen Matthew out shooting some baskets behind the high school.

"Want to play some one-on-one?" Matthew had asked.

"No, thanks."

"Maybe we could practise some free throws together?"

Gordy had just laughed. "No way," he'd said. "Some of us are fortunate enough to be natural-born athletes—we really don't need to practise."

Gordy's thoughts moved to another day. He'd been standing outside Monroe's Corner Store, eating a jumbo bag of potato chips and drinking a cola. Matthew had come along, and Gordy had offered him some chips.

“No, thanks,” Matthew had replied. “I love them, but when I start eating them I can’t stop. I’m kind of in training. I’m just here to get some milk.”

“Whatever,” Gordy had shrugged, and he had turned away while Matthew walked into the store.

Gordy recalled yet another time. He’d been boasting to Matthew about staying up until dawn to watch *Doctor Dread’s Theatre of Fright* movies on television. He had asked Matthew if he had also watched them. Matthew had said no, he never stayed up all night, because if he did he’d feel too tired the next morning to be at his best. Gordy remembered rolling his eyes and thinking, “Bor-ing!”

Now, however, as he watched Matthew move effortlessly up and down the court as the crowd cheered, he considered that possibly he’d been wrong. Maybe Matthew was doing something right after all. Maybe Matthew was doing something that he, Gordy the Great, needed to be doing. Gordy sighed, leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, and made plans for the next day. Starting tomorrow, Gordy the Great was going to start getting into shape!

Pier 21

Word Count: 296

Dimitrio glowered at the calendar on the wall. The date was April 5, 1928. It was Dimitrio's first day in Canada, the wonderful day he had dreamed of for so long. Their ship had docked at Pier 21 a day late, and Dimitrio knew Papa would be waiting to meet them in Montreal. Papa had been alone there for a whole year, working hard to send them the money to pay for their passage. But now everything had gone wrong, because the man behind the desk in the great hall said they couldn't get on the train to Montreal. They had to stay here in Halifax until a doctor decided what was wrong with Elena. People with some kinds of sickness weren't allowed to be immigrants to Canada.

And it was his own fault his sister was sick! Dimitrio had taken her up on deck yesterday, and it had started to rain. He hadn't noticed the rain because he was exploring the ship's lifeboats. But soon Elena's teeth were chattering and she was soaking wet. He'd hurried her below and rubbed her dry with a towel, but this morning she had a fever. Maybe the doctor would send them back to Greece! Maybe Elena would die in this strange country.

Dimitrio felt weak with fear. While his mother was busy with the baby, he slipped away to the examining room. He opened the door a crack and peeked in. The doctor was listening to Elena's chest with an instrument. He looked up at Elena and spoke to her in English, a language Dimitrio did not understand. Then the doctor smiled, and Dimitrio understood what he must be saying. Elena was going to get well. They would be taking the train to Papa after all.

The Memory Book

Word Count: 302

Mr. Hardcastle smelled of peppermints, and Angie hated peppermints. All he'd said when her teacher introduced Angie was "Hmmpf!" and now he was sitting in his wheelchair with his arms crossed, frowning at her.

Angie had offered to volunteer at Cedarview Lodge as a term project. She had imagined herself visiting some nice lady, maybe holding her arm as they walked around the garden. Well, she had suggested the garden, and Mr. Hardcastle had just snorted. What was she supposed to do with someone as prickly as a porcupine?

Sighing, Angie plumped down on a chair. As she rummaged in her backpack for a tissue, out plopped a book with a lock on it. Mr. Hardcastle's sharp eyes lit up, and he asked if that was her diary. Angie nodded, jamming it back into her bag. Then Mr. Hardcastle said that when he was her age, he had kept a diary too. He still did. He called it his memory book, and said he wrote about everything and everybody—the more gossip the better!

He wheeled over to the bookcase and pulled out a leather book. He said it was the diary he had kept when he was her age, and he began reading bits from it, showing her funny drawings he had done of his sister. Mr. Hardcastle had had some of the same problems as Angie. For one thing, he had an older sister who was a real pain.

Incredibly soon, it was time for Angie to go, but she hadn't yet discovered how he had gotten revenge on his sister.

“See you next week, Mr. Hardcastle?” she said hopefully.

“I’d be honoured, Ms. Chong,” he replied.

