
V. English Language Arts,
Reading Comprehension, Grade 6

Grade 6 English Language Arts Reading Comprehension Test

The spring 2008 grade 6 MCAS English Language Arts Reading Comprehension test was based on learning standards in the two content strands of the Massachusetts *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* (2001) listed below. Page numbers for the learning standards appear in parentheses.

- Language (*Framework*, pages 19–26)
- Reading and Literature (*Framework*, pages 35–64)

The *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* is available on the Department Web site at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html.

In *Test Item Analysis Reports* and on the Subject Area Subscore pages of the MCAS *School Reports* and *District Reports*, ELA Reading Comprehension test results are reported under two MCAS reporting categories: **Language** and **Reading and Literature**, which are identical to the two *Framework* content strands listed above.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The MCAS grade 6 ELA Reading Comprehension test included three separate test sessions. Each session included selected readings, followed by multiple-choice and open-response questions. Common reading passages and test items are shown on the following pages as they appeared in test booklets. Due to copyright restrictions, certain reading passages cannot be released to the public on the Web site. For further information, contact Student Assessment Services at 781-338-3625.

Reference Materials and Tools

The use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries was allowed for current and former limited English proficient students only, during all three ELA Reading Comprehension test sessions. No other reference materials were allowed during any ELA Reading Comprehension test session.

Cross-Reference Information

The table at the conclusion of this chapter indicates each item's reporting category and the *Framework* general standard it assesses. The correct answers for multiple-choice questions are also displayed in the table.

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 1

DIRECTIONS

This session contains three reading selections with sixteen multiple-choice questions and two open-response questions. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

Aliens, robots, and time machines. Not everyone is interested in them, but Isaac Asimov was, from a very early age. Asimov was one of the most creative modern science fiction authors—you may have seen the movie I, Robot, based on his work. Read the article about Isaac Asimov’s life and answer the questions that follow.

The Bookworm Who Became a Science Fiction Writer

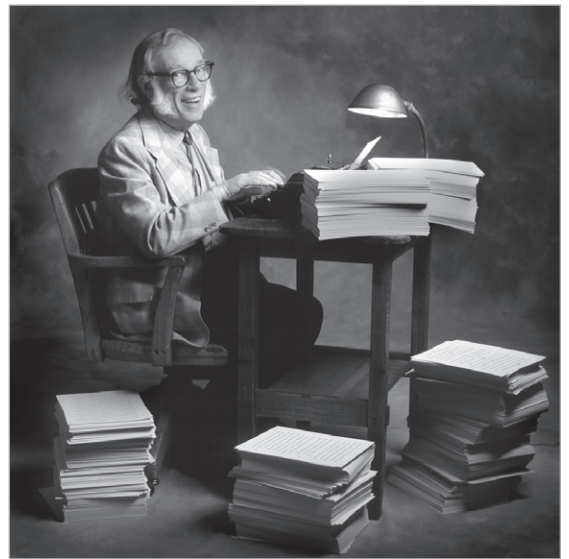
by Marc McCutcheon

1 A microscopic team of humans in a minuscule submarine cruises through the veins of a sick man’s body. . . . A robot takes desperate measures to become human. . . . Citizens of an alien world panic as they witness their first nightfall in 1,000 years. . . .

2 These are the plots of just three of the wondrous stories either written or co-written by Isaac Asimov, one of the greatest science fiction authors of all time. Asimov, who started writing at the age of 11, wrote in nearly every category — history, science, language, religion, geography, chemistry, ecology, math, mystery, reference, juvenile, humor — but it is his science fiction works that he is most famous for. Chances are good that you or somebody in your family has read a short story or book by Asimov or seen a movie based on one.

3 Few authors top him in sheer production, as he wrote nearly 350 books! And his scientific essays and science fiction stories have inspired numbers of readers to become either scientists or science fiction writers themselves. So how did the young Isaac gain the ability and talent necessary to write so many books? What kind of childhood led him to imagine robots, space travel and life in the future?

