

THE TIME-TRAVELER'S RECEIPT

Lessons with Mr. B: A Junior Reporter Project

THE PAST
(c. 1995)

MOVIE TICKET - \$4.50

TIME COST: 45 MINS



THE PRESENT
(c. 2026)

MOVIE TICKET - \$15.00

TIME COST: 30 MINS



INVESTIGATION:
Harder Work or Higher Prices?

JUNIOR REPORTER NAME: _____ DATE: _____



Uncovering the Truth About Purchasing Power.

PROJECT № TTR-001 · LESSONS WITH MR. B
FROM THE NEWS DESK



Welcome.

A B7 Collective project
v2 · Case File Edition

Inside this folder is a small, finite world with one job: *to make a kid's writing better*. No app. No streak. No leaderboard. Just paper documents and a project that takes about two weeks to run.

The folder is built to be opened, marked up, drawn on, and stapled back together. **Rip it. Spill coffee on it. Print it twice.** It's already been printed by other families this week.

01 / THE BUSINESS

One purchase. One household.

A single purchase covers every kid under your roof, forever. Print it as many times as you need.

If you're running these with kids from other families — co-op, microschool, private school, classroom, after-school program — pick up a copy for each family or email us about group licensing. We answer those notes ourselves and we make it work.

GROUP LICENSING → lessonswithmrb@b7collective.com

02 / THE REAL ONE

If you can't afford it, take it anyway.

If the cost is genuinely what's keeping this out of a kid's hands, take it anyway. No application. No income proof. No paperwork.

Email lessonswithmrb@b7collective.com, tell us which kit your kid wants to run, and we'll send it. We'd rather the work happen than the work sit on a shelf.

What this teaches.

Tier · MIDDLE SCHOOL (6–8)

Subject · ELA · Math · Social Studies

Project type · Investigative Journalism

This project is designed for kids in **grades 6–8** and aligns with the Common Core State Standards listed below. It runs for about **two weeks** with roughly 45–60 minutes per day. The deliverable is graded against a four-category rubric inside the folder; the rubric maps directly to these standards.

STANDARDS MET · CCSS GRADES 6–8

Common Core alignment.

CCSS.ELA-W.6-8.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas with precision.
CCSS.ELA-W.6-8.7	Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on multiple sources.
CCSS.ELA-W.6-8.8	Gather relevant info from multiple print and digital sources; assess credibility.
CCSS.ELA-W.6-8.4	Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
CCSS.MATH.6.RP.A.3	Use ratio reasoning to solve real-world problems ($\text{price} \div \text{wage} = \text{hours}$).

WHAT TWO WEEKS LOOKS LIKE

Week 1 — Reading & Drafts: Source-gathering, evidence log, ugly first draft. **Week 2 — Polish & Final:** Self-audit using rubric, banned-word check, polished final filed in the archive.

The Brief.

How to run this project.

The Time-Traveler's Receipt

AT A GLANCE

DURATION

2 weeks

~45-60 min/day

DELIVERABLE

**500-700 word
feature article**

ROLE

Junior Reporter

Investigative
Journalism

STANDARDS

5 CCSS

aligned to MS 6-8

THE PROJECT ARC

1

PHASE 1

READING

Days 1-4

Pick the beat. Find historical price + wage. Run the math.

2

PHASE 2

DRAFTS

Days 5-7

Draft lede + body with attribution. Land the kicker.

3

PHASE 3

POLISH

Days 8-10

Self-audit, banned-word check, read aloud.

4

PHASE 4

FILE

Day 10

File the polished article. Clip the press pass.

HOW IT RUNS

▶ WHAT'S INSIDE

- . Letter from the Editor + topic menu (six "beats")
- . Field guide: School Mode vs. Reporter Mode
- . Reporter's Notebook with 5W boxes + witness slots
- . Two gold-standard articles + Press Pass + rubric

▶ THE DELIVERABLE

- . 500-700 word feature article on a chosen "beat"
- . Lede, nut graph, body with attribution, kicker
- . Graded on Detective Work, Beat-Match, Banned Words, Sentence Variety

▶ WHAT YOU NEED

- . Notebook + pen
- . Computer with internet (BLS.gov, Wayback Machine)
- . Printer (optional)

WHEN TO STEP IN

Mostly, don't. The packet is built for the kid to run.

