

WRITTEN COMPOSITION

Rubrics and Sample Responses

Write an essay explaining how a person can feel connected to a special place.

The information in the box below will help you remember what you should think about when you write your composition.

REMEMBER—YOU SHOULD

- ☐ write about the assigned topic
- ☐ make your writing thoughtful and interesting
- ☐ make sure that each sentence you write contributes to your composition as a whole
- ☐ make sure that your ideas are clear and easy for the reader to follow
- ☐ write about your ideas in depth so that the reader is able to develop a good understanding of what you are saying
- ☐ proofread your writing to correct errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure

The names of individuals mentioned in the compositions have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the students whose responses appear in this guide.

SCORE POINT 1

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS AN INEFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

Focus and Coherence

- ☐ Individual paragraphs and/or the composition as a whole are not focused. The writer may shift abruptly from idea to idea, making it difficult for the reader to understand how the ideas included in the composition are related.
- ☐ The composition as a whole has little, or no, sense of completeness. The introduction and conclusion, if present, may be perfunctory.
- ☐ A substantial amount of writing may be extraneous because it does not contribute to the development or quality of the composition. In some cases, the composition overall may be only weakly connected to the prompt.

Organization

- ☐ The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and/or paragraph to paragraph is not logical. Sometimes weak progression results from an absence of transitions or from the use of transitions that do not make sense. At other times, the progression of thought is simply not evident, even if appropriate transitions are included.
- ☐ An organizational strategy is not evident. The writer may present ideas in a random or haphazard way, making the composition difficult to follow.
- ☐ Wordiness and/or repetition may stall the progression of ideas.

Development of Ideas

- ☐ The writer presents one or more ideas but provides little or no development of those ideas.
- ☐ The writer presents one or more ideas and attempts to develop them. However, this development is so general or vague that it prevents the reader from understanding the writer's ideas.
- ☐ The writer presents only a plot summary of a published piece of writing, a movie, or a television show.
- ☐ The writer omits information, which creates significant gaps between ideas. These gaps prevent the reader from clearly understanding those ideas.

Voice

- ☐ The writer does not engage the reader, therefore failing to establish a connection.
- ☐ There may be little or no sense of the writer's individual voice. The composition does not sound authentic or original. The writer is unable to express his/her individuality or unique perspective.

Conventions

- ☐ There is little or no evidence in the composition that the writer can correctly apply the conventions of the English language. Severe and/or frequent errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure may cause the writing to be unclear or difficult to read. These errors weaken the composition by causing an overall lack of fluency.
- ☐ The writer may misuse or omit words and phrases and may frequently write awkward sentences. These weaknesses interfere with the effective communication of ideas.

Allot of people have their special place. Their special place is where they can think, relax, or just have fun. I think even the famous have thier special place.

I have a special place. My special place is a basketball court. Every time I'm sad, confused, or bored; I just go out to a basketball court I start to play. When I playing or even just shooting the ball I forgot everything bad about my life and I feel so much better. I go there everytime I have a chance.

It is hard to believe that someone doesn't have a special place. I someone didn't have a special place how can they do the things I do in my special place. A special place can be an office, a backyard, the park etc. We all do different thing in are special place.

That is how I'm connected to my special place. I don't know how other people are connect to their special place. There are many way to be connect to a special place. My might be diffrent from yours.

Score Point: 1

The writer of this ineffective composition initially focuses on a special connection to a basketball court but shifts abruptly to discussions of someone without a special place and where special places can be. Wordiness and repetition (someone doesn't have a special place, someone didn't have a special place) stall the writer's progression of ideas, and the ideas have little to no development. In addition, frequent conventions errors weaken the fluency of the composition.

Some persons feel connected to a place because either they had good moment with a special person or live their childhood there and have funny moment of it.

When you have a special moment with the person you love, some time that place will be a special place for us because we will have very good memories of that special place.

Having a special place or named like that, living your childhood and remembering all the good times you past there the sad moments with all your friends and having good times and the funny stuff you did together it will be always connected to you

It feels very good when you have a special place and feel connection to that place all your life. Sometimes we think about that place and what you did and feeling connected and identify with the special place.