Angie could hardly wait to get home and scribble everything down. Maybe someday she’d even share it with Mr. Hardcastle.

Producer for a Day

Word Count: 310

Nisha, winner of radio station CKDX’s “Producer for a Day” contest, shook the hand of Derek, the studio producer.

“This is where we make magic,” said Derek. He gestured around the recording studio.

Nisha looked at the large console covered in dozens of sliding switches. Through a window, she could see another room, filled with microphone stands and metres of wiring.

“And that’s the soundproof booth,” continued Derek. “Today you’ll see a singer dubbing some of her vocal tracks.”

“Dubbing?” Nisha asked hesitantly.

“I’d better explain how a recording studio works,” laughed Derek.

“We do multi-track recording here. That means everything we record, each singer’s voice and each instrument, is recorded on its own. Each of these recordings is called a track. Nothing that is recorded on one track affects the others. Usually we record on 24 tracks, but we can also record on 48 and 72 tracks. Then we put the different tracks together, so that they sound like one recording.”

“Why is doing multi-track recording better than just recording everything at once?” asked Nisha.

“Well, if we record each part separately, we can add new instruments or vocals later without having to redo the whole thing,” explained Derek. “We can also replace sections easily if someone makes a mistake. It means that one musician can play more than one instrument on a recording, or we can add sound effects to some tracks. Then the mixing engineer, the person who combines the tracks, can mix the very best version of each track for the final recording.”

“Cool!” Nisha said.

“It *is* cool,” Derek agreed. “You’ll understand after today why the sound quality on your CDs is so good! Now, are you ready to be a producer for a day?”

“I sure am—and I’d better get started,” Nisha answered. “I’ve got a lot to learn!”

The Solitary Planet

Word Count: 323

On the starship *Icarus*, we'd done our best. For years we'd searched the farthest reaches of the Milky Way, seeking out new solar systems and visiting unexplored planets.

Our mission sounded simple, but it had proven to be not so easy to perform: We were supposed to discover, among the millions of stars in the galaxy, a place other than Earth where life existed.

Every planet we probed proved to be a vast desert, as dull and lifeless as our own Mars or Jupiter. Could it really be true that we on Earth were alone in the galaxy? And the countless other galaxies in the universe—Andromeda, M87, the Magellanic Clouds—were they just empty light shows too? I never felt so alone in my life as at the moment we turned *Icarus* back to Earth, our mission a failure.

The route home took us through an empty pocket of the Milky Way. No stars, just a huge cloud of gas and dust that shone almost as brightly as our sun. And then, as we came through the cloud, we found the strangest thing. A solitary planet, suspended in space. It wasn't elliptical like Earth or most of the others we'd visited. Instead, it formed a perfect sphere.

We landed, of course. We couldn't resist making a final probe, but this was the worst planet yet. Not only was there no *biology*—no life—but no *geology* either. Not a mountain, not a hill, not a stone, not a single grain of sand. The surface of the planet was perfectly smooth.

“It’s like an eggshell, but it’s metallic,” said my chief-of-staff.

“It’s almost like we’ve landed on another ship,” I said, “but one a thousand times bigger than our own.”

We had only one moment to exchange a look before we felt its reactors surge to life, and we knew we *had* found life. A new adventure was about to begin!

The Mystery of Oak Island

Word Count: 300

Oak Island has a mystery. No one knows what it is, but many people have come to the island, hoping to solve it.

A long time ago, in 1795, a boy named Daniel McGinnis saw a strange dip in the ground. He and his two friends thought treasure might be buried there. After all, pirates used to sail nearby. Captain William Kidd was one of the most famous pirates. Perhaps it was his treasure. The boys dug as far as they could. No treasure. They tried again nine years later, with special digging equipment. This time, they found a stone with mysterious writing. Then the pit filled with water.

Over the years, many people in different places heard about the mystery. Some came to Oak Island to look for treasure. John Wayne was a famous movie star. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president of the United States. They both tried to find the treasure. Lots of holes were dug near the pit. Lots of tunnels were dug. Lots of money was spent looking for treasure. People began to call this place the “Money Pit.” No one had any luck.

People kept digging. They found strange things: pieces of gold chain, very old paper, a second stone with writing on it. One team used a TV camera. They said they saw three treasure chests 64 metres down, but the pit caved in. No one tried to open it again.