- 1** Kid can't find a credible historical source after 15 minutes
- 2** The math feels off — sanity-check the ratio
- 3** The draft is one paragraph — push back

FILE # TTR-001 / ECON DESK

THE TIME-TRAVELER'S RECEIPT

CLASSIFIED

FOR THE APPRENTICE

A folder of *receipts.*

Inside, you'll find: a letter, a list of beats, a schedule, field guides, worksheets, a model article, a rubric, and one Press Pass. Total damage: 5 days of class time.

— MB.

LESSONS WITH MR. B

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF · THE BEAT · ECONOMICS DESK

File #: TTR-001
Re: Your assignment

Day One of Five.

Junior Reporter –

Welcome to the newsroom. You've been given a press pass, a deadline, and one question that's more interesting than it looks:

Are kids today actually paying more for fun than their parents did?

The lazy reporter writes: ~~"Yes, because of inflation, the end."~~ That reporter does not get a byline. The real reporter notices that the dollar price of a thing isn't what it actually costs. The cost is in hours of work – what the economists call purchasing power. And those hours, when you do the math, almost never agree with the dollars.

Your job: pick one specific thing – a movie ticket, a Big Mac, a Jordan retro – and report what it costs in 1995 (or whenever your parent was 14) versus today. Not in dollars. In hours.

If you finish in twenty minutes, you have not finished.

Yours from the editor's desk,

Mr. B.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

P.S. Your press pass is in the back of this folder. Cut it out, fill it in, wear it. Earned the day you file your first article.

**Not optional.
Really pick
ONE thing.
"A phone" is
not one thing.*

*← This is the
whole project,
btw. Don't
lose
sight of it.*

*If you can Google
the answer in
20 seconds –
you picked the
wrong question.*

– MB

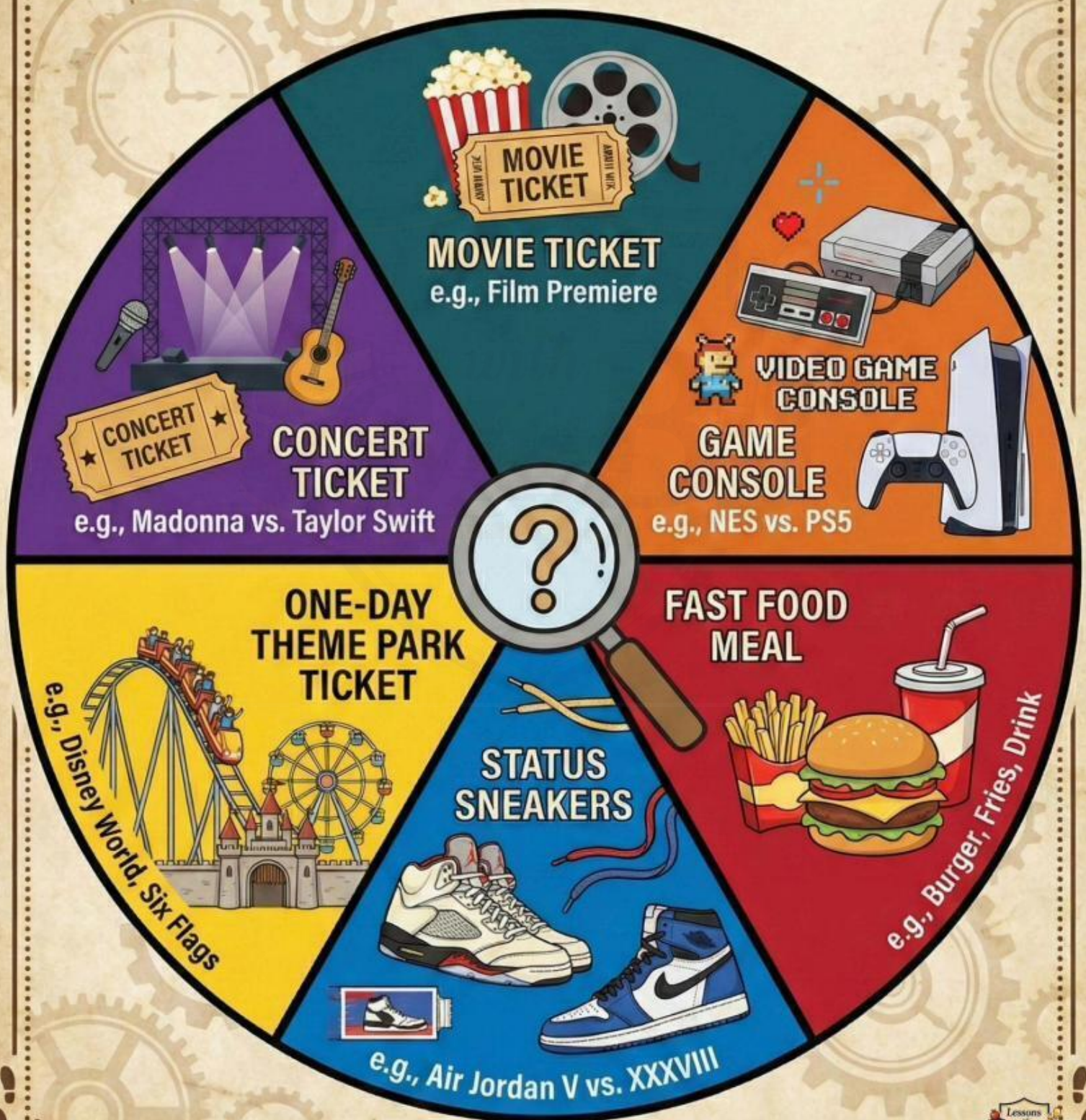
Six possible beats.

