

***In Common: Effective Writing for All Students***  
**Collection of All Student Work Samples, K-12**

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By The Vermont Writing Collaborative, with Student Achievement Partners and CCSSO

**Sixth Grade**  
**Range of Writing Argument Writing Samples**

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**File Name: A6R Animals are Smart**

**Opinion/Argument**

**Grade 6**

**Range of Writing**

### **Animals are Smart**

Some people think that we are superior to animals but I think that animals are as smart as we are. Pets react to your moods and seem to know just when it's dinner time! Some animals use tools, communicate and think for their own.

If animals can use tools, they must be smart. For instance, a cow named Betty made a hook out of a piece of metal wire. That's obviously pretty smart but she didn't stop there. She then used the hook to get treats out of a glass tube. I think this is smart because Betty figured out how to make a tool to get something she wanted. Another smart animal who used a tool was Fu Manchu the Orangutan. Fu Manchu first traded Food for wire with another orangutan and then he hid it in his mouth until the right time. Then he used the wire as a tool to pick the lock on his cage and escape. I think this shows Fu Manchu was smart because he used a tool and he outsmarted humans by escaping from his cage.

Animals who communicate might be even smarter than animals who use tools. For instance one clever gorilla actually learned sign language! Not only that but she started making her own signs. This showed scientists that she was trying to communicate her thoughts, which takes big brainpower. I think this is smart because when Koko made her own signs it showed that she wasn't just memorizing signs, she was thinking and making her own signs. Another smart animal who could understand communication was Betsy the dog. Betsy understands 340 spoken words! Not only that, but when someone showed her a picture of something she had never seen before she would go and get the item. I think this is really smart because Betsy didn't just

**Introduces claim**, with a bit of context (*some people think we are superior to animals*), which functions as a counterclaim

**Organizes the reasons and evidence clearly**

**Supports the claim with clear reasons and relevant evidence, and demonstrates an understanding of the topic**

**Uses words, phrases, and clauses to clarify relationships among claim and reasons**

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memorize words she could recognize objects and fetch them. Betsy didn't really communicate, but I think she understood so much. It's just as good.

For animals who don't communicate or use tools there is another category: Animals that think on their own. For example, the poison dart Frog. Aside from protecting themselves with poison, they have AMAZING memories! The mothers hide their pollywogs in individual nests all over the jungle and had to remember where each one is and to come back every couple days to feed them! I think that is amazing how they think for their own because every pollywog (up to 35!) is in a different, camouflaged spot and their mom can still remember where each and every one is. Another example of animals thinking on their own is Alex, the African grey parrot. Alex can figure out alikeness and diference between two objects. For instance, when scientists hold up two objects and ask what the difference is he will answer either shape or color, depending on what it was. This is really smart because not only can Alex tell the difference he can tell what is the same about some objects. I'd say that is a pretty smart bird to be able to figure out what was the same and different in his mind, but he also translated that out into words. I'd say these animals are really smart in thinking on their own.

I know that some of you may think that animals are not smart. Some of you may think that animals are not smart. Some of you may think that most of the animals I talked about were special, that they were bred in a lab. But animals in natural life are smart too. For instance, a girl in my class named Erin has a farm, and every day her dad goes out at 2:30 AM to milk them. The cows line up at 2:25 am without being told. I think that this is smart because the cows know what time it is, AND line up early without being told. I think this is really smart of the cows. Another real life example of smart animals is my friend Mandy's Cockatoo. Now, you all know Cockatoos repeat what is said. This Cockatoo, However takes it a step farther. Instead of just saying things at random times, she actually answers the door when the doorbell is rung. She doesn't open the door, but she does say things like "Hello", and "Come in." I

**Uses words, phrases, and clauses to clarify relationships among claims and reasons**  
Writer explains her thinking, relating back to claim

Introduces a counterclaim which writer then refutes

think this is smart because instead of just saying random words, she responds with the right words at right time.

My goal of this essay was to convince you that animals were smart. You may have already known this and reading this essay was a waste of time to you. Or, you might have thought animals were not smart and still think that. If that is the case I have failed in my essay. However If you have changed your mind and now think that animals are smart, I have succeeded! I know that animals are smart, especially ones that use tools, communicate, and think for their own.