Score Point: 1

In this ineffective composition, the writer discusses how people can feel connected to a special place because they had a good moment with a special person there or because they had a childhood memory there. However, the writer's presentation is vague and repetitive with little to no development of these ideas. In addition, frequent conventions errors weaken the fluency of this composition.

There I was sitting in my favorite tree house in my favorite woods. I was 7 years old, I did not know it would be the last time I would ever be at my Tree house. There I was playing in the tree house in the woods when all the sudden people with chainsaws started cutting down all the tree's. I asked them what they were doing to my favorite woods. They said they were cutting it down to build a house. I was devastated, I ran home crying. I thought how could someone do that to my favorite place.

A couple months later a house was on the lot. I gradually accerted the fact that it was gone. But to this day I still think about how much fun that tree house was, and have never found another one like it.

Score Point: 1

In this composition the writer remembers and reflects on a tree house in the woods and its destruction to make room for a house. Even though the narrative progresses and the writing is clear, the level of development is insufficient to achieve a higher score.

Almost every person I know has a place or something that they have an emotional connection to. In my case I feel connected on a baseball field. "When I am on the field everything seems to go away, all my worries, fears, everything seem to disappear when I step onto a field." Some how or another people will always have a certain place that they feel connected to. War veterans have gone back to the battle fields, and monuments to reflect on what happened that day. People feel connected to these places, because its a part of them, A chapter of their life when they either lost something, or gained something and felt a connection to that place. Cemeteries are a perfect example of how a person can feel connected to a place. If you've ever lost a loved one, you can understand the importance of their grave is to you, and you can feel a connection to that area, and understand the importance of that area. As time goes on everyone will find their special place that they feel a connection to, and will understand why they are connected to that place.

Score Point: 1

The writer of this composition focuses on the idea that people can have an emotional connection to places (the writer to a baseball field, veterans to a battlefield, and people to cemeteries where loved ones are buried). However, the development of these ideas is too general and insufficient to be considered somewhat effective. In addition, repetition (on the field every thing seems to go away, every thing seems to disappear when I step onto the field) and wordiness weaken this composition.

SCORE POINT 2

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS A SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

Focus and Coherence

- ☐ Individual paragraphs and/or the composition as a whole are somewhat focused. The writer may shift quickly from idea to idea, but the reader has no difficulty understanding how the ideas included in the composition are related.
- ☐ The composition as a whole has some sense of completeness. The writer includes an introduction and conclusion, but they may be superficial.
- ☐ Some of the writing may be extraneous because it does not contribute to the development or quality of the composition as a whole.

Organization

- ☐ The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and/or paragraph to paragraph may not always be smooth or completely logical. Sometimes the writer needs to strengthen the progression by including more meaningful transitions; at other times the writer simply needs to establish a clearer link between ideas.
- ☐ The organizational strategy or strategies the writer chooses do not enable the writer to present ideas effectively.
- ☐ Some wordiness and/or repetition may be evident, but these weaknesses do not completely stall the progression of ideas.

Development of Ideas

- ☐ The writer attempts to develop the composition by listing ideas or briefly explaining them. In both of these cases, the development remains superficial, limiting the reader's understanding and appreciation of the writer's ideas.
- ☐ The writer presents one or more ideas and attempts to develop them. However, there is little evidence of depth of thinking because this development may be somewhat general, inconsistent, or contrived.
- ☐ The writer may omit small pieces of information that create minor gaps between ideas. However, these gaps do not prevent the reader from understanding those ideas.

Voice

- ☐ There may be moments when the writer engages the reader but fails to sustain the connection.
- ☐ Individual paragraphs or sections of the composition may sound authentic or original, but the writer has difficulty expressing his/her individuality or unique perspective.

Conventions

- ☐ Errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure throughout the composition may indicate a limited control of conventions. Although these errors do not cause the writing to be unclear, they weaken the overall fluency of the composition.
- ☐ The writer may include some simple or inaccurate words and phrases and may write some awkward sentences. These weaknesses limit the overall effectiveness of the communication of ideas.

