Excerpted from “Losing Is Good for You” By Ashley Merryman, *The New York Times,*  September 24, 2013

LOS ANGELES — As children return to school this fall and sign up for a new year’s worth of extracurricular activities, parents should keep one question in mind. Whether your kid loves Little League or gymnastics, ask the program organizers this: “Which kids get awards?” If the answer is, “Everybody gets a trophy,” find another program.

Trophies were once rare things — sterling silver cups bought from jewelry stores for truly special occasions. Today, participation trophies and prizes are almost a given, as children are constantly assured that they are winners. But the science is clear: awards can be powerful motivators, but nonstop recognition does not inspire children to succeed. Instead, it can cause them to underachieve.

It turns out that once kids have some proficiency in a task, the excitement and uncertainty of real competition may become the activity’s very appeal. If children know they will automatically get an award, what is the impetus for improvement? Why bother learning problem-solving skills, when there are never obstacles to begin with?

When it comes to rewards, people argue that kids must be treated identically: everyone must always win. That is misguided. And there are negative outcomes. Not just for specific children, but for society as a whole.

In June, an Oklahoma Little League canceled participation trophies because of a budget shortfall. A furious parent complained to a local reporter, “My children look forward to their trophy as much as playing the game.” That’s exactly the problem, says Jean Twenge, author of “Generation Me.” In life, “you’re going to lose more often than you win, even if you’re good at something,”

When children make mistakes, our job should not be to spin those losses into decorated victories. Instead, our job is to help kids overcome setbacks, to help them see that progress over time is more important than a particular win or loss, and to help them graciously congratulate the child who succeeded when they failed. To do that, we have to stop letting the trophy industry run our children’s lives.

This school year, let’s fight for a kid’s right to lose.

**Writing Directions**

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author’s most important ideas. Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced.

Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that are needed to help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.