**Provides concluding statement** that follows from the argument presented

In this assignment, the student has been working with a study of animals and has read several informational pieces. She appears to be responding to a Focusing Question of “What have you learned about how smart animals are?” The writer makes the claim that animals are smart, in spite of anticipation that some might disagree with her.

The writer develops her claim with several reasons, and uses credible and relevant evidence to develop the reasons, showing her understanding of her topic. The writer organizes her ideas clearly and supports her claim with logical reasoning. She uses phrases (such as “*this shows*” and “*this is really smart because*”) to clarify the relationship between the claim she makes about animals being smart and the reasons and evidence she gives to support the claim. She even includes a form of counter-claim (“*some of you may think that animals are not smart*”), which she refutes, even though use of the counterclaim is not stated in the Standards for this grade level.

While the writer occasionally adopts a personal tone, (“*my goal of this essay was to convince you...*”), the overall tone of the essay is appropriately formal. The writer concludes by restating the focus / claim about animals being smart.

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**Opinion/Argument**

**Grade 6**

**Range of Writing**

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**File Name: A6R Tom Sawyer**

**Opinion/Argument**

**Grade 6**

**Range of Writing**

### **Tom Sawyer**

Having complicated characters in a book makes the story more interesting, as well as enjoyable to read. Tom Sawyer is one of those kinds of characters that is very complicated and sometimes hard to put into one group, such as likable or dislikable.

**Introduces claim**, by giving some context about complicated characters, and about the setting of the text

The book *Tom Sawyer*, by Mark Twain, is about a boy, age twelve, named Tom who lives in a small town in Missouri. He lives with his Aunt, Aunt Polly. The Mississippi River, which runs very close to the town is often the center of the excitement. The story is about how Tom grows up in the small town, and the adventures he and his friends have.

I think that even though Tom does do some very brave and admirable things, the author, Mark Twain, wants us to think of Tom as a character to dislike. For example, Tom often gets his friends into trouble. Also, Tom does sometimes steal things. When it is little things he is stealing, like a doughnut from Aunt Polly, it seems okay. But when it is bigger things from somebody else, it is a big deal because whatever he stole could be important to that person, or it could be necessary for them to survive.

**States a focus / claim**

However, Tom is not *only* dislikable. He has done some very good things and it is easy to see why many people would like him. For example, even when Tom runs away to be a pirate, he still feels that he should say his prayers, even though nobody is there to tell him he has to. He can also be very kind to his friends, and help them when they are stuck in difficult situations, or when they are in trouble.

**Distinguishes claim from opposing claim** (that in some ways Tom is likeable). Opposing claim is fully and fairly developed with evidence from the text

One example of Tom being kind to his friends is the time when his friend Becky is in big trouble. She accidentally ripped the school Master's book, that she was not even supposed to open. When the schoolmaster found out that someone had ripped the book, he was furious. He began to ask the students one by one, who had done it. When he came to Becky, Tom knew she would not be able to keep the secret, so he

jumped up and yelled, “I done it!” That is an example of a time when Tom did a very brave thing, by taking the blame for Becky.

**Organizes the reasons and evidence clearly**

Another example of how Tom could be considered a likeable character is when Tom ran off to be a pirate with his friends, Joe Harper and Huckleberry Finn. Even though they had run off so no one could tell them what to do, they found themselves feeling bad about the things they had stolen. They also felt they should still say their prayers, even though nobody was there to tell them to. That shows that even though he had run away to become a pirate, he is still good.

A third example of how Tom could be considered as a good person is the time when he saved Becky in the cave. It really was his fault that they got lost in the first place, because he lead them further and further in the cave. But in the end, he saved her. He left her and let her sleep, and he traveled around the cave and eventually he found an entrance out. He then went back into the cave to find her. Then he makes his way back with her, and they both are able to escape the cave. It was brave of Tom to go back into the cave for Becky.

**Distinguishes claim from opposing claim (that in some ways Tom is likeable). Opposing claim is developed fully and fairly with evidence from the text**

A last example of Tom acting as the kind of character you would admire is the time when Tom was going to leave a note for Aunt Polly saying that he was not dead, and had only run away. But Tom did not end up leaving the note. However, he did kiss Aunt Polly in her sleep, before leaving. This shows that even though Tom ran away, he still cares about Aunt Polly, and that is good.