4 Isaac was born in Russia in 1920, then was taken by his parents to America when he was three. He taught himself how to read at age four and began to write stories when he was 11. He graduated



from high school at 15. Because his family was too poor to buy books, Isaac went to the local library. In his autobiography, he recalls himself at age nine:

I read omnivorously¹ and without guidance. I would stumble on books about Greek myths and fell in love with that world. When I discovered . . . the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, I took them out of the library regularly. I enjoyed them and read and reread them, often beginning again as soon as I had finished, until I had almost memorized them . . . I read Dumas and Dickens and Louisa May Alcott and, indeed, almost the entire gamut² of 19th-century fiction.

5 Isaac read some books as many as 26 times! As most bookworms do, he preferred reading to any other activity. Because of this and because his parents needed him to work long hours in their candy store in New York, he spent little time with friends or playing like other kids. But it was in the candy store that he found the time to read. You might feel sorry for Isaac, but he didn't feel sorry for himself.

6 Although Isaac was a voracious reader, meaning no matter how many books he read it just wasn't enough, he didn't discover science fiction until he was 10. He stumbled upon the monthly magazines *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Stories* and from the first few pages, was hooked. *Astounding Stories* was the best science fiction magazine of its day, and some of America's most imaginative writers contributed stories to it. The tales of aliens, robots and time machines so enthralled Isaac that he would often retell them to groups of fellow junior high students on the sidewalk outside of school.

FASCINATING FACT:

Isaac isn't the only science fiction writer to be published as a teenager. Robert Bloch sold his first story at 17. Greg Bear wrote his first story at age 10 and sold his first story at age 15.

FASCINATING FACT:

In college one of Isaac's professors told him, "The trouble with you, Isaac, is that you can't write."

7 Isaac not only read and reread every issue of these magazines (luckily, his father stocked them in the candy shop so he could read them for free!), he would also write to their editors and critique³ each story. Some of his letters were even published. As Isaac learned more about science fiction, he began to believe that he could write as well as some of the authors he was reading. Why not try?

8 Although Isaac had penned his first story at age 11, it wasn't until his mid-teens that he began to get serious. He then churned out a rapid succession of stories, which he submitted to the editors at *Astounding Stories* and *Amazing Stories*. His first dozen efforts were rejected, but Isaac persevered. He worked tirelessly at becoming a better writer. At 18, he wrote a story called "Marooned Off Vesta." It earned him the breakthrough he was waiting for — it was published in *Amazing Stories* a few months later, and Isaac giddily collected his first writing check for \$64 (approximately \$820 in today's dollars). The rest, as they say, is history.

¹ *read omnivorously* — read anything available

² *gamut* — range

³ *critique* — review; evaluate

- 9 Asimov eventually sold nearly everything he wrote. This included short stories with such titles as “Ring Around the Sun”; “The Martian Way”; “I, Robot”; and “Stowaway.” Today his short stories have been collected in no less than 33 volumes. Among his best works is a story entitled “Nightfall,” which he wrote when he was just 20. The members of the Science Fiction Writers of America voted it the greatest science fiction story ever written.
- 10 One key to Asimov’s popularity was his simple writing style; another was his attention to accuracy. Unlike many writers of his day, his science fiction had *real* science in it. When he wrote that the sun was 93 million miles away or that the sound of an explosion could not be heard in space, readers could be assured he was right.
- 11 While many authors describe their work as difficult — even agonizing — Asimov never did. He loved to write. He wrote as much as 18 hours a day, even when he was sick. He wrote on his birthday. He wrote on holidays. And it was this passion for his craft that made him so successful. At the peak of his career, he sold a piece every six days.
- 12 Isaac Asimov’s career came full circle in 1976 when a new science fiction magazine was named after him. *Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine* is still being published today and is cultivating a whole new generation of award-winning authors. In 1987 he was given the ultimate recognition from his peers: the coveted Grand Master of Science Fiction award for his lifetime of achievements in the field. He died in 1992.

WANT TO BE A SCIENCE FICTION WRITER?

Before you begin, you should READ, READ, READ. If you want to write science fiction, you’ve got to love to *read* science fiction. So if you haven’t already read a hundred or more science fiction short stories, this would be a good place to start.

Science fiction magazines are as popular today as they were when Asimov was a boy. These magazines pay writers, no matter what their age, for well-written stories. Two of the best are *Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine* . . . and *Fantasy and Science Fiction* . . . Once you have a story ready to send, write to the editors for their submission guidelines and follow them closely. These guidelines typically contain everything you need to know to professionally submit your story to the publication. Getting published takes time, so don’t be discouraged if the first few stories you submit are not accepted. It’s important to keep reading and writing science fiction to continually hone your science fiction writing skills.

