DISTRICT WRITING PRE-TEST ASSESSMENT

MIDDLE SCHOOL

6TH & 7TH GRADE

INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY PROMPT

NAME:______________________________________

TEACHER: ________________ PER: ___
Writing Situation

Read all three of the following sources about the northern Florida Keys. What was the relevance of the location of the Jones’s island? Why did people feel that preserving the northern Keys was important? What were some of the issues surrounding the development of the park?

Write an explanatory essay about the contributing factors that led to the establishment of Biscayne National Park. Use the information from the texts in the passage set to write your essay. Cite evidence by title or source number.

Manage your time carefully so that you can

- read the passages;
- plan your response;
- write your response; and
- revise and edit your response.

Be sure to include

- an introduction
- support for your controlling idea using information from the passages; and
- a conclusion that is related to your controlling idea.

You may write or type your response.

Your writing should be in the form of a well-organized, multi paragraph essay.

You have 90 minutes to read, plan, write, revise, and edit your response.
The Jones Family and the Florida Keys

At the southern tip of Florida’s Biscayne National Park is a tiny island called Porgy Key. On this island, accessible only by boat, is a bronze plaque that marks the ruins of an old homestead. This was once a thriving farm and home to one of the most successful African-American families in Florida history. For more than a century, the Jones family lived on this island, transforming the lush wilderness into a successful business and beloved home.

Probably born into slavery in 1858, Israel Jones moved to south Florida around the age of 34 when he was a free man looking for work. He intended to find out what the world had to offer. For years, he took care of plantations and worked on a pineapple farm. During this time, he learned everything he could about growing lime and pineapple trees. He also met his wife, Mozelle, and started a family. In 1897, when he had saved enough money, Jones purchased Porgy Key for $300, about $5 an acre. A year later, he also purchased Old Rhodes Key, and he soon moved his family to its new island home.

Over the next 15 years, Jones set about making the place his own. He built a two-story house and a boat dock. With his sons, he began the difficult task of clearing the land by hand. Soon, they began farming pineapples and key limes, turning a profit within two years of the first planting. In time, the Jones family became one of the largest pineapple and lime producers on Florida’s eastern coast. In 1911, Jones added to his property with the purchase of Totten Key, about 250 acres, for $1 an acre.

By 1929, Israel Jones was ready to give the task of managing his farm to his sons, Arthur and Lancelot. Both Israel and Mozelle would pass away in the next few years, but their sons would continue the lime business until 1938. Because of several factors, key limes became less profitable. So the two brothers turned instead to fishing and guiding tours. The exceptionally charming and knowledgeable Lancelot acted as a guide for many prominent visitors to the Keys, including presidents Herbert Hoover and Lyndon Johnson.

Throughout the 1960s, a battle was waged between investors who wanted to develop the Keys into a tourist paradise and others who wanted to preserve their natural beauty. By then, Lancelot Jones was the second-largest property owner in the region and one of very few permanent yearlong residents. He found himself at the center of this heated conflict. Lancelot was not in favor of developing the islands. He wanted the beauty around him to be protected. He refused to sell Porgy Key to an oil refinery developer and supported plans to turn the area into a national park. The area was declared a national monument in 1968, and in 1970, Lancelot Jones became the first private landowner to sell his Biscayne property to the government. The National Park Service paid him and his sister-in-law an astounding $1.2 million and granted him the right to live out the rest of his life in his family home on Porgy Key.

For many years afterward, Lancelot continued to live on the old homestead. One of his greatest pleasures was sharing what he knew about the islands with groups of young students, who would listen intently to what Lancelot had to say. Until the end of his days, he was happy in the knowledge that he had done what he could to protect the unspoiled environment of the Keys.
Map indicating the location of Porgy Key, Old Rhodes Key, and Totten Key within Biscayne National Park.
The Florida Keys is one of the most famous and most visited island groups in the world. Contrary to what many people think, though, the Florida Keys do not begin at Key Largo. To the north lie nearly 50 more keys (ancient coral reef islands) that are, for the most part, undeveloped. The fight to protect these last unspoiled Keys ended more than 40 years ago with the creation of Biscayne National Park’s predecessor, the Biscayne National Monument.

During the early 1950s, an era of newfound prosperity, more and more Americans were taking vacations and moving to Florida. The Keys were a popular destination, and property values soared. Many people looked at the northernmost Keys and saw them being neglected. They pictured bridges, roads, and buildings. Several years later came a plan to dredge up 8,000 acres of bay bottom to create a jetport. In 1961, 13 area landowners voted to create the city of Islandia. Plans for Seadade, a major industrial seaport, were announced in 1962. The proposal called for the dredging of a 40-foot-deep channel through the bay’s clear, shallow waters. Dade County’s “New Frontier” was born, but it never grew beyond the toddler stage.

An initially small, but vocal, group of people had an entirely different vision for these islands: a national park unlike any other. This one would be covered by water, protecting not only the islands but the bay to the west and the reef to the east as well. It would provide a haven for wildlife and an escape for people tired of cramped city life. The park’s supporters were not extraordinary in the usual sense of the word. They were people who knew the area and who understood new concepts such as ecology and environmental preservation.

Slowly, support for this plan began to build. Juanita Greene’s inspiring newspaper stories in The Miami Herald helped speed up the pace. Hardy Matheson based his entire campaign for county commissioner on the issue of establishing the park. Vacuum cleaner magnate Herbert W. Hoover Jr., who spent considerable time in the area as a boy, brought legislators down from Washington for dramatic blimp rides over the proposed park. He was convinced that anyone who saw the place would be just as taken with it as he was. By early 1968, local and national support for a Biscayne National Monument was at an all-time high.

Facing a groundswell of public opposition, landowners in the city of Islandia brought in bulldozers in an attempt to despoil the area. Dubbed “Spite Highway,” the path was six lanes wide and seven miles long, right down the middle of Elliott Key. Park proponents were not discouraged. Congress, led by longtime Representative Dante Fascell, created the Biscayne National Monument to protect the area. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the bill on October 18, 1968.

That was more than 40 years ago. Since then, a lot has changed. Greater Miami has around 2.5 million residents and more than 8 million annual visitors from all over the world. The park has undergone several enlargements and a name change. Spite Highway has grown into a tunnel through a tropical hardwood forest, and it serves as the park’s one and only hiking trail.
While the struggle to protect the park from current local threats continues, some things have not changed. The northern Keys are still untethered by roads and bridges. The shallow water is still clear and beautiful. It is still a haven for wildlife and an escape for weary city dwellers.

1 **ecology**: the study of the relationships between organisms and their environments
2 **magnate**: person with a great deal of power

“The Birth of Biscayne National Park” in the public domain.