People still think there is buried treasure on the island. Perhaps there is, but no one knows for sure. What we do know is that lots of money has been spent looking for treasure. Six people have died trying to find it. Most of all, we know that no one has solved the mystery of Oak Island.

Drums

Word Count: 247

How can you talk without words? Beat a drum!

People have played drums for over 8000 years. People use drums all over the world, and not just for making music. In Europe, drums were used to send signals to soldiers. In Africa, drums copy the way people speak. These talking drums send messages far away. In North America, many Aboriginal peoples use drums, too. Some Aboriginal healers carry mini-drums.

Drums have special meanings. For the Mi'kmaq, the beating of a drum is like a heartbeat. Drums help to give us life, just as the heart gives life. Drums are also played for singing and dancing. They are an important part of Mi'kmaw tradition.

Drums come in different shapes, sizes, and colours. Many are made of animal skin and carved wood. The animal skin is called the *head* of the drum. The wood is called the *shell*. The shell is usually shaped like a bowl, but sometimes it is long and thin. The pieces of a drum are held together with nails, glue, cord, or buttons. To play the drum, the drummer hits the head with sticks or with a hand. Some drums do not have a head. The drummer plays this sort of drum by hitting the shell.

Bands and pop groups use many different types of drums. These drums also carry a message. They tell us the music is lively. Often the beat of the music tells us that we can get up and dance.

How to Make a Compass

Word Count: 255

Have you ever been on a hike or out in a boat? You may have had to use a compass to find the direction in which you wanted to go.

The needle on a compass is magnetic. It is balanced so that it can swing freely. Earth is like a giant magnet. Its strongest forces are at its two poles. No matter which way you hold a compass, its needle will turn and point toward the North Pole.

Hundreds of years ago, people had to make their own compasses. You can use a needle and magnet to make your own compass.

What You Need

- a steel needle
- a bar magnet
- a flat slice of cork
- a piece of tape
- a marker
- a small dish of water

What You Do

1. Stroke one end of the magnet along the needle about 30 times.

Always stroke in the same direction.

This will magnetize the needle.

2. Tape the needle to the piece of cork.
3. Mark an “N” for “North” on the cork, near the sharp end of the needle.
4. Float the cork in a dish of water. The tip of the needle will point toward the north.

The other end of the needle will point south.

You can check that your compass is working by comparing it with another compass. Do not put your compass too close to another one, though. The magnetism of one compass could attract the needle of the other, so that it no longer points north.

Living with Asthma

Word Count: 237

Every day when Sam goes to school, he checks that he has his “puffer” with him. This is because he has asthma. Sam can do all the things other children can do, but he has to work hard to stay healthy.

What Is Asthma?

When you breathe, you take air into your mouth and nose. The air goes down into your lungs, and back out again. To get to your lungs, the air flows through passages that get smaller and smaller. In children with asthma, the lining of these passages sometimes swells up. Air cannot pass in and out of their lungs easily, and it is hard for them to breathe. When this happens, they have an asthma attack. During an attack, they might cough or gasp for air.

What Causes Asthma?

Something that causes an asthma attack is called a *trigger*. Triggers are not the same for everyone. Children with asthma need to know what their triggers are, so that they can avoid asthma attacks.

What Makes Asthma Better?

Some medicines can help during an attack, and some can stop an attack from happening. Usually the medicine is **inhaled** (breathed in through the nose and mouth). It often comes in a special bottle, known as a “puffer.”

By watching for triggers and using the right medicine, children can live with asthma and have fun too.

Angus Walters: Captain of the *Bluenose*

Word Count: 219

Early Life

Angus Walters was born in 1882. His home town was Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. He learned to sail when he was just a boy. Angus was the captain of his own fishing boat when he was still a teenager. He soon became known as one of the best sailors in the province.

The Glory Years

In 1921, Angus had a chance to prove his skill. He was made captain of a schooner called the *Bluenose*. It was a beautiful boat. It had a glossy blue hull and white sails. It had been built to take part in a race for fishing boats. Boats came to the race from Nova Scotia and the United States, but none could beat the *Bluenose*. Between 1921 and 1938, the *Bluenose* won the race every time it was held. Angus was its captain every time. He became a hero across Canada.