- 1 What is the **most likely** reason the author uses examples of story plots in paragraph 1?
- A. to show the reader how characters are created
 - B. to persuade the reader to write science fiction
 - C. to introduce the reader to science fiction writing
 - D. to show the reader different approaches to writing

- 2 Which fact about Asimov's early life **best** predicted his future career?
- A. He moved to the United States with his parents.
 - B. He read books at the library instead of buying them.
 - C. He helped his parents in their New York candy store.
 - D. He taught himself to read when he was four years old.

- 3 Based on paragraph 9, for which of his stories did Asimov receive the **most** praise?
- A. "Ring Around the Sun"
 - B. "The Martian Way"
 - C. "Stowaway"
 - D. "Nightfall"

- 4 Based on paragraph 10, what is a **main** reason Asimov's work is respected?
- A. He made sure the information in his stories was correct.
 - B. He wrote stories about a great variety of subjects.
 - C. He included entertaining characters in his stories.
 - D. He wrote more stories than any other writer.

- 5 Read the sentence from paragraph 12 in the box below.

Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine is still being published today and is cultivating a whole new generation of award-winning authors.

- Based on the article, what does the phrase "cultivating a whole new generation of . . . authors" **most likely** mean?
- A. The magazine may inspire its readers to become writers.
 - B. The magazine gives readers information about Asimov's life.
 - C. The magazine continues to reprint some of Asimov's best stories.
 - D. The magazine sponsors a writing contest similar to one Asimov won.

- 6 What is the **main** purpose of the section titled “Want to Be a Science Fiction Writer?”
- A. to encourage young people to read science fiction
 - B. to caution young people about the challenges of writing
 - C. to suggest that young people should read better quality magazines
 - D. to give guidance to young people who want to write science fiction

- 7 Read the sentence from paragraph 6 in the box below.

The tales of aliens, robots and time machines so enthralled Isaac that he would often retell them to groups of fellow junior high students on the sidewalk outside of school.

Based on the sentence, what does the word *enthralled* **most likely** mean?

- A. troubled
- B. satisfied
- C. distracted
- D. fascinated

Question 8 is an open-response question.

- **Read the question carefully.**
- **Explain your answer.**
- **Add supporting details.**
- **Double-check your work.**

Write your answer to question 8 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 8 Based on the article, describe the qualities that Isaac Asimov had that led him to become a successful science fiction writer. Support your answer with important details from the article.

This selection from the classic tale *Black Beauty* tells of a horse's life as a young colt. Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.

MY EARLY HOME

from *Black Beauty*
by Anna Sewell

1 **T**HE first place that I can well remember was a large pleasant meadow with a pond of clear water in it. Some shady trees leaned over it, and rushes and water-lilies grew at the deep end. Over the hedge on one side we looked into a plowed field, and on the other we looked over a gate at our master's house, which stood by the roadside; at the top of the meadow was a grove of fir trees, and at the bottom a running brook overhung by a steep bank.

2 While I was young I lived upon my mother's milk, as I could not eat grass. In the daytime I ran by her side, and at night I lay down close by her. When it was hot we used to stand by the pond in the shade of the trees, and when it was cold we had a nice warm shed near the grove.

3 As soon as I was old enough to eat grass my mother used to go out to work in the daytime, and come back in the evening.

4 There were six young colts in the meadow besides me; they were older than I was; some were nearly as large as grown-up horses. I used to run with them, and had great fun; we used to gallop all together round and round the field as hard as we could go. Sometimes we had rather rough play, for they would frequently bite and kick as well as gallop.

5 One day, when there was a good deal of kicking, my mother whinnied to me to come to her, and then she said:

6 "I wish you to pay attention to what I am going to say to you. The colts who live here are very good colts, but they are cart-horse colts, and of course they have not learned manners. You have been well-bred and well-born; your father has a great name in these parts, and your grandfather won the cup two years at the Newmarket races; your grandmother had the sweetest temper of any horse I ever knew, and I think you have never seen me kick or bite. I hope you will grow up gentle and good, and never learn bad ways; do your work with a good will, lift your feet up well when you trot, and never bite or kick even in play."