MEXICO HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY SECOND HOME, I'M THERE EVERY HOLIDAY, SUMMER, NEW YEARS, EVEN SOME WEEKENDS. AT FIRST I NEVER ENJOYED GOING, BUT MY MOTHER ALWAYS PUSHED US SOMEHOW.

GOING TO PIEDRAS NEGRAS WAS SUCH A CHORE FOR ME. THE ONLY INCENTIVE I HAD WAS MY GRANDMA AND HER FOOD. YES I HAVE FAMILY THERE BUT BEING THERE WAS SO AWKWARD. MY MOTHER ALWAYS LOVED IT THOUGH. BEING A "MEXICANA" HERSELF, SHE NEVER WANTED TO LEAVE.

I ASKED HER ONE DAY WHY SHE WAS SO HAPPY OVERTHERE COMPARED TO HERE IN SAN ANTONIO? SHE ANSWERED, "MI UDA ES AHI." I PONDERED ON THAT BECAUSE MY MOTHER LOVED HERE, SO HER LIFE IS HERE NOT THERE. SHE EXPLAINED THAT WHEN SHE LEFT MEXICO A PIECE OF HER REMAINED THERE, SO EVERY TIME SHE RETURNS SHE PICKS UP THAT PIECE AND IS WHOLE AGAIN. SHE IS FOREVER CONNECTED TO MEXICO, HER UDA.

I UNDERSTOOD THE HAPPINESS MY MOTHER FEELS, AND NOW TRY TO ENJOY IT MYSELF. ITS IMPORTANT TO BE CONNECTED TO THE HAPPY TIMES, EVEN WHEN THEY ARE MILES AWAY.

Score Point: 2

In this concise composition, the writer's feelings about going to back to Mexico (such a chore for me, being there was so awkward) are opposite those of the writer's mother (loved it, never wanted to leave). In a conversation that followed, the mother explained why she feels that way (when she left Mexico a piece of her remained there, every time she returns she picks up that piece and is whole again). Although the writer presents a unique perspective and the conventions are appropriate, the level of development remains superficial and lacks depth of thought.

Every person needs time away from their problems, whether, they are big or small. Some people have a connection to a special place whether it is a physical or mental place. Humans will always look for some sort of comfort in their special place.

In the story "Going to America" Nicholas Father's special place was America where he could be free. Greece was run by a dictatorship, where Nicholas Father had no rights, so he dreamed of a place where he could be free. He ended up sailing to America. Nicholas mom said, "It was the first time he felt free in his life."

The father in the story "My father sits in the Dark" special place was in the dark. He would sit in a chair, staring at the wall in a state of mind. He would daydream about the past. He would escape from his problems by just sitting there thinking. His son would always ask, "what's wrong?" and he would reply, "nothing is wrong." His special place was found through past experiences, when he was a child living in Austria.

I have a special place I like to go also. When ever I am angry, I always go to

my grandparents house. I can be alone most of the time to think. If that doesn't work I'll watch TV or play games. It helps me escape from my problems, mainly my brother and sister. It really does help, when you can get away from everything.

You always going to have problems in your life. Its just knowing when to go to your special place is what really matters. You also have to know when to come back. If you don't it could drive you insane, But It helps knowing you could escape from the world at times.

Score Point: 2

This somewhat effective composition focuses on the idea that people need a special place to get away from their problems. The writer provides a brief analysis of "Going to America" and a personal anecdote (whenever I am angry, I always go to my grandparent's house) but provides only a plot summary of "My Father Sits in the Dark."

A memory can last a lifetime. Even if you feel that you have nothing else in life, you still have the memories.

Something as simple as a picture or visiting a certain place can trigger memories. This is why so many people are attached to certain places. These places hold their own meaning to different people. A strong meaning which can connect you to it. A prime example of a connection to a place is a grandmothers house. Almost everyone holds a memory to grandmas house. Whether its the traditional Christmas, or being so full from the Thanksgiving dinner that you want to pop.

For me my connection is also grandmas house. Making "tamales" in the back-yard will always be stuck in my mind. I think you gain this attachment by the emotion you endure towards a place. Usually its happiness, a feeling of comfort, or even safety which can make you grow fond of a place. All of this and more can get you emotionally connected to a special place.