— pick the one your parent won't shut up about.

1. movie ticket (e.g. some 90s blockbuster) *streaming was supposed to kill it →*
2. game console (NES vs. Switch 2) *prices barely moved!*
3. fast-food combo (big mac + ~~★ fries~~ *The Economist*) *it does this!*
4. status sneakers (jordan V '90 vs. XXXVIII) *resale market is wild*
5. theme park ticket (disney one-price) *prices outpaced wages 4x*
6. concert ticket (madonna vs. taylor swift) *albums died → tours \$\$\$\$*

Next page:
the wheel.
Spin a pencil
if you really
can't decide.

THE DETECTIVE WORK



Quick Note: Pick one or have fun and spin a pencil to see where the tip lands!

— A FIVE-DAY PLAN —

Five days. One scoop.

M

Pick the beat. Line up the witnesses.

Choose your scoop. Brainstorm two adults you can interview. Get them on your calendar.

"what's the first thing you saved up for?"

T

Interview both witnesses. Hit the archives.

Talk to your two adults — capture exact quotes. Then go online: find the prices & wages, past and present.

W

Do the math. Find the motive.

Calculate both Sweat Scores. Then research *why* the price changed (inflation? demand? labor? resale?).

don't be scared of the math.

Th

Write the article. Ugly draft.

Inverted pyramid: lede → nut graph → body → kicker. Don't try to make it perfect on the first pass.

F

Polish & file. Read it aloud. ★ scoop!

Edit the draft. Build the "Two Receipts" infographic. Read every sentence aloud to catch the awkward bits. File it.

LESSONS WITH MR. B

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF · THE BEAT · ECONOMICS DESK

File #: TTR-001

Re: House Rules

REJECTED IF MISSING

Reporter -

Below: the things your story must do. None of these are negotiable. The newsroom is a craft, not a checklist - but these are the few items where the checklist wins.

// FORMAT

- [] 500-700 words. Not 499. Not 701.
- [] 12pt serif, double-spaced.
- [] Headline at the top. Your name underneath.
- [] Inverted pyramid (lede → nut → body → kicker).

// EVIDENCE

- [] Two interviewed witnesses, by name, quoted directly.
- [] Two archival sources for prices & wages, cited.
- [] Both Sweat Scores calculated & visible.
- [] At least one direct quote in proper form.

// VOICE

- [] No first-person "I". You are invisible.
- [] "According to" is your friend. Every claim, attributed.
- [] Specific nouns. Strong verbs. Real numbers.
- [] Banned words:

~~very~~ ~~really~~ ~~stuff~~ ~~things~~ ~~basically~~ ~~kinda~~
~~like~~

these aren't suggestions. they're the walls of the room.

every banned word in your first draft = one rewrite session.

If your draft has zero of the banned words, you're already halfway there.

— MB

P.S. If you can't cite a source for a number, you don't have the number. Keep digging.

The witnesses.

Two adults. Real interviews. Capture exact words.

Witness № 1

NAME

RELATIONSHIP

FIRST JOB & HOURLY PAY

BEST DIRECT QUOTE — *exact words. with quote marks.*

word
for
word!
↓

Witness № 2

NAME

RELATIONSHIP

FIRST JOB & HOURLY PAY

BEST DIRECT QUOTE

Hit the archives.