7 I have never forgotten my mother's advice; I knew she was a wise old horse, and our master thought a great deal of her. Her name was Duchess, but he often called her Pet.

8 Our master was a good, kind man. He gave us good food, good lodging, and kind words; he spoke as kindly to us as he did to his little children. We were all fond of him, and my mother loved him very much. When she saw him at the gate she would neigh with joy, and trot up to him. . . . All the horses would come to him, but I think we were his favorites. My mother always took him to the town on a market day in a light gig.*

* *gig* — a horse-drawn carriage or cart

- 9 There was a plowboy, Dick, who sometimes came into our field to pluck blackberries from the hedge. When he had eaten all he wanted he would have what he called fun with the colts, throwing stones and sticks at them to make them gallop. We did not much mind him, for we could gallop off; but sometimes a stone would hit and hurt us.
- 10 One day he was at this game, and did not know that the master was in the next field; but he was there, watching what was going on; over the hedge he jumped in a snap, and catching Dick by the arm, he gave him such a box on the ear as made him roar with the pain and surprise. As soon as we saw the master we trotted up nearer to see what went on.
- 11 “Bad boy!” he said, “bad boy! to chase the colts. This is not the first time, nor the second, but it shall be the last. There—take your money and go home; I shall not want you on my farm again.” So we never saw Dick anymore. Old Daniel, the man who looked after the horses, was just as gentle as our master, so we were well off.

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- 9 What is the **main** purpose of paragraphs 1 and 2 in the selection?
- A. to summarize the plot
 - B. to explain the conflict
 - C. to describe the setting
 - D. to present the characters
- 10 Based on paragraph 6, how is the narrator different from the other colts?
- A. He has a father who watches out for him.
 - B. He is expected to do finer things with his life.
 - C. He is more shy and hesitant to join in the games.
 - D. He lives in better quarters and enjoys more freedom.

- 11 In paragraph 7, why does the narrator mention that the master has a nickname for Duchess?
- A. to show that Duchess is special to the master
 - B. to show why the other horses resent Duchess
 - C. to show why the other horses treat Duchess differently
 - D. to show that Duchess needs extra attention from the master
- 12 What do paragraphs 10 and 11 **best** show about the master?
- A. He expects people to be hard workers.
 - B. He is impatient with people who disobey him.
 - C. He is very strict with his horses and his workers.
 - D. He cares deeply about protecting his horses and his farm.
- 13 Based on the selection, why is the colt **most likely** telling the story?
- A. to explain why he is cautious around humans
 - B. to suggest his mother was too strict
 - C. to show how the master changed
 - D. to share a fond memory

Poetry is often used to express emotion. In the poem below, Navajo poet Shonto Begay recalls feelings about his mother's kitchen. Read "In My Mother's Kitchen" and answer the questions that follow.

IN MY MOTHER'S KITCHEN

Fragrance of fresh tortillas and corn stew
Fills my mother's kitchen
Sparsely furnished
Crowded with warmth
5 Soot-grayed walls, secretive and blank
She moves gently in and out of light
Like a dream just out of reach

The morning light gives her a halo
That plays upon her crown of dark hair
10 Strong brown hands caress soft mounds of dough
She gazes out into the warming day
Past sagebrush hills, out towards the foot of Black Mesa
How far would she let the goats wander today
Before it rains

15 Childhood dreams and warmth
Tight in my throat, tears in my eyes
The radio softly tuned to a local AM station
News of ceremonies and chapter meetings
And funerals
20 Flows into the peaceful kitchen
Lines upon her face, features carved of hard times
Lines around her eyes, creases of happy times
Bittersweet tears and ringing silvery laughter
I ache in my heart

25 My mother's gentle movements light up dark corners
Her gentle smiles recall childhood dreams still so alive
My mother moves in and out of light
Like clouds on days of promising rain

—Shonto Begay

From NAVAJO: VISIONS AND VOICES ACROSS THE MESA by Shonto Begay. Copyright © 1995 by Shonto Begay. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

- 14 Read lines 3 and 4 of the poem in the box below.

Sparsely furnished
Crowded with warmth

What does the poet **most likely** mean by the contrast in the lines?