I think that even by thinking of someplace you love can bring a smile on. You could be in the worst situation or a sad situation. And by taking

the advice of "think of all the good times" you can make it just a bit better. When I do that I think of where I was that made me feel the best. Then all the other great memories will come flooding in. Each person possesses their own connection to a place that they enjoyed in their life, and usually its a memory that doesn't fade away.

Score Point: 2

The writer of this philosophical composition presents the idea that memories are tied to places, and this connection exists because one experiences an emotion there. An example of such a place (grandmother's house) is given along with memories that took place there (the traditional Christmas, being so full from Thanksgiving dinner, making tamales) that create emotions (happiness, comfort, safety). These memories can then make one feel better in trying times. The ideas progress logically and fluently. Overall, the level of development remains superficial, preventing the writer from achieving any depth of thought.

A person can feel connected to a special place for many reasons. For example, maybe that's where they met a loved one or they experienced something for the first time. I'm connected to a special place myself. It's located in Lovington, New Mexico. My father and I call it Tadpole Lake. There were a lot of frogs in the area. My dad took me there to see my grandmother but while she was out he took me to Tadpole Lake. July 21, 1996 was the first time I ever learned how to fish. Before we began my father turned to me and said, "May you always keep a tight line." After that he shook my hand. When a person says may you always keep a tight line means they are giving you a blessing. They're blessing you to catch a fish. My father instructed me to do exactly as he did. If I had trouble he would help me out. We fished for several hours, but at 6:13 p.m. I caught my first fish. I don't know what kind it was but when my grandmother cooked it, it was delicious. My father and I go fishing every summer now. Tadpole Lake is our special place. I feel connected to Tadpole Lake because I honestly believe it gave my father and I the special relationship we have today. So my answer is yes, a person can feel connected to a special place because of how that place makes you feel.

Score Point: 2

In this reflective composition, the writer remembers events that occurred while visiting Tadpole Lake (my dad took me there, I learned how to fish, and catching a fish for the first time) and how this place created a special relationship with the writer's father. Although the voice is strong and sustained and the conventions are appropriate, the level of development remains general and lacks depth of thought.

SCORE POINT 3

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS A GENERALLY EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

Focus and Coherence

- ☐ Individual paragraphs and the composition as a whole are, for the most part, focused. The writer generally shows the clear relationship between ideas, making few sudden shifts from one idea to the next.
- ☐ The composition as a whole has a sense of completeness. The introduction and conclusion add some depth to the composition.
- ☐ Most of the writing contributes to the development or quality of the composition as a whole.

Organization

- ☐ The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph is generally smooth and controlled. For the most part, transitions are meaningful, and the links between ideas are logical.
- ☐ The organizational strategy or strategies the writer chooses are generally effective.
- ☐ Wordiness and/or repetition, if present, are minor problems that do not stall the progression of ideas.

Development of Ideas

- ☐ The writer attempts to develop all the ideas included in the composition. Although some ideas may be developed more thoroughly and specifically than others, the development overall reflects some depth of thought, enabling the reader to generally understand and appreciate the writer's ideas.
- ☐ The writer's presentation of some ideas may be thoughtful. There may be little evidence that the writer has been willing to take compositional risks when developing the topic.

Voice

- ☐ The writer engages the reader and sustains that connection throughout most of the composition.
- ☐ For the most part, the composition sounds authentic and original. The writer is generally able to express his/her individuality or unique perspective.

Conventions

- ☐ The writer generally demonstrates a good command of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure. Although the writer may make minor errors, they create few disruptions in the fluency of the composition.
- ☐ The words, phrases, and sentence structures the writer uses are generally appropriate and contribute to the overall effectiveness of the communication of ideas.

During life a person finds a special place that connects to them in one way or another. At times we go there to reflect on our day, or to remind us about past experiences or memories. Javier is a man who does that every day of his life.

During Javier's childhood years, he and his mother would always take walks around Oasis Park in downtown. After feeding the birds, they would go and sit under the big Oak Tree where they would eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. There they would talk about their day and wait for dad to meet them after work. The park was very peaceful and if you were quiet you could hear the wind and birds chirping in the background. After time passed Javier's parents had passed away due to old age.

