

Student Sample: Grade 12, Argument

This essay was produced in a two-hour-long college placement exam. Students first read a passage of approximately a thousand words titled “In Praise of Boredom.” The passage was adapted from an essay published by Ellen Ruppel Shell in 2000. Students were then asked to respond to Shell’s views, drawing on anything else they had previously read, their observations, and/or their experiences.

Freedom From Structure

Children are blank slates that are subject to the environment around them. Allowing a child to interact with their surroundings is difficult for adults because it leaves each decision, and each consequence of that decision, up to them. Ellen Ruppel Shell believes that children miss out on experimenting and discovering aspects of the world that cannot be taught in a classroom or read about in a book. I agree that children can learn many important lessons about social interaction and the products of creativity by playing on their own, or with other children, in a free and open environment.

To relieve the inevitable boredom that every child eventually encounters, they can nourish their creative minds by playing alone. As a child, I was content to sometimes play by myself in a land of make-believe. If it was cold and rainy outside, I would pretend it was the middle of summer. Night became day, my bedroom became a kingdom, my bed was a castle, my floor was a mote, and I was a princess. Playing “let’s pretend” allowed me to imagine and create my own world when reality seemed too mundane. “Boredom leads to exploration, which leads to creativity,” and nothing is more creative than a world that exists in the mind of a child.

There are endless opportunities for parents to stimulate and teach their kids that come with instructions and rules and boundaries, but I agree with Shell when she declares that “the best play is spontaneous and unpredictable.” Plain and simple freedom is invaluable, and we are only so free as children. As we grow up, our minds become molded around society’s rules and we learn to conform to a certain way of thinking and creating. If adults see a soccer ball, they will only think of how to play soccer. If children see a soccer ball they will immediately create their own rules and proceed with an entirely different game. The ability to be spontaneous and imaginative is strongest in children because they know nothing else. Adults and parents that bombard their kids with structured activities are wasting the unique and innate ability of children to create; however, a parent’s reasoning for such structure is not unsupported.

There are many life lessons that can be difficult to learn on your own, so adults establish controlled environments for their children to learn about the world. For example, making new friends can be an awkward and terrifying process for kids, so parents will try to make friends for their children. What most adults don’t realize is that they are robbing their child of a chance to open up and reach out to another person. The kid they meet on the jungle gym will be more beneficial to them than the kid their parent forced them to play with. “We don’t believe that they can navigate the world, so we try to navigate it for them.” Shell believes that adults need to trust their kids to discover the world for themselves and that it’s just as important for them to fail as it is for them to succeed.

For children, it’s not about the final product, it’s how they get there. When forced to follow rules and obey boundaries, kids are not given the opportunity to use their imagination. I agree with Shell and I believe that it is more beneficial for children to make believe, be spontaneous, and discover as much as they can about the world for themselves.

Annotation

The writer of this piece

- **introduces a precise, knowledgeable claim.**
 - *I agree that children can learn many important lessons about social interaction and the products of creativity by playing on their own, or with other children, in a free and open environment.*

- **establishes the significance of the claim, distinguishing the claim from alternate or opposing claims.**
 - *Allowing a child to interact with their surroundings is difficult for adults because it leaves each decision, and each consequence of that decision, up to them.*
- **creates an organization that logically sequences claim, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.**
 - *I agree that children . . . they can nourish their creative minds by playing alone. . . . As a child, I was . . . but I agree with Shell when she declares . . . As we grow up . . . There are many life lessons that can be difficult to learn on your own . . . What most adults don't realize . . . For children, it's not about the final product . . . I agree with Shell and I believe . . .*
- **develops the claim and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both.**
 - *Allowing a child to interact with their surroundings . . . leaves each decision, and each consequence of that decision, up to them.*
 - *Ellen Ruppel Shell believes that children miss out on experimenting and discovering aspects of the world that cannot be taught in a classroom or read about in a book.*
 - *. . . they can nourish their creative minds by playing alone.*
 - *There are many life lessons that can be difficult to learn on your own, so adults establish controlled environments for their children to learn about the world.*
 - *When forced to follow rules and obey boundaries, kids are not given the opportunity to use their imagination.*
- **develops the claim in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.**
 - *. . . making new friends can be an awkward and terrifying process for kids, so parents will try to make friends for their children. What most adults don't realize is that they are robbing their child of a chance to open up and reach out to another person.*
- **uses words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim and counterclaims.**
 - *As a child . . . As we grow up . . . For example . . .*
 - *To relieve the inevitable boredom that every child eventually encounters, they can nourish their creative minds by playing alone. As a child, I was content to sometimes play by myself in a land of make-believe. . . . "Boredom leads to exploration, which leads to creativity," and nothing is more creative than a world that exists in the mind of a child.*
 - *There are endless opportunities for parents to stimulate and teach their kids that come with instructions and rules and boundaries, but I agree with Shell when she declares that "the best play is spontaneous and unpredictable."*
- **provides a concluding statement that follows from and supports the argument presented.**
 - *I agree with Shell and I believe that it is more beneficial for children to make believe, be spontaneous, and discover as much as they can about the world for themselves.*
- **demonstrates good command of the conventions of standard written English (with occasional errors that do not interfere materially with the underlying message).**