- A. A room can be full of love even if the family has few possessions.
- B. A room can seem cramped even if it contains no furniture.
- C. A memory often seems better than real life.
- D. A kitchen is the room used most in a home.

- 15 Line 10 contrasts the mother’s strength with her

- A. past.
- B. hope.
- C. sorrow.
- D. gentleness.

- 16 Read lines 21 and 22 from the poem in the box below.

Lines upon her face,
features carved of hard times

Lines around her eyes,
creases of happy times

What does the speaker suggest about the lines in his mother’s face?

- A. They seem to change as time passes.
- B. They are more obvious in the bright light.
- C. They are created by both joy and sadness.
- D. They represent both the past and the future.

- 17 What is suggested by the phrase “light up dark corners” in line 25?

- A. The mother knows the secrets of her son.
- B. The mother makes difficult times easier for her son.
- C. The mother shows concern that her son is too serious.
- D. The mother seems most alive to her son in the evening.

Question 18 is an open-response question.

- **Read the question carefully.**
- **Explain your answer.**
- **Add supporting details.**
- **Double-check your work.**

Write your answer to question 18 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 18** Based on the poem, explain why the speaker's memory of his mother's kitchen is important to him. Support your answer with important details from the poem.

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 2

DIRECTIONS

This session contains one reading selection with eight multiple-choice questions and one open-response question. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

This selection comes from Gary Paulsen's novel The River. Two years before the events in this selection take place, Brian Robeson, the main character, had survived alone in the wilderness for 54 days after a plane crash. Now Brian is back in the woods with Derek Holtzer, a survival instructor, to re-create his experiences. Read the selection and then answer the questions that follow.

The River by Gary Paulsen

Students read a selection titled *The River* and then answered questions 19 through 27 that follow on pages 122 through 124 of this document.

Due to copyright restrictions, the selection cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the copyright citation below.

From RIVER by Gary Paulsen, copyright © 1991 by Gary Paulsen. Used by permission of Dell Publishing, a division of Random House, Inc.

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- 19 What is the **most likely** reason the author repeated the words *Full* and *All wrong* as separate paragraphs 10 and 12?
- A. to create a sense of mystery in the story
 - B. to stress Brian's growing concerns
 - C. to show that Derek repeated Brian's words
 - D. to indicate that Brian was becoming confused

- 20 Read the sentence from paragraph 27 in the box below.

You can tell, but you can't really teach.

Based on the information in the selection, what does Brian mean by this statement?

- A. People learn best by reading.
- B. People learn best by experience.
- C. People will learn something if they want to.
- D. People have difficulty learning from Derek.

- 21 In the selection, why was Brian unconcerned about the storm at first?
- A. It was almost morning.
 - B. He knew it would pass quickly.
 - C. It was moving away from them.
 - D. He thought they were well protected.

- 22 In the selection, what mistake caused Derek to be hit by the lightning?
- A. He tried to save Brian.
 - B. He reached for the radio.
 - C. He went outside the shelter.
 - D. He got too close to the tree.

- 23 Based on information in this selection, what will **most likely** happen in the next chapter?
- A. Brian will leave Derek on his own.
 - B. Brian and Derek will fly to get help.
 - C. Brian and Derek will give up the experiment.
 - D. Brian will help Derek survive his injuries.

- 24 Which event causes the mood of the selection to change?
- A. Derek makes a call on the radio.
 - B. Brian is awakened by an explosion.
 - C. Brian and Derek discuss their situation.
 - D. The plane drops Brian and Derek at the lake.

- 25 Read the sentence from paragraph 6 in the box below.

Then they had enhanced the beds and made them deep and soft with more boughs . . .

What does the word *enhanced* mean as it is used in the sentence?

- A. built
- B. carried
- C. cleaned
- D. improved

- 26 Read the sentence from paragraph 31 in the box below.

They had banked the fire well and the coals would last until morning.

Which meaning of the word *banked* is used in the sentence?

- A. a hillside or slope
- B. put or kept in a bank
- C. a place for storing supplies
- D. piled up in a mound or heap

Question 27 is an open-response question.

- **Read the question carefully.**
- **Explain your answer.**
- **Add supporting details.**
- **Double-check your work.**

Write your answer to question 27 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 27** The setting is an important element in the selection. Describe the setting and explain how it is important to the selection. Support your answer with important details from the selection.

