

Step Up to Writing
Grade 6

**Informative/Explanatory Writing
Baseline Assessment**

Directions:

Do not begin until you are told to do so. Once your instructor tells you to begin, you may use the time provided to complete all steps below.

1. Read and review the sources provided for this task on page 2.
2. Answer the questions on page 3 about the sources provided.
3. Read the related writing prompt and directions on page 4 and write your response.

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Source #1

Excerpted from “Hold Your Sea Horses!”

by Sean McCollum

One glance at a sea horse and you know why it got the name. (Their genus name, *Hippocampus*, is Greek for “bent horse.”) But sea horses—for all the resemblance to their four-legged, grass-grazing, land-loving namesakes—are fishes. And amazing fishes at that! They are captains of camouflage with armored bodies and talented tails. Their wacky adaptations make them wonders of the sea.

Where Sea Horses Roam

Like land horses, sea horses like grass. But they prefer to hide in it rather than nibble on it. Most species of sea horse haunt seagrass beds as well as coral reefs along warmer coastlines. There, they hang out and hang on by wrapping their prehensile tails around seaweed or some other support. Then underwater currents deliver their food—tiny sea animals and plants called plankton.

Masters of Disguise

Spotting a sea horse in its natural habitat is a tricky treat for SCUBA divers. These fish are masters of disguise. They can change colors to camouflage themselves, and feature bumps called tubercles (say: TOO-bur-kullz) that also help them blend in. They have to be good at hide-and-seek since they’re lousy at run-away. They lack tail and large anal fins that most fish use for power and speed. They maneuver with just dorsal fins and a pair of pectoral fins that look like ears on the sides of their horsy heads.

Look Ma, No Scales!

Sea horses might not be fast, but they are plenty tough. Instead of fishy scales, bony plates protect their bodies. This makes them less than tender snacks for most predators. Sea horses also lack teeth. Instead, they use their tubular snouts like straws to suck in plankton whole. Sea horses are ambush hunters, aided by eyes that can move independently of each other. They calmly lie in wait until a morsel floats by—and flick! Then a very simple digestive system—sea horses don’t have stomachs—turns food into energy.

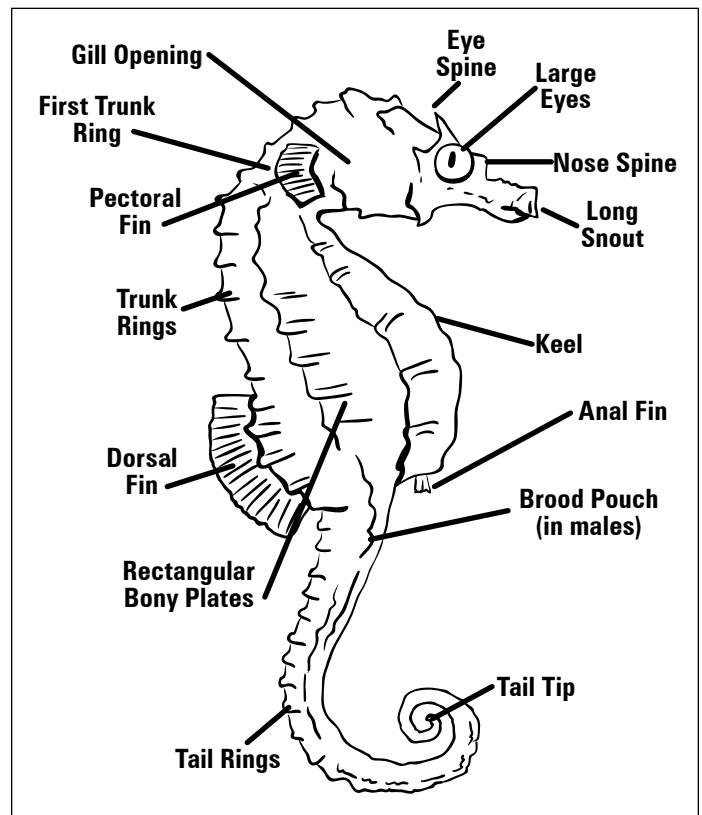
Source #2

Seven Animal Adaptations

*Adaptation is a process by which an organism gradually changes over generations to better survive in its environment. These changes can be **structural**, or physical; or they may be **behavioral**, or related to the animal’s behaviors. Here are seven animal adaptations observed in nature.*

Adaptation	Explanation
Eating and Digestion	Changes in what or how animals eat and digest
Body Parts	Shells or other body structures that help animals survive
Temperature Control	Adaptations that help animals survive in extreme heat or cold
Tool Use	Use of simple tools to meet needs for food or shelter
Oxygen Use	Ability to survive with low oxygen or no oxygen for periods of time
Camouflage	Coloring and shapes that help animals blend into their habitats
Special Senses	Senses that help animals sense trouble or find food

Source #3



Name: _____ Grade: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Questions**Directions:** Refer back to the sources on page 2. Fill in the correct bubble to answer the questions.

1. What is the main idea of source #1?
 - Ⓐ Sea horses are very similar to horses that live on land.
 - Ⓑ Very little is known about sea horses because they are difficult to find.
 - Ⓒ Sea horses have developed interesting adaptations to their habitat.
 - Ⓓ The hunting habits of sea horses make them wonders of the sea.

2. According to source #1, where would a SCUBA diver most likely find sea horses?
 - Ⓐ in areas of cold water
 - Ⓑ on coral reefs and in beds of seagrass
 - Ⓒ in the open sea
 - Ⓓ wherever there are underwater currents with plankton

3. Based on sources #1 and #2, sea horses have adapted to their habitat by
 - Ⓐ developing special senses.
 - Ⓑ acquiring a resistance to poison.
 - Ⓒ using simple tools.
 - Ⓓ developing camouflage.

4. Considering sources #1 and #3, the reader can infer that sea horses
 - Ⓐ are poor swimmers.
 - Ⓑ are not really a species of fish.
 - Ⓒ do not see very well.
 - Ⓓ are dangerous predators.

5. What inference can be made from source #2, the Seven Animal Adaptations table?
 - Ⓐ Behavioral adaptations are more effective than structural adaptations.
 - Ⓑ Animal species adapt to their habitats in a variety of ways.
 - Ⓒ Individual animals can adapt quickly to environmental changes.
 - Ⓓ Most animal species are capable of adapting to multiple habitats.

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Prompt: Write a short essay describing ways in which sea horses have adapted to better survive in their habitat. Make sure to refer to information from the sources in your response.

- Directions:**
1. Plan in the space provided below.
 2. Draft on the page(s) titled: DRAFT.
 3. Prepare final copy on the page(s) titled: FINAL DRAFT.

Checklist: Use this checklist to do your best writing. The items below directly relate to essay scoring:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write a clear introduction with topic sentence. | <input type="checkbox"/> Use precise word choice and varied sentence structures. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Present ideas in logical order, with transitions. | <input type="checkbox"/> Use appropriate formal style and standard English. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support your essay with important ideas and details from the sources. | <input type="checkbox"/> Revise for organization and content. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write a conclusion that supports the topic and follows from the ideas presented. | <input type="checkbox"/> Edit for proper conventions, grammar/usage, punctuation, and spelling. |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Proofread for a final copy. |

Planning Space: Use the following space to plan your writing.

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____