Now Javier is 32 and has a wife and son of his own. Everyday his wife and son wait for him under the big oak tree in Oasis Park. When he arrives he sits with his family and has a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich like old times. There Javier would tell stories about his childhood, and how him and mamma would always go to his special place in the park. He told his son, "One day this place will connect with you as it did with me." His son then smiled and replied, "I know dad, I can feel it already."

At times when Javier feels like there's no

one around to talk to him, he'll go to the park.
There he sit's quiet under the big oak tree and
reflects back on past memories. He then thanks
God for creating the big oak tree at Oasis Park.

Score Point: 3

In this generally effective response, the writer presents a narrative about a man named Javier and his connection to a big oak tree in Oasis Park. A description of his childhood experience (feeding the birds, eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, wait for dad) is followed by how as an adult, he and his family meet under the big oak tree. Javier relives his childhood experience, thus passing the connection to his son (has a peanut and butter and jelly sandwich, tell stories of his childhood). Appropriate use of conventions and a sense of the writer's voice contribute to the effectiveness of this composition.

A stone Fence is not a spectacular sight. It's not a wonder of the world or a nations monument. It is however a special place to me. In _____, Texas, My grandparents live in a small, white house. This house is shaded by a 36 Foot Evergreen. Surrounding the perimeter is a stone, white Fence. The fence has been there for many years. I remember the first time sitting on it at eight years old with my uncle, Cowboy, and Pa, his father. We all sat smiling, Pa helping me hold my first gun. I'll never forget that autumn. Mom threw a fit. That would also be the last time I saw Pa, he passed away that winter, God rest his soul. That fence has also been my worst enemy, where I got my first black eye when my brother nailed me with a dirt clod and where I got my first broken leg during a contest to see who could jump the furthest off the fence. It has been my shelter, to shed tears, and my refuge to hide fears. In fact it's where I got my first kiss from KAYE, and where Cowboy gave me my "one day, when you're a man." talk. I have a strong connection to it and if I sit and feel the cracks in the stone I can feel all of it still. That wall has in some way helped define who I am. It has taught me that even the smallest places can hold the strongest chains of the heart.

Score Point: 3

The writer of this concise, engaging composition describes the events that connect him with a stone fence at his grandparents' house. Effective imagery and word choice (nailed me with a dirt clod, my refuge to hide my fears) strengthen the development as well as the voice, and the thoughtful introduction and conclusion add some depth.

My closet. It's there if I need to have a good cry. It's there if I need to just sit and giggle. It's there if I need to express my thoughts. It seems strange that a place where you hang your clothes can also be a place where you hang your emotions, but for many years, that's what my closet's been to me.

It's there if I need to have a good cry. When my brother's best friend died, my closet held all my tears. When my dad was diagnosed with cancer, my closet was where I'd go so my mom wouldn't have to see me cry. When my teammate was killed by a drunk driver, my closet was the one place that didn't care if I ever stopped crying.

It's there if I need to just sit and giggle. If I'm talking on the phone late at night and my best friend is telling me about her adventures, my closet contains all my laughter. If the girls are over and our conversation turns to guys, my closet is where we go to giggle. If I've made a fool of myself as I often do, my closet is there to laugh with me.

It's there if I need to express my thoughts. After my boyfriend and I broke up, my closet heard my side of the story. After my friends left me out of another exciting weekend, my closet hushed my screams. After each month comes to a close, my closet is where I sit and write letters to my future husband so he, too, may know my thoughts.

Everyone has their own special place whether it be

Uncle TED'S tool shed with every tool imaginable on the overstuffed chair in Grandma's den or the old tree in Aunt EDNA'S garden that's "not made for climbing." A closet is just a place to hang your clothes. To anyone else, it's just part of my room, but to me it's a sanctuary. My closet. My special place.

Score Point: 3

In this composition, the writer focuses on her closet as a place she has a special connection to because that is where she expresses her emotions. The closet provides a place to cry (when my brother's best friend died, dad was diagnosed with cancer, teammate was killed by a drunk driver), a place to giggle (if the girls are over and our conversation turns to guys), and a place to express thoughts (I sit and write letters to my future husband). The strong sense of voice and good command of conventions add to the effectiveness of this composition.

