**Grade 8.2 Explanatory Performance Task: Overcoming Obstacles to Survive and Thrive**

**Task**:

Your English class has been reading *The Game* by Monica Hughes. *The Game* is a science fiction novel about teenagers who are trying to survive being unemployed in a highly automated world of the future. Only those who are working have freedom and access to the future; the unemployed are restricted to their DA (designated area) and have access only to the past. These teenagers must overcome many obstacles (no access to technology) to survive and thrive. Your class has become interested in learning about more about people who have overcome difficult obstacles to survive and thrive (succeed). You have found four sources about this topic.

After you have reviewed these sources, you will answer some questions about them. Briefly **scan** the sources and the three questions that follow. **Then, go back and read the sources carefully** so you will have the information you will need to answer the questions and complete your research.

In **Part 1**, you will answer questions about the reading passages.

In **Part 2**, you will write an explanatory article using information you have read.

Directions for Beginning:

You will now review several sources. You can review any of the sources as often as you like.

Research Questions:

After reviewing the research sources, use the rest of the time in Part 1 to answer three questions about them. Your **answers to these questions will be scored**. Also, **your answers will help you think about the information you have read**, which should help you write your informational article.

Answer the questions on the opposite side of the paper where the questions are located or in the location your teacher directs.

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**Source #1**

You have found an article about sports figures who have succeeded by overcoming obstacles.

**Overcoming Obstacles**

By Don Yaeger, June 29, 2009

It was just back pain. That’s what Boston Red Sox pitcher Jon Lester kept telling himself. When you throw like a 25-year-old left-hander does, muscles usually hurt, but the pain wouldn’t go away. Lester went to see doctors and heard words he never expected: He had cancer. It wasn’t just any form of the disease, but the extraordinarily rare blood cancer known as anaplastic large cell lymphoma. To beat back the cancer’s spread, Lester would require intensive chemotherapy. “I didn’t once ask why. Instead, I asked how we get rid of this. I wanted to think positively and look forward.”

With that approach, Jon Lester became a hero to many. From that diagnosis in August 2006, Lester went through treatment, worked his way back into the major leagues, pitched—and won—a World Series game and then, in May 2008, became only the 18th pitcher in the history of the storied Red Sox organization to throw a perfect game. And Jon Lester is cancer-free. “I don’t think I had any idea what it would mean to others when I made it back,” Lester says. “I was just trying to win each day, to make sure I was doing whatever it took to be as disciplined and successful in treatment as I was in baseball.”

By doing so, Lester earned a legion of new fans, many of them cancer survivors. Web sites were loaded with letters of thanks, with words of encouragement. Many of those writing wanted Lester to know his top-flight accomplishment gave them reason to believe. “I was surprised, honestly,” he says. “There were so many things said that were wonderful, but all I was trying to do was make my way back.”

Lester is one of many athletes who have handled adversity on a grand stage and have used the same strengths that made them champions to get them through tough times. The stories of those athletes and their successes have long proven inspirational.

And as proof that athletes often find inspiration from each other, Jon Lester, after working his way back into the major leagues, regularly mentioned another pitcher, Jim Abbott, when he described where he looked for inspiration. Abbott didn’t suffer disease, but what he did amazed millions. “I’ve learned that it’s not the disability that defines you,” Abbott explains. “It’s how you deal with the challenges the disability presents you with.”

Abbott is no stranger to challenges. The 10-season major league pitcher was born without a right hand. Never one to let a perceived disability stand in the way of his goals, he pursued athletics with his heart and soul, as a high-school quarterback leading his football team to a Michigan state championship and developing a distinct pitching and fielding style that made him a highly sought-after baseball recruit.

Despite being drafted out of high school, however, Abbott decided instead to attend the University of Michigan, where he led the Wolverines’ baseball program to two Big Ten championships and became the first pitcher to earn the James E. Sullivan Award for the best amateur athlete in the country. In 1988, he earned a gold medal, pitching the final game at the Seoul Olympics. From there, he was drafted, eighth overall, by the Angels. In 1993, playing for the Yankees, he pitched a 4-0 no-hitter against the Cleveland Indians. Abbott’s story quickly became one of the most inspiring in professional athletics, encouraging children to look past their limitations and keep their eyes on their dreams.