End of an Era

In 1938, the aging *Bluenose* was sold. It later sank in a storm, but its fame lives on. You can see its picture on the back of most Canadian dimes. A new *Bluenose* first sailed in 1963. The new ship was called the *Bluenose II*. At the helm was its captain, Angus Walters. Angus died in 1969, but the *Bluenose II* still sails today.

Searching for the Titanic

Word Count: 258

In April 1912, a special ship was launched. The *Titanic* was the largest ship ever built. Inside, it looked like a beautiful hotel. Some people called it a “floating palace.” The owners of the *Titanic* said it was the safest ship in the world. It had a double **hull**, or frame. If one hull was damaged, the second hull would still keep out the water.

The *Titanic*’s first journey was from England to New York, across the Atlantic Ocean. Just a few nights after leaving, disaster struck. Sailing through calm waters, the ship hit a huge iceberg. It sank quickly, in very deep water. There were over 2000 passengers and crew on board. Over 1500 of them lost their lives.

Why did the *Titanic* sink? Over the years, people searched for the ship, looking for answers. Deep water made it hard to locate. At last, in 1985, the *Titanic* was found. Scientists dived deep into the ocean in a **submersible**—a mini-submarine. They used bright lamps to light up the wreck, and they took pictures of the hull. Using a robot, they picked up some objects from the ocean floor. Now they could tell what had happened. The iceberg had damaged one side of the ship so badly that the hulls could not keep out the water. Then, as the *Titanic* sank, the weight of the water pouring in caused the ship to break apart.

People have tried, but failed, to raise sections of the *Titanic*. The wreck still lies deep beneath the waves.

The Wild Horses of Sable Island

Word Count: 229

Sable Island lies in the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of Nova Scotia. The water around the island is dangerous. Over the years, many ships have sunk here. For this reason, Sable Island is often called “The Graveyard of the Atlantic.” To hundreds of wild horses, though, Sable Island is home.

No one knows how the horses came to the island. At one time, people thought the horses came from ships that sailed near here centuries ago. They thought the horses swam ashore when the ships were wrecked. Today, most people think that the horses were brought here about 250 years ago. The island has fields of thick grass. The horses were probably brought here to graze.

About 250 horses live on Sable Island. They roam freely, but life is hard. There is not always enough food and water for the horses. It is hard for them to survive in the winter. The winter of 1959 was very cold. Some people wanted to move all the horses off the island. Only the actions of the Prime Minister saved them. He said the horses should stay “wild and free.”

Today, there are laws to protect the horses of Sable Island. No one is allowed to catch or harm them. They will always be a part of this wild and beautiful region of Nova Scotia.

Animal Adaptation

Word Count: 240

There are almost two million types of animals in the world today. Each animal has special features, or **adaptations**, that help it survive in the world. These adaptations did not happen quickly. Many changes took hundreds or thousands of years. Some animals, like the dinosaurs, could not adapt to a changing world.

Some adaptations help animals live in different places, or **habitats**.

- Fish have gills for breathing under water, and fins and scales for swimming.
- Spider monkeys live in trees. They have long tails that they use to hold on to the branches.
- Penguins have thick oily feathers on top of a layer of fat. This protects them from their cold environment.
- Some animals, such as dormice, hibernate. This helps them survive long, cold winters.

Adaptations also protect animals from their enemies.

- When some butterflies fold their wings, they look like a dead leaf. A bird searching for a meal won't notice them.
- Snowshoe rabbits have dark brown coats in summer and white coats in winter. This helps them to blend in with their surroundings so their enemies cannot see them easily.

- Opossums will “play dead” to fool their enemies. They can do this for up to six hours.
- When porcupines are attacked, they back into their enemy. Their sharp quills then break off in their attacker’s body.

These are only a few adaptations of animals. Can you think of others?

How to Make a Sundial

Word Count: 367

You know that if you stand outside on a sunny day, your body casts a shadow. You may notice that your shadow is longer in the morning and afternoon than it is at noon. You may also notice that your shadow points west in the morning and east in the afternoon. This is because the sun moves across the sky during the day.

Thousands of years ago, people noticed the sun's movements too. They learned they could tell time by putting sticks in the ground and marking where the sticks' shadows fell throughout the day. These were the very earliest sundials. You can use the following instructions to make your own sundial.