Four numbers. Four sources. *No source = no number.*

Then. — *the year your witness was 14.*

YEAR

PRICE OF YOUR ITEM (\$)

HOURLY MIN. WAGE (\$)

SOURCE URLS - two minimum. paste here:

Now. — *this year. today's prices.*

YEAR

PRICE OF YOUR ITEM (\$)

HOURLY MIN. WAGE (\$)

SOURCE URLS

BLS.gov and the
Wayback Machine
are your
best friends.

— MB

LESSONS WITH MR. B

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF · NEWS DESK

File № TTR-001 · Re: Search Like A Pro

Reporter —

Most kids type "old prices" into Google and get nothing. Pros type these exact phrases. Steal these. The archives don't open for lazy queries.

1. WAGES · THE MONEY

"Federal minimum wage history chart"
"[Your state] minimum wage [year]"
"Average hourly wage for teenagers 1990s"

2. MOVIE PRICES

"Average movie ticket price by year chart"
"Cost of movie ticket 1995 vs 2025"
"Regal Cinemas ticket prices history"

3. FOOD PRICES (fast food is best)

"Big Mac price history chart"
"McDonald's menu prices 1999"
"Cost of large pepperoni pizza 1990"

4. TECH & GAMING

"Nintendo 64 launch price 1996"
"Original Game Boy price 1989"
"Sony PlayStation 1 launch price"

5. SNEAKER PRICES

"Original retail price Air Jordan 5 1990"
"Nike Air Max launch price 1995"
"Cost of Reebok Pumps 1991"

6. THEME PARKS

"Disney World 1-day ticket price history"
"Six Flags admission cost 1998"
"Universal Studios ticket price by year"

7. CONCERTS

"Average concert ticket price 1990 vs today"
"Ticket price for [Artist] tour [Year]"
"Historic concert ticket prices chart"

P.S. Add the YEAR to every search. "Game Boy price" gets you scalpers. "Game Boy launch price 1989" gets you the receipt.

*BLS.gov and the
Wayback Machine
are your best
friends. Period.
— MB*

The math.

Two equations. Two answers. Both in *hours of your life*.

THE FORMULA

$$\text{PRICE} \div \text{HOURLY WAGE} = \text{HOURS WORKED}$$

("Sweat Score" — how much of your life it costs)

Show your work!
Not just the answer.

— MB

A. Then.

From § 9 — past price ÷ past wage.

$$\underline{\hspace{2cm}} \div \underline{\hspace{2cm}} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \text{ hours}$$

B. Now.

Today's price ÷ today's wage.

$$\underline{\hspace{2cm}} \div \underline{\hspace{2cm}} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \text{ hours}$$

C. The verdict — circle one.

VERDICT · A

Today is harder.

Sweat Score went UP. Kids today work more.

VERDICT · B

Today is easier.

Sweat Score went DOWN. Less work, same fun.

Are you *actually* finished?

Three index cards. Tear them out. Mark them up. Staple them to your draft.

CHECKLIST · № 01

The Reporter's Notebook. *Did you do the legwork?*

- ☐ Two witnesses interviewed. (*only mom = one. find another.*)
- ☐ Three direct quotes captured (word-for-word, in quote marks).
- ☐ Past-year price & wage documented + source URL.
- ☐ Today's price & wage documented + source URL.

CHECKLIST · № 02

The Crunch. *Does the math actually math?*

- ☐ Past Sweat Score computed. Math is shown.
- ☐ Today's Sweat Score computed. Math is shown.
- ☐ Both answers in **hours**, not dollars.
- ☐ A clear comparison: harder, easier, or about the same?

CHECKLIST · № 03

The Article. *Could a stranger read it & get it?*

- ☐ 500–700 words. Counted with a tool.
- ☐ Headline < 12 words and earns the click.
- ☐ Lede answers Who/What/When/Where in sentences 1–2.
- ☐ At least one direct quote, attributed.
- ☐ Kicker (last line) *lands* — doesn't just stop.
- ☐ Read aloud to a real person. They didn't get bored.

THE JUNIOR REPORTER'S FIELD GUIDE

The Shift from School Writing to News Writing



SCHOOL MODE (The Old Way)



THE GOAL: **ENTERTAIN & FEEL**

Save the best for last!
Build up slowly to a
dramatic conclusion.
Climax at the End



THE VOICE: **"I THINK..."**

Share opinions & amotions.
"In my view, it was
wonderful."