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 3

DIRECTIONS

This session contains two reading selections with twelve multiple-choice questions and one open-response question. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

Homemade quilts were very popular in the United States before the Civil War. Most were valued for their usefulness, beauty, and quality of work, but some were also used for other purposes. People who helped slaves escape from the South to the North and Canada used the quilts to show directions for the Underground Railroad, a secret system that helped slaves travel to freedom. Read the article about “slave quilts” and answer the questions that follow.

Pattern for Freedom: Women’s Quilts as Art

by Susan Goldman Rubin

SLAVE QUILTS

- 1 Over the years, women have made quilts not only to produce something useful, but as a form of self-expression. They have needed beauty despite the ugliness of their surroundings. Women who could not even read or write have passed on their emotions, histories, and religious beliefs through quilting. Sometimes women have even fought back and resisted oppression with quilts. Many of their creations are so brilliantly original and beautiful that they are considered art.
- 2 Before the Civil War, African American slave women on plantations made quilts in their “spare time.” That is, after the day’s work was done or on Saturday afternoons and Sunday evenings. Children helped, too.

. . .
- 3 The slaves made two kinds of quilts: some based on European American designs and others with their own patterns. Africans who had been captured and enslaved came from many countries and spoke different languages. They handed on their traditions by telling stories and making quilts. According to scholars, some African quilts communicate information in a secret code. A cross shaped like an X, for example, signifies a crossroads. Conveying messages this way was commonplace in African culture. Tribes that had no written language taught ancestral customs, events, and legends through textiles. The snake motif represented the West African god of fertility,¹ and flower patterns symbolized the Haitian goddess of love. Slaves taught each other designs such as “Cotton Leaf,” “Tulip,” “Tree of Paradise,” “Log Cabin in the Lane,” and “Whirligig.”

¹ *god of fertility* — god of the harvest

- 4 Many black quilt makers thought it boring to repeat the same design over and over, so they invented original patterns. The Crazy Quilt² was started by a slave named Hannah in North Carolina. When Hannah was twelve years old, her master, John Logan, gave her to his daughter as a wedding gift. Logan also gave his new son-in-law a twelve-year-old slave boy named Pharoh. Hannah became a house servant and Pharoh became a blacksmith on the plantation. Later they married and had a daughter, Emma. Hannah made many quilts. One of her last was the Crazy Quilt. She died before it was done, and Emma completed it in 1895, stitching the words, “Finished by M.”
- 5 A slave woman in Mississippi created patterns inspired by nature. Years later her daughter showed one particular quilt to a museum curator and told how it was made. “My mother wove that white cloth an’ the thread it’s quilted with,” she said. “The red an’ green an’ blue pieces was bought from the store, but she got the pattern by goin’ out into the woods an’ gettin’ a leaf to cut it by. The two parts of the pattern is cut from the bull-tongue leaf and the gopher grass. The quilt is about ninety years old, an’ it was made when people was smart, an’ went into the woods to get their patterns.”
- 6 Most slaves could not read or write. It was against the law to teach them. But they left a record of their lives in the quilts they designed. Their choices of bold color, odds and ends of fabric, and wild patterns expressed their feelings. Red, a favorite color, symbolized a woman’s birth process and a man’s role as hunter and warrior. Blue represented protection for the maker of the quilt. But superstitions went along with quilting. “Don’t start to sew a piece of goods on Friday unless you are sure you can get it done before night, for that is bad luck,” said one slave. And the color black often meant someone might die.
- 7 However, black later came to have a different meaning on the Underground Railroad. When runaway slaves trying to escape to the North saw a quilt with black fabric hanging on a clothesline or airing in a window, they knew they could safely stop at that house. If the popular “Log Cabin” design had a black square in the center instead of the usual red (representing a fireplace), it signaled a safe house. Other patterns, such as “Jacob’s Ladder,” sent the same signal. Quilts conveyed secret messages in the Underground Railroad Quilt Code.
- 8 One scholar learned about the code from an African American craftswoman, Mrs. Ozella McDaniel Williams, to whom the story had been passed down. Williams explained that different shapes gave traveling instructions. Quilts with zigzag patterns such as “Drunkard’s Path” told escapees to take an indirect route and double back in order to escape slave catchers. “Drunkards weave back and forth, never moving in a straight line,” Williams said. A star meant to follow the North Star. The “Flying Geese” pattern instructed the fleeing slaves to head north