What You Need

- a piece of cardboard about 15 cm by 23 cm
- a ruler
- a small piece of modelling clay
- a pencil about 10 cm long
- a triangle from a geometry set
- a compass
- a watch
- a marker

What You Do

1. Draw a line through the middle of the cardboard, parallel to the long sides.
2. Place the modelling clay in the middle of the line.
3. Put the end of the pencil in the clay.
4. Use the triangle to make sure the pencil is perpendicular to the cardboard (straight up and down).

Using the Sundial

1. Early in the morning on a sunny day, put the sundial out in the open, away from buildings or trees. Place it on level ground or on a level table.
2. Use the compass to find north.
3. Place the board so that the line runs north to south. Make sure it will not blow away.
4. Exactly on each hour, make a spot with the marker at the top of the shadow made by the pencil.
5. Write the hour under the spot. Do not move the board.
6. The next sunny day after your sundial is finished, tell the time by “reading” the shadows on your sundial.

You will be able to use your sundial for only about a month, then you will have to make a new one. This is because the sun’s path across the sky changes gradually from day to day. After about 30 days, the time your sundial shows will no longer be accurate.

From Salt Marshes to Fertile Fields

Word Count: 226

This is the story of a special invention. It was made by the Acadian settlers, and no other settlers in North America did anything like it. The Acadians changed salt marshes into rich farmland.

Hundreds of years ago, many Acadians lived near the Bay of Fundy. Their families had come from France. They faced some difficult problems. At first, the Acadians could not grow crops. The Bay of Fundy has very high tides. When the tide was high, sea water covered much of their land. The fields were too salty to grow crops. Without the crops, the Acadians had little food.

The Acadians solved the problem by working together to build dikes. These long walls were built of either logs and clay or large pieces of sod. The dikes kept the sea water back, away from their fields. They also built **sluices** inside the dikes. A sluice is a kind of gate that will open in one direction only. Water that collected in the fields, such as rainwater or melted snow, could flow out. Sea water, however, could not come in.

Once completed, the dikes needed to be checked constantly, and they often needed to be repaired. By building them, however, the Acadians were able to feed themselves. Crops they grew included hay, wheat, cabbages, turnips, peas, beans, onions, and corn.

The Birchbark Canoe

Word Count: 287

For the Aboriginal peoples of early Canada, travel by water was the fastest way to go. There were no wheeled vehicles back then. Horses were not used until the 18th century. The favourite boat of the Aboriginal peoples was the birchbark canoe. The Mi'kmaq in the east and the Ojibwa in central Canada were excellent canoe builders.

The birchbark canoe was fast in the water. It could carry heavy loads, but was so light itself that one person could **portage**, or carry it, around waterfalls and rapids. The canoe was also easy to build. The Aboriginal peoples could find the materials in the surrounding forest. All they needed was birchbark, cedar wood, spruce roots, and spruce **gum**, or resin.

First, they had to harvest the birchbark. This was easiest in the summer, when the sap in the birch trees was flowing. The canoe builders made a vertical cut down the tree trunk and pulled off a sheet of bark. Usually this did not kill the tree. Birch has a type of inner bark that it uses to make a new covering.

Next, the builders cut down a cedar tree. Cedar wood is lightweight and splits easily. It was used for the ribs and **gunwale**, or upper edge, of the canoe. Then the builders would find a stand of spruce trees and pull up some of the long, thin roots. These made a tough twine that was good for lacing together the sheets of bark.

Finally, they waterproofed the canoe by sealing its seams. For this they used spruce gum mixed with animal fat and charcoal.

Sometimes they decorated the finished canoe. The Mi'kmaq were famous for the beautiful designs they painted on their canoes.

Save Your Hearing!

Word Count: 267

Every time we wear stereo headphones or stand too close to noisy machinery, we could be damaging our hearing. Even everyday city noise can be harmful. The traffic, the construction, the people—it can all be too much! Noise is one of the main causes of hearing loss. That’s why we must protect ourselves from noise pollution.

Noise is defined as any unwanted or unwelcome sound. Noise pollution is a growing problem, and it can occur both indoors and outdoors. Indoor noise pollution can consist of such things as appliances humming, fans rattling, clocks ticking, boards creaking, and music playing. Outdoor pollution can be noise from tools, pets, airplanes, cars and buses, and sirens.