Natalie du Toit would have been a perfect candidate for Abbott’s mentoring. Already an internationally ranked swimmer in her native South Africa by the age of 14, du Toit seemed to be a rising star in international athletics. But, just three years later, in 2001, she was struck by a car on her way back to school from swim practice, and lost her left leg at the knee. The very next year, she took to the pool at the 2002 Commonwealth Games and won not only two events for athletes with physical challenges, but also became the first physically challenged athlete to qualify for the final of a regular event when she swam the 800-meter freestyle. In 2003, again swimming the 800-meter freestyle, she won gold at the All-Africa Games.

She continued to wow the swimming world, winning or placing in nearly every international competition she entered, including winning five golds and one silver in the Paralympics, and winning two golds again in the 2006 Commonwealth Games—and all without the aid of a prosthetic leg. When she qualified for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, du Toit was honored in another way: She became the first physically challenged athlete to carry a country’s flag in the opening ceremony. Her 16th-place finish in the 10-kilometer open-water swim was not as strong a finish as she had hoped, but in a field of 23 other athletes, all able-bodied, it was a triumph indeed. “Be everything you want to be,” du Toit regularly reminds her fans during interviews. Clearly, she is a tremendous reminder that no obstacle is too great that it cannot be challenged— and overcome.

**Source #2**

You found an article about how Pixar has survived and thrived after overcoming obstacles.

***Closing the Innovation Gap:***

***Reigniting the spark of creativity in a global economy***

By Judy Estrin October/November 2008

Short-term thinking and fear of risk are jeopardizing America’s future, says the author of an important new book that offers solutions to revive national prosperity in the global economy.

Say the word Pixar and what comes to mind? Kids of all ages think of *Toy Story, A Bug’s Life, Monsters, Inc., Finding Nemo, The Incredibles, Cars* and *Ratatouille*. All of these films create magical worlds in which toys, bugs, monsters, fish, superheroes, and cars come to life, and a rat can become a gourmet chef. Even after my son was too old to want to go to the theater with me, I eagerly awaited the release of each new Pixar film—not only to watch what great story would unfold, but also to see how the company’s brilliant animators pushed technology to make their onscreen characters even more engaging. At Pixar, the technology inspires the art and the art challenges the technology. It’s a two-way street.

I remember my first visit to Pixar headquarters in Emeryville, California, when Disney was in the process of acquiring the company. The lobby opens into a giant atrium surrounded by conference rooms, gaming spaces, and a cafeteria, inviting employees to play, meet, eat, and create. Scooters and skateboards are used to zip around the building, encouraging people to get out of their offices and move around. The openness of the building immediately conveys the openness of the environment.

Behind Pixar’s incredible creative and financial success is leadership that has a deep understanding of the importance and process of innovation. Launched with $10 million by Ed Catmull and John Lasseter in 1986, the company was sold to Disney for over $7 billion in 2006. Catmull is now the president of Disney and Pixar Animation Studios.

The genesis of the company was an example of innovation at work. What is now Pixar began in 1979 when George Lucas, of Star Wars fame, set up a group to explore new techniques for digital printing and audio and video editing. He hired Catmull, a leading researcher in computer graphics, who has always had a passion for filmmaking. After several years, they agreed to set up the group as an independent company. Following months of discussions with venture capitalists and corporate partners that led nowhere, they finally negotiated a deal with Apple founder Steve Jobs, who was attracted by the talent of the team. Their passion was to make full-length computer-generated animated films. But recognizing that neither the technology nor the market was ready, they sold advanced imaging systems to medical-imaging firms, government agencies, and other movie studios, including Disney. Never giving up on their long-term vision, a small group led by Lasseter developed animated short films that helped drive the technologists and incubated what would eventually become Pixar’s main business.