Many people find comfort in different ways. Some find it in a favorite food, watching a tv show + relaxing, but I find my connection elsewhere. I feel connected to the golf course (where I spend a lot of my time).

As I was growing + maturing in junior high my love + passion had always been baseball, but due to an injury I was forced to stop playing to prevent further medical damage. This is when I first took up playing golf. My new goal was to join the highschool golf team + be as good as the highschoolers I saw playing at the time. As I began to devote more + more time to the sport I developed a passion + love for the game. If I ever was stressed or worried I could rely on the tranquil fairways of the golf course to soothe my thinking.

Now, when I think of how stressed I am with college + my grades I will go to the golf course as the sun is steadily rising over the clouds. I can feel the morning dew settled into the perfectly cut grass where the ball sits, waiting to be struck at the flag which is

gently waving in the breeze of the cool spring air. It is majestic to me how peaceful & comforting the golf course is when you put your mind at rest from all of the stressful burdens of everyday life & connect with the serenity of the game.

Although many people find a connection with a special place I feel that my "special place" is unique. This uniqueness is another contribution to the serenity & tranquility that the 18 hole course provides to me, & is one of many reasons why I feel connected to the peaceful golf course.

Score Point: 3

The place this writer feels connected to is a golf course. Playing golf became an alternative to baseball (I was forced to stop playing to prevent further medical damage) and a way to relieve stress (If I was ever stressed or worried, I could rely on the tranquil fairways of the golf course to soothe my thinking). The development overall reflects some depth of thought, and effective description (perfectly cut grass, the flag which is gently waving in the cool spring air) adds to the sense of the writer's voice.

SCORE POINT 4

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

Focus and Coherence

- ☐ Individual paragraphs and the composition as a whole are focused. This sustained focus enables the reader to understand and appreciate how the ideas included in the composition are related.
- ☐ The composition as a whole has a sense of completeness. The introduction and conclusion are meaningful because they add depth to the composition.
- ☐ Most, if not all, of the writing contributes to the development or quality of the composition as a whole.

Organization

- ☐ The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph is smooth and controlled. The writer's use of meaningful transitions and the logical movement from idea to idea strengthen this progression.
- ☐ The organizational strategy or strategies the writer chooses enhance the writer's ability to present ideas clearly and effectively.

Development of Ideas

- ☐ The writer's thorough and specific development of each idea creates depth of thought in the composition, enabling the reader to truly understand and appreciate the writer's ideas.
- ☐ The writer's presentation of ideas is thoughtful or insightful. The writer may approach the topic from an unusual perspective, use his/her unique experiences or view of the world as a basis for writing, or make interesting connections between ideas. In all these cases, the writer's willingness to take compositional risks enhances the quality of the content.

Voice

- ☐ The writer engages the reader and sustains this connection throughout the composition.
- ☐ The composition sounds authentic and original. The writer is able to express his/her individuality or unique perspective.

Conventions

- ☐ The overall strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the composition. The writer demonstrates a consistent command of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure. When the writer attempts to communicate complex ideas through sophisticated forms of expression, he/she may make minor errors as a result of these compositional risks. These types of errors do not detract from the overall fluency of the composition.
- ☐ The words, phrases, and sentence structures the writer uses enhance the overall effectiveness of the communication of ideas.

As the soldiers stepped off of the plane, my mother and I spotted my brother and began to cry. He saw us and sprinted over to give us a hug. Then he began to cry. He and the rest of his squadron had been stationed in Iraq to try to help the process of voting for a new leader for their new government go reasonably smoothly and without civilians being harmed. He witnessed suicide bombers, women and children murdered, some of his friends shot, and endured the chaos of war to return home to the country he loved. It took going overseas to war for him to have appreciation and truly feel connected to his home country.