Here are some signs of hearing loss:

1. You have ringing, tingling, or buzzing in one or both ears.
2. Sounds seem to be muffled.
3. Quiet sounds are hard or impossible to hear.
4. One or both of your ears feels plugged.
5. Your ability to hear seems to come and go.

What can you do to prevent hearing loss? Here are some suggestions:

1. Wear hearing protection at events where there is continuous loud noise, such as rock concerts.
2. Turn down the volume on your TV, radio, and stereo, especially if you 're listening on headphones. You should always be able to still hear someone nearby who is speaking at normal volume.
3. Have your hearing tested regularly. Hearing loss happens slowly and usually does not hurt, so you might not even notice it is happening.

Once your hearing is gone, it is gone for good. Hearing is one sense that we can and should protect.

The Confederation Bridge

Word Count: 248

Bridges are built to take us where we want to go. Many people want to visit Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. In the past, people travelling between the two provinces had to use a plane or ferry. Now they can make the trip on the Confederation Bridge.

The bridge opened in May of 1997. It has two lanes for traffic and is 12.9 kilometres long. This makes it the longest bridge over ice-covered waters in the world. The bridge took four years to build and cost one billion dollars. Over five thousand people worked constructing the bridge.

The bridge is very convenient. The ferry ran only at certain times, but the bridge is open twenty-four hours a day. Crossing by ferry could take up to three hours. It takes less than ten minutes to drive across the bridge. It also costs less to take the bridge than it did to travel by ferry.

The bridge has many safety features. Closed-circuit television cameras watch for accidents. Every 750 metres there are emergency phones and fire extinguishers that travellers can use. The bridge has a curve in it, to help drivers remain alert.

What about people who want to cross the bridge on foot or on bike? They are not allowed to cross the bridge on their own, but there is a free bus service that will take them across.

So, the next time you are in the area, experience for yourself the spectacular Confederation Bridge!

Carrie Best

Word Count: 362

Carrie was born near New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, in 1903. At that time, many people discriminated against African Canadians.

This meant African Canadians were treated unfairly. They were not allowed to work in many jobs. By law, they were not allowed to mix with other people in public places.

Carrie's mother worked as a maid and a cook. Many other African Canadian women did, too. Other jobs were closed to them. As Carrie was growing up, she vowed she would be able to choose a better job.

In 1925, Carrie married Albert Best. She and her husband worked to improve the rights of African Canadians. Carrie founded a newspaper called the *Clarion*. It was the first newspaper in Nova Scotia for African Canadian readers. Soon Carrie was writing her first big story.

One night, an African Canadian woman named Viola Desmond went to the theatre. A stranger to New Glasgow, she sat in the section reserved for white people.

The police arrested Viola and threw her in jail. Carrie Best wrote about these events in the *Clarion*. Her story sparked an uproar.

In 1954, the Nova Scotia government finally changed the law.

African Canadians could now mix with others in public places.

The *Clarion* eventually closed down, but Carrie continued her work. She was determined to win better rights for African Canadians. In one case, she showed that African Canadians in New Glasgow were taxed unfairly. They had to pay higher property taxes than other people who owned larger pieces of land. Once again, the government had to act. Carrie also had her own radio program for over 12 years, and her voice became known on five different radio stations. She loved poetry, and on her show she recited poems and read from novels. When Carrie's husband died, she donated his property to the town of Pictou. It was used to create a park bearing his name.

Carrie died in 2001 at the age of 98. By then she was known as Dr. Best. In recognition of her work, two universities had made her a Doctor of Laws. The Canadian government had also honoured her with the Order of Canada.

Get Green!

Word Count: 309

Many Nova Scotians make a habit of separating their garbage. They set aside waste that can be recycled. This includes glass, metal, plastics, and many paper products. This waste goes into blue bags that are picked up by special trucks. The waste is then sorted and sold to industries. These companies recycle it into new products.

Some people also separate their organic waste. This includes food scraps, leaves, grass clippings, and other garden waste. They throw this garbage into a compost heap or a special bin. Over time, the garbage turns into a rich soil-like mixture called *compost*. This mixture can be used as fertilizer in gardens. In some areas, garbage trucks pick up both organic garbage *and* waste that will be recycled. The organic garbage is “cooked” for about 90 days. The resulting compost is sold to gardeners and farmers.

