

STUDENT ESSAY SAMPLE

The following essay is based on a non-fiction selection that appeared on the **December 2003**

exam: **an essay:**

“Fathers, Sons, and Hockey” by Roy MacGregor.

Note the following:

- The student’s main idea is underlined once in the introductory paragraph.
- The student’s thesis statement is underlined twice.
- The *topic sentences* of each paragraph appear in italics.
- The student’s references to **techniques and devices** appear in bold letters.
- [Critical comments] appear in square brackets.

“Fathers, Sons and Hockey”, by Roy MacGregor, is a short essay about the nature of father-son relationships in general and, more specifically, in hockey. MacGregor asserts that, despite what may be true about other paternal relationships, in hockey the father-son relationship is reinforced through constant bonding and mutual support. In order to understand precisely how MacGregor makes his case, it is necessary first to explain his exploration of ideas put forth about father-son relationships in general. Second, the reader needs to understand his development of the idea that relationships in hockey provide an exception to general perceptions about the distant nature of father-son interactions. Thirdly, one needs to be able to follow MacGregor’s explanation of why this is the case. Overall, however, it is important to pay attention to MacGregor’s supporting arguments and justification in order to see that, while his heart is in the right place, his interpretation of the “facts” as he states them is open to criticism.

One of the purposes of MacGregor's text is to make statements and respond to various claims about paternal relationships. For example, MacGregor quotes Bertrand Russell as saying "the fundamental defect of fathers is that they want their children to be a credit to them. In some ways, MacGregor agrees with him and comments that "Fathers can't help themselves . . ." [The argument that MacGregor is attempting to make in his essay, however, is that this 'defect' referred to by Russell does not hinder the development of relationships at all.] In fact, the author sees hockey as an exception to the commonly held views. In further development of this idea, MacGregor gives the example of Olga Silverstein and Beth Rashbaum who presented, in their book "The Courage to Raise Good Men", the notion that there is a salient need for the increased participation of fathers in the family. MacGregor does not dispute this claim, in general, but says in response that there is " . . . little such hunger in hockey". [In support of his views, MacGregor latches on to the theory proposed by Ken Rappoport that hockey encourages family values and increases the personal bond between father and son.] MacGregor uses examples of various 'star' hockey players who make it clear to him that . . . it is undeniable that there is something about fathers and sons and hockey worthy of examination. For MacGregor, it is as much by necessity, as by any virtue or property of the sport that key family values are reinforced. [It is important for a critical understanding of MacGregor's argument to note his justification and explanation for why hockey is an exception to what experts point to as the degradation of the institution of the family in the west.] MacGregor explains why hockey preserves the father-son bond as being a necessary product of circumstance. He uses examples and comparison to support his argument. The circumstances in hockey are simply different from those associated with most other North American sports, says MacGregor. [He believes that, in playing hockey, a child needs the economic and emotional support of his family.] Fathers must be willing to make it out to 5 a.m. practices, drive their sons and dress them, watch their practices and support

them. For MacGregor, it is the sheer devotion, time and compassion that is required, the ultimate level of personal involvement that lends to hockey families this incredible father-son bond.

A brief analysis of MacGregor's justification provides a better understanding of the techniques and devices that he employs. Much of MacGregor's argument revolves around the allusion to, and comparisons of, various examples of hockey fathers and sons. He discusses Martin McSorley, who publicly greeted his father with a kiss, and Brett Hull, who was inspired by his father Bobby Hull. Also, MacGregor responds to various theorists who complain about the degradations of family values, comparing Robert Bly's "ritual space" to hockey dressing rooms, and contrasting "fathers who lose their sons five minutes after birth" with fathers who attend group sessions. [Unfortunately most of MacGregor's responses are irrelevant or unsatisfactory.] Also, MacGregor comments about Walt Disney, that he retreated to his " . . . empire that portrayed fathers as essentially ineffectual, bumbling and usually absent", after Disney had observed that very few songs were written about fathers. [MacGregor [MacGregor's arguments are faulty here; perhaps Disney does portray fathers pejoratively but that does not decrease the relevance or factuality of his claim. MacGregor also completely ignores the role of the mother, except to say that she might attend a hockey game or two to cheer on her son. In the context of the twenty-first century, MacGregor's focus solely on the father in the hockey family is chauvinistic and unrealistic.] Many mothers perform the same duties as fathers, negating the argument about hockey and its ability to foster father-son relationships. [Lastly, MacGregor uses anecdotal evidence, which, while illustrating his point, should be avoided in a formal argument.]

To conclude, MacGregor argues that hockey reinforces the father-son relationship by necessitating the achievement of expectation and consistent bonding. He agrees with experts about father-son relationships in general but claims that hockey is an exception to the rule.

MacGregor justifies his argument with examples, responses to arguments about the family in general and comparison of stories and ideas. An analysis of his justification reveals his use of allusion, examples, comparisons, contrast and the dialectical progression of his own argument in responses to others. All of these literary techniques and devices are employed by MacGregor in the text. However, a brief analysis of his argument also reveals certain ambiguities, fallacies and irrelevant points that cast doubt on whether or not MacGregor's text would stand up to sustained criticism. All the same, Macgregor's points still stand, yet the larger question looms as to, regardless of whether he's right or not, what exactly is causing the break-up of the family in the West.