After being overseas in a foreign country going through political turmoil, he realized just how much he missed and appreciated the little things that he took for granted in America. He was thankful for the good education he received, for having a home to go home to, not just a makeshift shack, for having food every day, for having clean water to drink, for being able to take a shower and use soap, all of these small things that no one really appreciates until they do without, as my brother, the rest of his unit, and the majority of the people in Iraq did and do every day.

While he was there, my brother and his squadron reminisced on old childhood memories, such as little league games, eating ice cream, birthday parties, and just having fun. They felt sorry for the Iraqi children

who would grow up knowing only war, not knowing about laughter and having fun as a kid. They would grow up hardened to war with hatred towards others of different races and religions.

Understanding and seeing this kind of turmoil, chaos, and lack of emotion other than hatred and grief has caused a realization of a strong connection between my brother and his country and home. He no longer takes for granted the small things in life, but appreciates them more than ever.

Score Point: 4

In this thoughtful composition, the writer's brother has just returned from serving in Iraq and now appreciates and feels connected to his home country. The tragedy in Iraq (suicide bombers, friends shot, the chaos of war) is contrasted with the things he took for granted (the good education he received, having a home, food every day, clean water). This appreciation was furthered as the soldiers contrasted their childhoods (little league games, eating ice cream) with those of children in Iraq. The specific word choice enhances the authenticity of this piece, and consistent control of conventions adds to the effectiveness of this composition.

There will always be that one place that I will forever be connected to. Others refer to it as "the island," but to me, it is much more than that. It's home.

I was born and raised in Manila, Philippines. Most know it because of the famed "Thrilla in Manila" fight from Muhammad Ali's glory days. I know it for a different reason. I spent the first six years of my life there. I spoke the language. I ate the food. I shared a small house with my grandfather, grandmother, mother, father, sister, and the occasional aunt or uncle. I attended Catholic school a few blocks from my house. I spent much of my childhood running the streets of Quezon City with my playmates. I lived the true "Pinoy" lifestyle.

About a month after my sixth birthday, my mom, my sister and I boarded a plane headed to DFW. It wasn't just "goodbye" to the islands, it was "goodbye" to everything. Everything I had known—my family, friends, school, even my language—was back at home. I arrived in Dallas only speaking broken English, holding onto my suitcase full of clothes and my memories of home. I adjusted quickly. About a month later, I started Kindergarten, spoke fluent English, and even got used to the fact that we traveled everywhere in a car, not by foot or public transportation.

When a person as young as I was is taken from the only place they've ever known and is put in a completely different place, they assimilate the two cultures as they adjust to the new one. No matter how "Americanized" I've become, I never let go of my island. Sure, I wear American clothes. I wear jackets and scarves because unlike in the Philippines, winter here actually gets colder than 70° F. I listen to American music, enjoy American television and cinema, and follow American sports. But I still speak Tagalog, mainly at home with my family. I eat pancit, lumpia, and other traditional Filipino dishes. And even though almost my entire family still lives in the Philippines, they're just a letter or a long-distance phone call away.

I will always feel connected. Not only was I born there, but my experiences there have shaped me and continue to influence me as I grow. Although I live in Texas, Manila is still my home. Everything about it - the tropical weather, the mango trees, the language, and especially the spirit of the island - will never cease to be a part of me.

Score Point: 4

In this focused and detailed reflective piece, the writer describes moving from the Philippines to Texas and how one can be "Americanized" and still maintain a connection to one's home. Strong depth of development and excellent word choice add to the effectiveness of this composition and contribute to the strong sense of the writer's voice. Highly effective control of conventions enhances the writer's presentation.

Ten years ago, I was uprooted from my house in big city Ft. Worth and planted in a home in small town _____. That move was one of the best things that ever happened to me. My new home was much larger than the old, and was in a more peaceful neighborhood. At the heart of the house was the Kitchen, which quickly became the hub of my family's communication and interaction. That Kitchen is one of the most important places in my teenage life. It is where I've grown-up, ^{can} taught how to love, and learned to entertain.

Everyday when I get home from school, my mother is in the Kitchen preparing dinner. I pull out a chair, sit down, and unload my daily burdens. I spill out all of the trials, troubles, and tribulations of the day. I confess my crushes, and cry about cares. My mother listens, and offers sound advice, wisdom, and knowledge, which I gobble up more quickly than my afternoon snack. The smell of spaghetti, or fried chicken, or even taco meat wafts in the Kitchen air, dispelling my bad mood. The Kitchen atmosphere is almost magical in the relaxation it provides.