Despite these efforts to recycle and compost, much garbage is still sent to landfill sites. Here, the garbage is thrown into a huge pit and covered over. This form of garbage disposal can cause many problems, however. Landfill sites are filling up quickly, and we may be running out of places to dispose of our garbage. We might also be polluting large areas with our garbage. Rotting garbage can pollute the soil, air, and nearby water sources. This kind of pollution can threaten the animals and plants that share our planet.

Many people say that we need to be more responsible for our garbage. We cannot keep sending truckloads of garbage to landfill sites. It is important to recycle and compost whenever we can. Nova Scotia is setting a good example. It recycles and composts more of its waste than any other province does. Now it's up to the rest of Canada to "get green"!

The Shubenacadie Canal

Word Count: 308

How do you get a boat from a lower lake to a higher lake? That's the question that engineers had to answer during the construction of the Shubenacadie Canal. The canal was built to provide a safe shipping route between Halifax and the Bay of Fundy. Along the way, engineers found that they had to build a series of locks. These locks could raise or lower boats from one level to another. When completed, there were nine locks along the canal.

When the engineers came to the section above Halifax Harbour, they had to reconsider their design. There was a rise of 16 metres between the harbour and Sullivan's Pond. Should they simply build another lock? At first, they thought they would. Then they realized that the slope was so steep that they would need five locks to do the job, not just one. The design had to change because *five* locks would have been too expensive to build.

The solution they came up with was an **inclined plane**. With an inclined plane, a boat could be raised or lowered by floating it onto a wheeled sled at one end of the slope. It was then pulled over land by strong cables. These cables were attached to a **turbine**, an engine driven by the flow of water in a nearby channel. When the boat reached the other end of the slope, it was floated back into the water so it could continue its journey.

The canal opened in 1861, but was only used until 1870. A new railway line made it easier and less expensive to transport goods by train. Today, parts of the canal are being restored. People hike along its path, and canoe or kayak in its waters. There are parks along the canal where visitors can enjoy both nature and the history of the area.

Egyptian Pyramids

Word Count: 273

About 7000 years ago, people started farming in Egypt. They farmed in the valley around the Nile River. The surrounding area was mostly desert, but the Nile valley was fertile. Every summer the river flooded, leaving behind a layer of rich soil.

The people of Egypt grew wealthy as they traded figs, dates, and wheat with other nations. They developed a kind of picture writing called **hieroglyphics**. They wrote on material made from the **papyrus** reed. Our word *paper* comes from *papyrus*.

The ancient Egyptians also built the giant pyramids at Giza. These were tombs for their **pharaohs**. The pyramids are still some of the largest structures on Earth. It's amazing that the Egyptians were able to build them without modern machinery.

Archeologists, people who study old civilizations, think they used a system of pulleys, ramps, and levers. They would have needed thousands of workers.

Each pyramid had a burial room, where the pharaoh's body would be laid. In the room, the Egyptians placed food and other everyday objects. They believed the pharaoh would need these things in the afterlife. Then they **mummified** the body.

It took 70 days to make a mummy. First, they washed the body with salt water. Then they dried it in salt and packed it with sawdust. They also rubbed it with oils. Next, they wrapped it in linen and put **amulets**, or charms, on it. Finally, they put a mask over the face. They always laid a pharaoh inside a gold coffin.

A mummy could last thousands of years. We have learned a lot about ancient Egypt from mummies and the pyramids that were built for them.

Rocks and Minerals

Word Count: 366

Rocks and minerals are some of the most useful materials known to humans. Some are also very beautiful.

Question: What is the difference between a rock and a mineral?

Answer: A mineral is a substance that is found in the earth, but is not formed from any animal or vegetable. Minerals are the building blocks of rocks. Some rocks are made of one mineral, and others are made of as many as fifty. Most rocks contain about six minerals.

Question: What are the three main kinds of rocks?

Answer: The three main kinds are **igneous**, **sedimentary**, and **metamorphic**.

Igneous rocks form on or near the surface of the earth. They are created when magma (hot, melted rock inside the earth) pushes through the earth's crust, then cools and hardens. Granite is an example of an igneous rock.

Sedimentary rocks are formed on the surface of the earth when pieces of rocks and minerals are compressed together with parts of dead animals and plants. Over time, they form solid rock. Sandstone is one type of sedimentary rock.

