

## Camping

### The Prompt

*Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.*

### The Essay Writing Sample

One significant experience I had was when I camped out in the wilderness with my dad for two weeks last summer. That was a very buggy experience, but more than the left-over scars from branch wounds and brambles are left with me. I think I grew up on that trip.

I had never camped before and now my father thought it would be good for us to bond, away from civilization. We packed and headed out not for a camp ground with tent sites and shower rooms. We headed for the back regions of swamps and raspberry bushes, at least a thousand miles from home and regular communication.

We actually had to walk into the pond where we would set up our home-away-from-home. What a trek, it was terrible, and when we finally arrived, I was already set to leave. But, no. We had to unpack our gear, prepare the ground, put up the tent, and then think about food. That wasn't going to be a quick trip to the frig for ice cream and soda. We needed a camp fire, a place to put our staples so bears wouldn't get into them, and the meal itself—trout. That meant we had to get our fishing gear ready and wade out to the depth so cold streams and running leeches! YUCK. It was a good 45 minutes later, while the sun set and the flies bit, that we got our first bites. I was able to get two trout, and dad finished off with two more. We gutted them and fried them—delicious, I must say. It was then we sat and talked over the plans for the next day.

Those two weeks were difficult. I had to do everything from scratch, even build my own out house. I had to carry water, find berries, get wood for the fire, dry out wet clothes from a night of rain, even mend things that broke, like my fishing pole. I learned something about myself. I could survive. I didn't need my cell phone or my TV or my CDs, even my friends and my car to get along. Things might not have been the most luxurious for me out in the back country of nowhere, but I was doing pretty well with a full stomach, good sleep, invigorating exercise, and yep, a book, which dad had insisted I bring along.

I also had dad. He and I had never really talked like we did over those two weeks. It's amazing how many things had been left unsaid over the years after he divorced my mom. He told me about how much the divorce hurt, how he and mom had met and fell in love, how much he loved me. I got to ask him what caused the divorce, how he felt about being with me now, how he felt about mom, and his new wife. He explained it all, and it made some sense. The divorce didn't happen out of no-where. There had been problems even before I was born. And, they didn't hate me or each other. They had good and bad feelings and memories, just like I did. I began to see my dad, and my mom, too, through different eyes, and I saw them as people apart from me. That was a revelation, an adult one, that it wasn't all about me and that things don't stay the same or perfect all the time.

When dad and I left the woods, we were still sweating and the deer flies were still biting, but I felt different, I was stronger. And, that strength was something that came not only from knowing how to cook my own food, lug armfuls of wood three or four times a day, and make my own safe and cozy place in the world, no matter where. It came from an inner sense of seeing things as they are. Life isn't just out of a magazine with the best appliances and the nicest furniture. There are other things in life, like dirty floors, and relationships that don't always work, and meals that have to be made. But, that's not all bad. (697 words)

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### Suggested Revisions

There are so many good things in this essay: a sense of real insight; a voice, that is, this sounds like a real high school student writing with some of his own ways of speaking; good development, a little humor.

Striking problems are a tired, like-everyone-else's opening that will not catch the reader or let the reader know right away there is an interesting voice in this piece; a weak ending; a bit of rambling or disorder in the whole essay; and spots where there is need for more vivid and specific detail. There may also be more of a sense of describing what happened than explaining why this trip was significant—a question of the right emphasis. It is also a bit too long. Its' okay to go over 500 words, but not 200 words over, especially if there are sections that can be left out.

Suggestion 1 - Start with the walk into the camp. Put the reader there with you right away with good specific detail and give the reader a sense of who you are. Let the essay "tell" that this is a significant event for you; don't repeat back the words of the prompt. The first two paragraphs can be condensed into one easily.

Suggestion 2 - The next two paragraphs, about being at camp, might be condensed too. Try using the same detail but less of it to capture the time spent at camp and all you did from day one through till the end. You might also want to take the idea of strength and confidence from the last paragraph and fit it in with your description of these things you had to do.

Suggestion 3 - The next paragraph works, but you could also take the idea of seeing your dad, and mom, differently, from the last paragraph and fit it in with your description of the new way you got to know your dad. You might also mention, for more detail, how you saw your dad differently not only from your conversations with him but also from seeing him as a teacher or modeling independent and reasonable behavior camping.

Suggestion 4 - Now you can repeat your lessons about growing up to bring home the significance of your experience, but keep the idea of the path in and the path out which works well.

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### The Revised Essay

Deer flies buzzed my head and sweat poured down my back. My backpack dug into my sides, and I was sure I had just heard rustlings that could only bode a visit from a ferocious bear my dad and I were headed into the back regions of swamps and raspberry bushes, at least a thousand miles from home and regular communication. Mud pulled at my sneakers, brambles cut my legs, and tree branches swatted my face. We had packed early in the morning for my first camping trip, my dad's attempt to bond before I started my senior year. We weren't bound for coastal shores, sculpted campsites, or shower rooms with warm water, we were going deep into wilderness...for two whole weeks.

When we reached the pond where we would set up our home-away-from-home, I was already set to leave. But, no! Dad set about unpacking our gear, preparing the ground, and putting up the tent, while I contemplated food. I suspected there wasn't going to be a quick trip to the fridge for ice cream and soda out here. I learned quickly in order to eat we needed a camp fire, a place to put our staples so animals wouldn't get into them, and the meal itself. It was a good 45 minutes later, while the sun set and the flies bit, that we got our first trout.

Those two weeks were difficult. My dad and I did everything from scratch; I even built my own outhouse. I had to carry water, find berries, get wood for the fire, dry out wet clothes from a night of rain, and even mend things that broke, like my fishing pole. I grew stronger, and that strength was something that came not only from knowing how to cook my own food, lug armfuls of wood three or four times a day, and make my own safe and cozy place in the world, no matter where. I learned something about myself. I could survive. I didn't need my cell phone or my TV or my CDs, even my friends and my car to get along. I could do pretty well with a full stomach, good sleep, hard exercise, and, yep, a book, which dad had insisted I bring along.

I also had dad. He and I had never really talked like we did over those two weeks. It's amazing how many things had been left unsaid over the years after he divorced my mom. He told me about how much the divorce hurt, how he and mom had met and fell in love, how much he loved me. I got to ask him what caused the divorce and how he felt about mom and his new wife. He explained it all and it made some sense. The divorce didn't happen out of nowhere. There had been problems even before I was born. And, they didn't hate me or each other. They had good and bad feelings and memories, just like I did. That was a revelation, an adult one. Things are not always perfect, but that doesn't mean they're all bad either.

The Friday dad and I left the woods, we were still sweating and the deer flies were still biting, but I felt different. I grew up on that camping trip. I gained an inner sense of confidence and independence and I learned life is never the picture-perfect image you create in your head. There are wet sleeping bags, meals that have to be made, and relationships that don't always work. But, that's okay; I'll cope. (595 words)