A long, polished dinning table is the central feature of my Kitchen. At night, my family gathers around it to feast upon my mother's homemade Southern cooking. We enjoy one another's company. Discussion ranges from sixth grade science projects to the war in Iraq, from middle school social issues to deep, theological subjects, and from AP classes to what is happening in Congress. The Kitchen is the bonding

place for my family; it is where we draw our strength.

Friday night is party night for my family, and the Kitchen is always the focal point of those parties. Guests always end up in the kitchen, snacking, laughing, and talking. Card games take place at the table, and little kids skate around in their socks. Desserts are pulled out of the oven and passed around. The Kitchen is a very merry place on the weekends.

My Kitchen is the place I feel most connected to. Without it, I would feel lost. It contains the medicine for my heart and body. Twenty years from now, when I have a house and Kitchen of my own, I will look back and remember my Kitchen, and make sure that my kids have a comparable special place to be attached to.

Score Point: 4

In this highly effective composition, the writer provides a reflective and descriptive presentation of a special connection to her kitchen. The reader is taken to a room with a mother preparing dinner and listening to her child to a table where the family discusses and shares what is happening in their lives to the fun had on a weekend. The nice imagery and strong sense of voice contribute to the overall effectiveness of this composition.

I paced back and forth several times. I could hear my mother and stepfather loading the last of our belongings into the huge trailer. My time was limited. I only had but a few minutes left to be alone with the house of my childhood. Slowly I made my way through the house, making a sketch in my mind of its structure. The rooms, furniture, smells, tastes, sounds all arranged in my mind like a doll house.

102 W MAIN . The place of ALL my childhood memories. The small, cozy home was perfect. It was nestled between the houses of the most caring elderly people who would occasionally give me a dollar out of kindness. Down the street was the park where me and my dad found a 3-legged turtle we called tiny tim. And only a few blocks away was my favorite place to go: Grandma's house.

As I walked through the house memories came to mind, all appealing to each one of my senses.

I remember walking through the house ^{as a child} barefoot, feeling the thick, cushy brown carpet through my toes. The window unit in the living room reminded me of the hot Texas summers and how I would stick my face right in front of it to cool off. In my mind I could see the sunlight coming through every possible place. I imagined my cluttered book shelf containing all my favorite children's books and other special belongings. I could also see the bluebirds that had nested outside my bedroom window when I was 6, which I claimed as my pets, named them, and checked every day to see if they had hatched.

As I paced through the house I remembered the smell of the torn leather chair that belonged to the grandfather I had never gotten a

a chance to know. Also came the smell of freshly cut grass that lingered on daddy after a hard day's work. I could taste the chicken N' dumplings mommy used to make for me and the bon-bons she would make every Christmas, when money was tight.

And as I made my way out of the house I remembered the sound of the chain on the door and the screech the back door made when one opened it. I remembered the sound of the loud attic fan during the summer, the pecans falling from the tree and hitting our deck. I remembered the sound of the train as it would pass behind our house day and night. And I heard the bark of the dogs we no longer had.

I still question why we had to move. My mom wanted a nice house, in a nice neighborhood. In my mind the creepy, foundation cracked house was more than nice... it was perfect. This special place, this dollhouse in my mind, are the memories that keep me going and keep me smiling, through the hardest of times. They give me a break from the difficult, challenging, hardships of growing up. The connection makes me feel like a child again; joyful, happy and care-free having no worries, no bitter, sad realities. It is home, away from home. A way to escape the world, that could drive a person mad, if they didn't have that special place.

Score Point: 4

In this unusual and risky approach, the writer takes the reader on a sensory journey (feeling the cushy brown carpet through my toes, the smell of the torn leather chair, the sound of the chain on the door) through a house as the family is moving out. Depth is achieved as the writer remembers events that have taken place and comes to terms with the impending loss. Highly effective word choice and good command of conventions add to the overall effectiveness of this composition.