Metamorphic rock forms inside the earth as a result of intense pressure, high temperatures, or chemical activity. Marble is an example of metamorphic rock.

Question: Are there minerals that are not rocks?

Answer: Yes. Rocks are made up of minerals, but not all minerals are rocks. Metals, like gold and silver, are minerals, but they are not rocks. Crystal-like substances such as quartz and salt are minerals, but they are also not considered rocks.

Question: Is coal a mineral?

Answer: No, coal is not made up of minerals. Coal is a rock-like substance that has formed from the carbon of dead vegetation compressed over millions of years. It is an important fossil fuel.

Question: Are gems rocks?

Answer: Yes, gems are rocks that have more colour and more interesting patterns than most other rocks. When they are cut and polished, they may sparkle, depending on the minerals they contain. Because some of these beautiful rocks are rare, they have become very valuable.

Some rocks and minerals are valuable because they are very hard. They do not get scratched easily, and they may be used in cutting tools.

Dance Around the World

Word Count: 350

People dance all over the world, for all sorts of reasons. All dance involves moving the body in a rhythmic manner, usually to music. Different dances may tell stories, express emotions, or celebrate special events.

Canada

In Canada, Aboriginal peoples dance at **powwows**, held to celebrate different aspects of Aboriginal culture. Powwow dancers move to the beat of a drum. The drumbeat symbolizes the beating of our hearts, and reminds us of our joys and sorrows. In most powwow dances, the dancers try to move their bodies in perfect time to the drumming, no matter how fast it gets.

To open the powwow, the dancers form a big circle. The people in the circle always move to the east, which is the direction of the rising sun, the source of life. The circle reflects harmony. No person is above another, and everyone is equal.

Spain

In Spain, the Romany people developed the **flamenco**. Music for the dance is played on the guitar. Often the dance is accompanied by singing, as well. The songs can be happy or sad.

The flamenco dancers pound the floor continuously with their feet. They turn their arms gracefully, reaching high above their heads. They clap their hands in short bursts. The dancers move

faster and faster until they seem to go into a trance. They are completely absorbed in their dance, and unaware of anything else around them. This is the high point of flamenco dancing.

India

India is the home of a dance called **kathakali**, which means “story-play.” These dances tell stories from Hindu epics that deal with the struggle between good and evil. The dancers move to the music of percussion instruments, including drums, cymbals, and gongs.

In kathakali, every movement tells part of the story. An expression on a dancer’s face may show sadness or surprise. The dancers must be strong and flexible. They train every muscle—even the muscles in their eyes.

All over the world, people dance to express their culture. But that is not the only reason they dance. They dance also because it’s fun!

The Halifax Explosion

Word Count: 321

December 1917

In Europe, World War I was at its height. In Canada, Halifax was a busy place. As the biggest port on Canada's Atlantic coast, the city was a jumping-off point for supply ships going to Europe. Extra rail lines had to be built for the new traffic. More housing went up for soldiers and their families. People seeking new jobs flocked to the city.

On the morning of December 6, the French ship *Mont Blanc* was coming into Halifax Harbour. It was about to join a convoy headed for England. The *Mont Blanc* carried 3000 tonnes of explosives. At the same time, a Norwegian ship, the *Imo*, was headed in the other direction. The two ships collided at a place called the Narrows, just outside the Bedford Basin. The *Imo* struck the *Mont Blanc* on the bow and set it on fire.

The *Mont Blanc*'s captain and crew immediately abandoned ship, as they were sure it would explode at any moment. Instead, the blazing vessel drifted across the harbour and came to rest at a pier in the north end of the city. Crowds of people, including many children on their way to school, gathered to gaze at the spectacular sight.

At 9:05 a.m., the *Mont Blanc* exploded in a huge flash of light. The blast levelled more than two square kilometres of the city. Every pane of glass in the city shattered. Flying shards of glass blinded many people.

Rescue efforts began at once. Thousands of troops went to work, and several ships were converted to floating hospitals. The city of Boston sent medicine, doctors, and public safety workers to Halifax by train. Many lives were saved, but more than 2000 people died and some 9000 were injured.

Today, the Memorial Bell Tower at Fort Needham overlooks the explosion site. Every December 6, at 9:00 a.m., the bells ring in memory of all those who suffered in the Halifax Explosion.