From 1986 to 1991, Pixar went through several variations of its business strategy. “We were grasping for a workable model. We sold the hardware business and started to sell software. Then we started making TV commercials,” Catmull recalls. “Throughout, we struggled. Steve stuck with us as we were losing money. Then Disney gave us the opportunity to do a feature film.”

If the team had been less passionate and tenacious, there would be no *Toy Story* or *Cars*. If the company had been backed by typical venture capitalists instead of a visionary entrepreneur like Jobs, it would never have survived its various transitions. Although he is not usually thought of as a patient personality, Jobs provided patient capital for the company. He trusted the smart people on the team, recognizing that their attempts to create various business models were not fatal failures, but steps toward success. When Disney approached Pixar in 1991 to work together on a set of 3D computer-animated feature films, the company and its technology were ready.

How has the company managed to always stay out ahead of the competition, each film amazing audiences more than the one before? Part of the answer is that the technology organization is always working on three time horizons simultaneously. Pixar developers who are dedicated to the next film in the lineup work side by side with the directors, writers, and animators to apply and extend the current technology. Other developers work on the next generation of animation tools so that the characters and environments in future films are even more real—enabling water to flow, shiny cars to reflect light, and fur to look soft to the touch.

Pixar’s internal culture encourages creativity through questioning, openness, and a healthy attitude toward failure. Self-assessment is ongoing—not only when there’s a problem, but also when things seem to be working well. Everyone is encouraged to comment on one another’s work.

**Source #3:** You have found an informational article about Beethoven, the famous composer, who thrived in the face of extreme adversity.

**The Beethoven Factor**

***The people who thrive in the face of extreme adversity may surprise you ...***

In 1801, at age 31, Ludwig van Beethoven had become suicidal. He lived in poverty, was losing his hearing, and wallowed in the depths of withdrawn despair and hopelessness. Twenty-three years later, utterly deaf, no longer suicidal, and, instead, energetically creative, he immortalized Schiller’s life-affirming “Ode to Joy” in the lyrical chords of his Ninth Symphony. His transposing of Schiller’s inspiring words, “Be embraced all ye millions with a kiss for all the world,” reflected his remarkable ability to triumph over the tragedy of his hearing loss. He had triumphed over his tragedy to be able to construe the world in ways that can forever help all of us feel the joy he experienced by hearing his miraculous music.

Beethoven can be seen as one of the superstars of thriving. He did not suddenly transform himself from someone living in helpless despair to a person living in constant joy and elation. Like all ordinary thrivers, he continued to suffer through many terrible times and remained prone to dark moods throughout most of his life. In an 1801 letter to his friend Karl Ameda, he wrote, “Your Beethoven is having a miserable life, at odds with nature and its Creator, abusing the latter for leaving his creatures vulnerable to the slightest accident. . . . My greatest faculty, my hearing, is greatly deteriorated.”

For years, Beethoven heard mostly humming and buzzing until, for the last and very productive years of his life, he became totally deaf. Through it all, however, his ability to creatively construe his situation allowed him to develop an increasingly more encompassing and adaptive explanatory style.

In another letter Beethoven wrote to a friend five months after the letter to Ameda, he said, “You must think of me as being as happy as it is possible to be on this earth—not unhappy. No! I cannot endure it. I will seize Fate by the throat. It will not wholly conquer me. Oh, how beautiful it is to live—and live a thousand times over!” His words capture the essence of how a deaf man learned to listen by continuing to lead a life as magnificently enriched as it was difficult.

**Source #4**

You have found an article about the Positive Change Cycle proposed by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross that allows people to survive and thrive in the face of adversity.

# The Positive Change Cycle

Just as there is a [negative cycle](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/kubler_ross/kubler_ross.htm) of emotions experienced when the change is not to the liking of the person in question, so also is there a positive cycle. Not all people experience change as a bad thing: some will benefit from the change, whilst others just find change in itself intriguing and exciting.