² *Crazy Quilt* — a quilt made of pieces of cloth in various colors, shapes, and sizes with no real pattern

in the springtime, just like geese. Although the pattern has triangles pointing north, east, south, and west, the quilter made one set a different color, thus showing which way to go. Even the stitches told what paths to take. “The length of the stitches and the position of the stitches formed a language that only the slave would know,” said Williams. The quilts became maps and helped many slaves escape to freedom.

Text from ART AGAINST THE ODDS by Susan Goldman Rubin, copyright © 2004 by Susan Goldman Rubin. Used by permission of Crown Publishers, an imprint of Random House Children’s Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

- 28 In paragraph 2, why does the author put the words “spare time” in quotation marks?
- A. to suggest that the women were usually kept very busy
 - B. to suggest that the women did not have permission to quilt
 - C. to suggest that the women pretended to work while they quilted
 - D. to suggest that the women did not need much time for themselves
- 29 Based on paragraph 3, how did quilts **most** help unite African people from different countries?
- A. The quilts helped people express their anger.
 - B. The quilts helped people forget old disputes.
 - C. The quilts helped people communicate with one another.
 - D. The quilts helped people understand differences in other cultures.
- 30 Based on the article, which quilt is based on a quilt maker’s original design?
- A. “Whirligig”
 - B. “Crazy Quilt”
 - C. “Jacob’s Ladder”
 - D. “Drunkard’s Path”
- 31 Based on paragraphs 6 and 7, how did the use of the color black in quilts change over time?
- A. It came to mean power rather than loss.
 - B. It came to mean wealth rather than poverty.
 - C. It came to mean protection rather than death.
 - D. It came to mean success rather than failure.

- 32 Read the examples of names of quilt patterns in the box below.

- Cotton Leaf
- Tulip
- Log Cabin in the Lane
- Flying Geese

Based on the examples, where did slaves get many of the ideas for their quilt patterns?

- A. from things that were part of their lives
- B. from things that were rare and beautiful
- C. from things that were imaginary and unreal
- D. from things that were symbols of their suffering

- 33 Read the sentence from paragraph 8 in the box below.

“The length of the stitches and the position of the stitches formed a language that only the slave would know,” said Williams.

Why does Mrs. Williams refer to the length and position of the stitches as a “language”?

- A. because the stitches carried a message
- B. because the stitches made shapes like letters
- C. because the stitches told the story of the quilter
- D. because the stitches reflected the history of a people

- 34 Read the sentence from paragraph 3 in the box below.

The snake motif represented the West African god of fertility, and flower patterns symbolized the Haitian goddess of love.

Based on the sentence, what does the word *motif* mean?

- A. quilt
- B. design
- C. warning
- D. superstition

Question 35 is an open-response question.

- Read the question carefully.
- Explain your answer.
- Add supporting details.
- Double-check your work.

Write your answer to question 35 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 35 Based on the article, describe what people have learned from studying slave quilts. Support your answer with important information from the article.

King Solomon was well known for his wisdom. This play tells one tale that demonstrates his remarkable gift. Read the play and answer the questions that follow.

The King and the Bee

An Israeli folktale

by Virginia Payne Whitworth

Characters

LORD CHAMBERLAIN¹

KING SOLOMON

BEE

KEEPER OF THE ROYAL OINTMENT

PAGE

QUEEN OF SHEBA

TIME: *Many years ago.*

SETTING: *King Solomon's garden. Low wall and bushes enclose garden. Ornamental vases stand at right. Bench with cushions stands left.*

AT RISE: *Soft, appropriate music is heard, then fades, as LORD CHAMBERLAIN enters.*

5 CHAMBERLAIN (*Pounding on floor with staff, and intoning*): Make way for His Majesty, the King! Make way for King Solomon. (KING SOLOMON *enters*.)

SOLOMON: Peace, Lord Chamberlain! The garden is quite deserted. You may go. I wish to be left alone, to think—maybe to sleep a little.

