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Writing Prompt

***Grade 5
Sampler
2015–16***



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DIRECTIONS: Read the following passage and write a response to the prompt that follows.

Smokejumpers to the Rescue!

by Laurie Toupin

1 A plane circles Dutch Oven Gulch, Idaho, at 100 mph. Smokejumper Patrick Withen stands at the open side door of the DC-3, his hands firmly gripping the sides. . .his heart racing. The plane bounces like a yo-yo from the wind and the turbulence of the fire raging 2,000 feet below. Withen stares straight ahead at the horizon, waiting for the signal.

2 "Get ready. . .go!" He jumps straight out, pulls himself into position, then counts: "One thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three, one thousand four. . . ." He looks up as the static line, one end of which is attached to the plane, rips open his parachute. "So far, so good," he thinks.

3 Nineteen more jumpers follow him, falling like sheets of paper let loose from a window. The plane flies away, and then, suddenly, comes stillness. Even though Withen is falling at 13 feet per second, he feels as though he is floating. He spots his jumping partner. Good. Birds faintly chirp around him; flames and destruction roar below.

4 Right on target, he aims for a tree and his chute catches in the branches. He drops a let-down line, releases the chute harness, and lowers himself to the ground.

5 After all 20 jumpers have landed safely, the plane circles back and drops a cargo box for each pair. It contains everything they need to live and fight the fire for three days, the average length of a stay. They unpack chain saws, shovels, Pulaskis (part ax and part hoe), first-aid kits, food, and water. It's time to get to work.

Catching the Fire

6 Job #1 is to create a firebreak, a stretch of broken ground in which there's nothing left for the fire to burn. In the Gulch, there is little accessible water, so the smokejumpers make the fire burn itself out by taking away its fuel.

7 Withen swings the Pulaski high into the air and slams it into the ground, scraping the surface to remove grass and brush. He and the other jumpers continue "digging line" until they surround all 30 acres of the fire. Withen feels the intense heat of the blaze, burning a mere six feet away.

8 Next, he revs the chain saw and cuts down brush, trees, and fallen debris to form a barrier 16 feet wide on the side of the line away from the fire. This removes ignitable fuel in the immediate vicinity and creates a boundary that the surface fire shouldn't be able to cross. Once the fire hits the break, it should sizzle out. If it does jump the line, it has less fuel to consume and should be easier to control.

- 9 Withen and the smokejumpers work round-the-clock until the firebreak is finished. At 8 a.m., with the blaze under control, they grab a catnap in shifts.
- 10 When they awake, it's time to watch (and wait) in case wind carries stray embers across the break, setting new fires. They watch for snags or dead trees that easily burn, fall, and roll out of the line.

Day #2. Mop Up Begins.

- 11 Trees, brush, or burning logs that smolder for days are potential new fire threats. With chain saws and Pulaskis in hand, the jumpers traverse the burn area, cutting down trees, throwing dirt on burning logs, and dragging unburned brush outside of the fire area.

Day #3. The Fire Is Out.

- 12 They're headed home for a day, maybe for a week, maybe for only an hour. . . depending on when the next fire flares up. . . .



Bibliography Information:

Laurie Toupin, "Smokejumpers to the Rescue!," *Odyssey*, September 2005.

Read the prompt below and then write your response.

You have read a passage describing a unique type of firefighter. How do these firefighters contain and put out the fires? Write an informational essay explaining the tools these firefighters use and how they are able to fight the fires. Use key details and examples from the passage to support your ideas.

Your writing will be scored based on the development of ideas, organization of writing, and language conventions of grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Please write your response within the lined boxes on pages 4 through 8.

Writing

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Writing

A large rectangular area with a green border, containing 20 horizontal black lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the box.

Writing



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