**Establishes and maintains a formal style**

However, although Tom does show some examples of being a likeable character, he shows even more examples of being dislikable. One example of this is when Tom and Huck witness Injun Joe murder Dr. Robinson. Huck and Tom swear not ever to tell anyone about the murder. Later, Tom breaks the vow, and confesses in front of everyone. But Huck never broke the vow, and in some ways Tom betrayed him. Also, if Tom and Huck had told earlier, but this time agreed to both tell, Muff Potter would not have been falsely accused of murder. If Muff Potter had been proven innocent by Tom and Huck, he would not be in jail for nearly as long as he was, if at all.

**Restates claim, then supports with clear reasons and relevant evidence from the text about why Tom is dislikeable, demonstrating an understanding of the text**



Another example of Tom as a dislikeable character is the day he meets the new boy. Almost the minute Tom meets him, they are in a fight. Tom ends up winning, and he beats up the new boy badly. That was a pretty mean thing for Tom to do, especially when it is the new kid.

**Supports claim with clear reasons and relevant evidence** from the text about why Tom is dislikeable, **demonstrating an understanding of the text**

Another time, Tom steals a whole leg of a ham. He and his friends are playing a game, and Tom takes a ham from a family. That much ham is a lot of meat, and for many families back then, that much meat could last the whole winter. It was a really terrible thing to do, because whoever he stole the meat from, might even need it to survive. Tom should never have stolen that meat. His friends too had taken things like fish or bacon from other families.

A third example of Tom doing something that the reader would think of as a dislikeable thing about Tom, is again, the time when Tom, Huck, and Joe run away. Tom knows that Aunt Polly is worried sick, and very sad. But Tom and his friends don't even leave a note to their parents, or anything to let them know that they are okay. That is a very cruel thing to do to them, to keep them waiting, thinking the boys are dead.

**Uses words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationship among claims and reasons**

But the most dislikable thing about Tom is the way Tom takes advantage of his friends. One example of this is when Tom is given the job of whitewashing the fence. Tom tricks his friends into doing his chore. He makes the job seem important by telling his friends that they would not be able to do a good enough job at it. They beg him and they trade him all sorts of things to do his job, and he knows he is being mean, and tricking them. Then Aunt Polly gives him an apple for the good work, that he didn't even do, but he steals a doughnut from her anyway. Later, when Tom goes to Sunday school, he gives his friends back the things they traded him to whitewash the fence, in exchange for bible tickets. The Sunday School gives out a blue ticket for every two verses memorized. Ten blue tickets equaled one red ticket, ten reds equals one yellow, and for ten yellow tickets you got a copy of the bible. Tom traded his whitewashing earnings for enough tickets for a bible. Then in front of the whole Sunday school Tom receives a bible. I think that is a truly nasty thing to do. He basically cheated to get the bible, and he cheated his friends.

Overall, Tom Sawyer is a complicated character that the author wants us to think of as a dislikeable one. Although Tom does do things that are likeable, the dislikable ones outweigh it. A lot can be learned from Tom about people's characteristics, and about what they are really like.

**Provides concluding section** that follows from the argument presented

In this assignment, the student has read and studied *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. She is responding to a Focusing Question of “Do you think the author wants the reader to think of Tom as a likeable or a dislikeable character?” The writer makes the claim that although Tom is likeable in many ways, the weight of the evidence lies with him being dislikeable.

The writer develops her claim with several reasons. She uses relevant evidence from the text to develop the reasons, showing her understanding of her topic and the text. The writer organizes her ideas clearly and supports her claim with logical reasoning. She uses phrases (such as “*this shows*” and the “*most dislikeable thing about Tom*”) to clarify the relationship between the claim she makes about Tom being dislikeable and the reasons and evidence she gives to support the claim. She even includes substantial use of counter-claim (“*However, Tom is not **only** dislikeable. He has done some very good things and it is easy to see why many people would like him.*”). The writer refutes this by pointing out the weight of the evidence supporting her claim. This use of the counterclaim is not stated in the Standards for this grade level.

The overall tone of the essay is appropriately formal. The writer concludes by restating the focus / claim that Tom is dislikeable and reflects a bit on what can be learned from Tom, which, again, is not required by the Standards at this grade level.

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