THE DETAILS: **VAGUE & FLOWERY**

Use many adjectives,
generalizations.
"A good amount of things."

REPORTER MODE (The New Way)

THE GOAL: INFORM & FACT-CHECK



THE LEDE (Who, What, When,
Where) - Essential Info First!

BODY
(Evidence, Data, Context)

KICKER
(Memorable Quote)



THE VOICE: **"ACCORDING TO..."**

Be invisible.
Attribute facts to sources.
"Data shows prices rose 20%."



THE DETAILS: **SPECIFIC & PUNCHY**

Use exact numbers, strong
verbs, and direct quotes,
"\$4.25 per hour in 1895."

TOP 5 TIPS FOR THE BEAT



ATTRIBUTION IS KEY:

Never make a claim
without proving who
said it ["According to..."]



STRONG VERBS,

Describe actions,
not just feelings



LET THEM SPEAK:

Use direct quotes to
bring the story to life



BE SPECIFIC:

"He bought a Snickers,"
not "He bought a snack".



THE INVISIBLE 'I':

Remove your opinion
from the news story

School mode.

Reporter mode.

Same facts. Different writer. The first version is what you write in English class. The second is what gets printed.

✗ SCHOOL MODE

In my opinion, I think the price of a movie ticket has gone up a really lot since the 1990s. Movies cost a lot more now and they cost a lot less back then. This is interesting because basically nothing else in life has gone up that much.

WHAT'S WRONG:

- "in my opinion, I think" (both. dead weight.)
- "a lot" / "really" / "stuff" (vague.)
- "this is interesting" (telling, not showing.)
- Zero numbers. Zero quotes. Zero citations.

✓ REPORTER MODE

In 1995, a movie ticket cost \$4.50, and the federal minimum wage was \$4.25 an hour. A teenager earned roughly one ticket per hour of work. In 2026, that same ticket runs \$16, and Maryland's minimum wage is \$15. The math, against expectations, has barely moved.

WHAT WORKS:

- Specific numbers. Specific years.
- "According to" energy, even unspoken.
- Kicker — "barely moved" — IS the story.
- Reporter is invisible. Story is up front.

The biggest move from "school" to "reporter" is one switch:

instead of telling me what you think happened, tell me what you found.

You become invisible. The receipts do the talking.
— MB

Five rules of the beat.

1. "According to" is your best friend.

every claim earns an attribution. ~~"Pizza was cheaper in 1990."~~ X "According to a 1990 Pizza Hut menu archived online, a large pepperoni cost \$8.99." ✓

2. Cut adjectives. Add verbs.

adjectives = opinions in disguise, verbs = facts. ~~"prices went really high."~~ X "the price jumped 200%." ✓

3. Let the people speak.

quote them, don't paraphrase. ~~"I scrubbed dishes for \$3.80 an hour," my father said.~~ "I can still smell the grease." ✓

4. Be specific. Always.

general writing is forgettable. ~~"he bought some snacks."~~ X "he bought a Snickers and a Coke." ✓

5. The Invisible "I".

you are not in the story. ~~"I found out that wages went up."~~ X "Federal data shows wages rose 41%." ✓

JUNIOR REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK:



UNCOVERING THE TRUTH

The 5 Ws & Quotes: Your Toolkit for Great Stories



WHO

(People involved, titles)



WHAT

(The event, action, or news)



WHERE

(Specific location)

WHEN

(Date, time)



WHY

(The cause or reason)



DIRECT QUOTES

(Exact words spoken, attribute correctly!)



INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF JOURNALISTS

Stretch first.

1. The Red Pen Challenge.

Each "lazy" sentence below has a problem. Cross out the bad words. Rewrite below in Reporter Mode – use specific numbers, strong verbs, or a direct quote.

A. "The school lunch was bad and the milk was maybe old."

REPORTER'S FIX:

B. "I saw a lot of stuff inside the gym."

REPORTER'S FIX:

2. Writing the lede.

A great lede answers Who, What, When, Where in the first sentence. Use the facts:

FACTS:

Who: 7th-grade Science Club | What:

Launched a model rocket

Where: The football field | When: Tuesday
afternoon

Detail: The rocket reached 300 ft.

