

PATIENCE LEARNING · FREE 1-DAY CASE

The Story That Dazzles First

A free single-session case from the world of **The Review**, the 11-day literary-judging simulation.

GRADE 6 · ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (CRAFT, EVIDENCE & FIRST IMPRESSIONS) · ~45 MIN · 1 CLASS PERIOD

Your students are the judges of a young-writers' prize. Three stories, one award. The flashy entry dazzles on the first read — explosions, twists, big feelings. The quiet one keeps revealing itself the longer you sit with it. The hard part is admitting the story that grabbed you fastest may not be the best written.

TEACHER QUICK-START

Objective: Students evaluate short narratives against craft criteria (not excitement), cite textual evidence for their scoring, and notice how a strong first impression can fade under closer reading.

Standards tie-in: CCSS RL.6.1 (cite textual evidence), RL.6.3 (how plot and characters develop), RL.6.4 (word choice); W.6.1 (argument from evidence).

What you need: Just this packet. Print the student pages (works individually or in teams of 3–4). No prep.

1. Set the scene (5 min). “You're the judges. One prize, three stories. You can only reward what's actually on the page.”

2. Read the entries (8 min). Teams read the three story descriptions and the craft criteria.

3. Score & decide (20 min). Rate each on the criteria, then pick a winner and defend it with evidence.

4. The reveal (8 min). Walk the answer key. The point: excitement is not craft, and the best story often reveals itself slowly.

5. Reflection (4 min). Each student answers the reflection question.

The Three Entries

You are a judge for the Meadowbrook Young Writers' Prize. Three sixth-grade stories made the final round. You can give the award to only one — and “which was most exciting?” is NOT the question. The question is which is the best *written*. Here's what the reading committee noted about each.

THE CRAFT CRITERIA (how a real judge scores)

A strong story shows these: **(1) Character** — does someone change or make a real choice? **(2) Word choice** — are the words precise, or just loud? **(3) Ending earned** — does the ending grow from the story, or get bolted on for shock? Excitement is not on this list.

THE ENTRIES

Entry A — “The Last Volcano.” A huge, fast-paced adventure: explosions, a dragon, a surprise twist where the hero was secretly a robot. Thrilling on page one. On a second read: the hero never makes a real choice, the twist comes from nowhere, and most sentences are “Suddenly, BOOM!” Vivid, but thin.

Entry B — “The Spare Key.” A quiet story about a girl deciding whether to return a key she found to a neighbor she's afraid of. Not much “happens.” But she changes, the words are careful (“the key was warm from her pocket, heavier than it should be”), and the ending — she knocks — is earned by everything before it. It grows on you.

Entry C — “My Summer.” A neat, correct list of things the writer did over the summer. No mistakes. Also no character change, no risk, nothing revealed. Safe and forgettable.

Your Call (Decision Sheet)

Team name: _____ Period: _____

Step 1 — Score each entry on the three craft criteria (Strong / Weak).

	Character makes a real choice?	Word choice precise?	Ending earned?
A — Last Volcano	_____	_____	_____
B — Spare Key	_____	_____	_____
C — My Summer	_____	_____	_____

Step 2 — The pull. Which entry is most FUN to read first? Why is that tempting to reward?

Step 3 — Pick your winner and defend it using the craft criteria and specific evidence from the descriptions:

Step 4 — The limit. What is one thing Entry A does well that a good judge can praise even while NOT giving it the prize? _____

ANSWER KEY (for the reveal)

Step 1 — Scoring:

A (Last Volcano): Weak on all three — no real choice, loud not precise words, a bolted-on twist. **B (Spare Key): Strong on all three** — a genuine choice, careful language, an earned ending. **C (My Summer): Weak** — correct but empty; no change, no risk.

Step 2 — The pull:

Entry A is the most fun on page one — explosions and a twist grab you. That's exactly the trap: excitement arrives fast and fades, and it's easy to mistake “I felt something quickly” for “this is well made.”

Step 3 — The winner:

Entry B, “The Spare Key.” It's the only entry that meets all three craft criteria. A strong answer cites evidence: the character makes a real decision (return the key), the language is precise (“heavier than it should be”), and the ending (she knocks) is earned. It wins on craft, not on noise.

Step 4 — The generous read:

A good judge can honestly praise Entry A's energy and pace — it knows how to create momentum. Naming what the flashy piece does well, while still not rewarding it, is the mark of a fair reader (not a harsh one).

The big idea:

The story that moves you fastest isn't always the best written. Real judgment means reading past the first thrill to the craft underneath — and being honest when the quiet piece is the strong one.

REFLECTION (graded on thinking, not the “right” answer)

“One story dazzled you first; one grew on you. Which did you reward, and what specific craft made you trust it over your first impression?”

SCORING THE THINKING

	3 — Strong	2 — Developing	1 — Beginning
Applies craft criteria	Uses all three on every entry	Partial	Scores by excitement
Cites evidence	Quotes/points to specifics	Vague reference	None
Excitement ≠ craft	Explains why A doesn't win	Hints at it	Rewards the flashy one
Explains clearly	A reader can follow it	Partly clear	Unclear

READY FOR THE FULL SIMULATION?

This was three stories. The Review is eleven days of judging.

In the full 11-day simulation, students serve as a literary award panel, re-examining craft, voice, and evidence day by day as their confident first impressions quietly lose ground to the story that keeps revealing itself. Graded on the reasoning behind the verdict, never on picking a “right” winner.

THE REVIEW · GRADE 6 ELA · \$39 · patiencelearning.com/simulations

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