In the first stage of positive change, the person is excited and intrigued by the change. They look forward to it with eager anticipation, building a very positive and often over-optimistic view, for example that it will be much easier for them and resolve all of their current issues. And for a time after the change (sometimes sadly short), there is a 'honeymoon period', during which they are positively [happy](http://changingminds.org/explanations/emotions/happiness.htm) with the change.

The honeymoon period does not last forever and the rose-tinted glasses start to fade as the untidiness of reality starts to bite. The person finds that things have not all fallen into place, that other people have not magically become as cooperative as they expected, and that things are just not as easy as they had expected. This pushes them over into a period of gloom when they realize that perfection, after all, is not that easy to attain. This may evidence itself in mutterings and grumblings, but still does not reach the depths of the [depression stage](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/kubler_ross/depression_stage.htm) of negative change perception (unless the person flips into a delayed negative cycle).

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Before long, however, their original optimism starts to reassert itself, now tinted by a resignation to the reality of the situation. After all, things are not *that* bad, and a positive sense of potential begins to creep back. As they look around them and talk to other people, they make realistic plans and move forward with an informed sense of optimism.

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Eventually, things reach a relatively steady platform of realistic and workable action. The person is probably happier than they were before the change started and, with their realistic vision, have the potential to reach giddier heights of happiness as they achieve more of their potential.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, Macmillan, NY, 1969

**Grade 8.4 Explanatory Performance Task: Overcoming Obstacles to Survive and Thrive**

**Part 1: ASSESSMENT ITEMS**

1. Source #4 includes an illustration. What information from the illustration is most likely the most useful for better understanding the content in Source #4. Explain how this information is most likely the most useful for better understanding the content of Source #4. Use two details from the illustration to support your explanation. Include the source title or number.

(short constructed response)

1. Sources #1, #2, and #3 give examples of people and a company can overcome obstacles to survive and thrive. Choose two sources and give two details from each source to support how people/a company were able to overcome obstacles to survive and thrive. Include the source title or number.

(short constructed response)

1. Check the boxes to show the claim(s) that each source supports. Some sources will have more than one box selected.

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|  | **Source #1:****Overcoming Obstacles** | **Source #2:****Closing the Innovation Gap** | **Source #3:****The Beethoven Factor** | **Source #4:****Positive Change Cycle** |
| 1. People survived and thrived by overcoming obstacles.
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| 1. A company survives and thrives because of the innovations of its employees.
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| 1. Many people are surviving and thriving because of the model of an athlete who survived cancer.
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| 1. A system for change could help people survive in the face of obstacles and also thrive.
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**Grade 8.4 Explanatory Performance Task: Overcoming Obstacles to Survive and Thrive**

**Part 2:**

1. Student Directions

You will now review your notes and sources, and plan, draft, revise, and edit your writing. You may use your notes and go back to the sources. Now read your assignment and the information about how your writing will be scored, and then begin your work.

Your Assignment

Your English teacher wants each student to write an explanatory article showing how people have overcome obstacles to survive and then how they go on to thrive. Your article will be read by other students, teachers, and parents.

Using more than one source, develop a main idea explaining about how people have overcome obstacles to survive and then how they go on to thrive. Choose the most important information from more than one source to support your main idea. Then, write an explanatory article about your main idea that is several paragraphs long. Clearly organize your article and support your main idea with details from the sources. Use your own words except when quoting directly from the sources. Be sure to give the source title or number when using details from the sources.

REMEMBER: A well-written explanatory article

* has a clear main idea
* is well-organized and stays on the topic
* has an introduction and conclusion
* uses transitions
* uses details from the sources to support your main idea
* puts the information from the sources in your own words, except when using direct quotations from the sources
* gives the title or number of the source for the details or facts you included
* develops ideas clearly
* uses clear language
* follows rules of writing (spelling, punctuation, and grammar)

**Now begin work on your explanatory article**. Manage your time carefully so that you can

1. Plan your explanatory article.
2. Write your explanatory article.
3. Revise and edit the final draft of your explanatory article.

For Part 2, you are being asked to write an informational article that is several paragraphs long.

Remember to check your notes and your pre-writing/planning as you write, and then revise and edit your informational article.