YOUR LEDE - ONE OR TWO SENTENCES:

*there's no
"right" answer
here. just a
better one.*

JUNIOR REPORTER PRESS PASS: CUT, DECORATE & WEAR!



HOW TO ASSEMBLE:

1. Cut out your press pass along the dotted lines.
2. Cut out any colored "stickers" you want to use.
3. Glue your photo and stickers onto the badge.
4. Punch a hole at the top and attach a string or lanyard to wear it!

BONUS TIP: Laminate your finished badge to make it look extra professional and last longer!

★ WHAT "RIGHT" LOOKS LIKE

A 1995 movie ticket cost a teenager an hour of work.

In 2026, it still does.

By M. Reyes | Junior Reporter, Economics Desk

Between shifts at his summer job in 1995, Tom Reyes — now 44 — saved up for a movie. The film was *Apollo 13*. The ticket cost \$4.50. He earned the federal minimum wage of \$4.25 an hour. To see Tom Hanks survive the splashdown, Reyes worked just over an hour.

Today, his daughter does the same calculation. She earns \$15 an hour scooping ice cream. A ticket to the new *Mission: Impossible* costs her \$16. The math works out almost identically: just over an hour of labor.

"It's the same trade," she said, watching the trailer on her phone. "I just get fewer cup holders."

Despite a 256% increase in the dollar price of a movie ticket since 1995, the real cost — measured in hours of teenage labor — has stayed almost flat, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and ticket-price archives at *Box Office*

Mojo. The Sweat Score for a 1995 ticket: 1.06 hours. For a 2026 ticket: 1.07 hours.

"That's exactly what you'd expect if everything were just inflation," said Dr. Annie Park, an economist at Johns Hopkins who tracks consumer pricing. "The interesting story is when something *doesn't* match. Tickets do match. Concerts don't."

Concert tickets, by contrast, have dramatically outpaced wages. A 1990 Madonna show cost about \$35; today's Taylor Swift Eras Tour seats average \$500 — over 14 hours of teenage labor for a single show. According to industry analyst Pollstar, that's because album sales have collapsed, and tours are now where artists earn their living.

For Reyes, the takeaway is simpler. "Inflation does what inflation does," he said. "But we're paying our musicians differently now. The ticket is the receipt."

600 words. 4 sources.
2 quotes. Zero "I"s.
THIS is the bar.

— MB

The editor's cut.

File #: TTR-001
Re: Final mark

CRITERIA	FRONT PAGE · 3 pts	INSIDE PAGE · 2 pts	SPIKED · 1 pt
1. Math & Data – <i>The Crunch</i>	Exact cents. Citations for every number. Sweat Score correct for both eras.	Rounded numbers. One citation missing. Math has minor errors but concept clear.	Numbers guessed. No citations. Compares dollars instead of hours.
2. Structure – <i>Inverted pyramid</i>	Lede with vivid detail. Smooth pivot from story to data.	Lede works but lacks specifics. Pivot is abrupt.	Flat lede ("I interviewed my dad"). Two unrelated lists stapled together.
3. Verdict – <i>Analysis & insight</i>	Answers "who had it harder?" Explains <i>purchasing power</i> , not just inflation.	Conclusion present but fuzzy. Mentions inflation without unpacking it.	No conclusion. Or "inflation trap" – just claims things cost more.
4. Voice – <i>Style & tone</i>	Invisible "I". Specific nouns. Zero banned words. Direct attributed quotes.	Slips into "I" 1–2 times. Occasional general words. One banned slip.	First person throughout. Banned words everywhere. Quotes paraphrased.
5. The Visual – <i>Two Receipts</i>	Two receipts side-by-side. Labeled in <i>hours</i> , not dollars.	Graphic present but messy. Lists dollars, time only in caption.	Missing or unreadable. Lists only dollars.

SCORE CONVERSION

- 13–15 pts** Front page, above the fold. (A)
10–12 pts Inside the paper. Strong. (B)
07–09 pts Filed; needs revision. (C)
00–06 pts Spiked. See the editor.

TOTAL SCORE

/ 15

EDITOR'S SIGNATURE

X _____



STORY · FILED

The Time-Traveler's Receipt

FILE № TTR-001 · FILED IN THE ARCHIVE

There are more folders on the desk.

More artifacts, more drafts, more worksheets that don't look like worksheets. Pick the next one.

★ FIND YOUR NEXT PROJECT ★

lessonswithmrb.com

Built with care. Delivered with excellence.