CHAMBERLAIN: To sleep—here—in the garden, sire?

10 SOLOMON: Yes, to sleep, and perhaps to dream of the coming of the beautiful queen from the land of Sheba.

CHAMBERLAIN (*Bowing*): I go, sire, but I shall be not far off, should you require me. (*Exits*)

15 SOLOMON: Very well, Lord Chamberlain. (*Yawning*) This heat makes me drowsy. (*Stretching out on bench*) The quiet is good. I can almost hear the flowers growing. Even the bees buzz only faintly in the distance. This crown is too heavy for a hot day. (*He takes off crown and lays it on the ground.*) That's better. (*As he closes his eyes, music of "Flight of the Bumblebee" begins softly.* BEE *enters, moving about in an aimless kind of dance. Music grows louder.*)

20 BEE: This must be the king's garden. I've never seen so many flowers. (*Bends over flowers, as if gathering nectar*) Mm-m-m! This is very good nectar. (*She suddenly sees SOLOMON.*) A man! I wonder if he is asleep. (*She peers into his face, and as she bends over him, her wings touch his face. He wakes and waves his hand to brush her away. Frightened, she strikes out with her stinger, and pricks his nose.*) Oh!
25 What have I done? I fear I have pricked his nose! (*She runs back from bench.*)

¹ *chamberlain* — a servant to a king

SOLOMON (*Putting his hand to his nose and looking around*): Oh, my nose! What has hurt me? Who's here?

BEE: Oh, dear, oh, dear! I'm so frightened! (*Looks at stinger*) I've broken the point of my stinger! (*Hides behind bush*)

30 SOLOMON: Who speaks? I hear a little voice crying that she is frightened.

BEE (*Amazed*): He understands me! No human being has ever understood me before. It must be the great and wise King Solomon!

SOLOMON: Step forth, creature. Name yourself.

35 BEE (*Coming forward timidly*): It is only I, sire. One of the humblest of the Lord's creatures—a honeybee.

SOLOMON: Do not be afraid. Only tell me why you struck me just now. (*Holds her arm*)

BEE: Please do not kill me, sire. I did not mean any harm. I was curious to see whether you were asleep, and as I bent over to look, you woke very suddenly with a jump. When I am frightened or startled I always strike out with my
40 little stinger—and so I did this time, touching your royal nose. Forgive me, Your Majesty.

SOLOMON: How do you know that I am king? I wear no crown.

BEE: No, but you understood my language. No one but the wisest of the wise may do that.

45 SOLOMON: I was dreaming of the lovely Queen of Sheba, and you disturbed me.

BEE: I am sorry, sire. Please, sire, let me go free!

SOLOMON: What if I do?

BEE: Maybe sometime I can show my gratitude. Maybe I can be of service to you, who knows?

50 SOLOMON (*Laughing*): That is very kind of you, little creature! Service to me, eh? Well, as you say, who knows? (*Feeling his nose*) Who knows—hm-m-m! Very well, you may go. (*Releasing her arm*) Remember your promise! (*Laughing*)

BEE: Yes, sire. I thank you! You may count on me. (*She exits over wall.*)

SOLOMON (*Clapping his hands*): Lord Chamberlain! (*LORD CHAMBERLAIN runs in.*)

55 CHAMBERLAIN: Your Majesty! Has anything harmed you? Where is your crown? Oh, here it is upon the ground! (*Staring*) Your nose! Sire!

SOLOMON (*Feeling it*): Is it that bad?

CHAMBERLAIN: Your Majesty! What has befallen you?

60 SOLOMON: A little creature in gauze and velvet, and carrying a small dagger, has just been interfering with the royal rest. (*Laughing*)

CHAMBERLAIN: May I not call in the doctors, Your Majesty? Truly, your nose is becoming—shall I say—

SOLOMON: It is, indeed, Lord Chamberlain, but a bit of ointment will fix it. Please send for some.

65 CHAMBERLAIN (*Calling very loudly*): Keeper of the Royal Ointment! Come into the king's garden!

SOLOMON: I hope I shall not frighten the Queen of Sheba.

CHAMBERLAIN (*Announcing*): The Keeper of the Royal Ointment. (*KEEPER, carrying many boxes and jars on a tray, enters and bows.*)

- 70 **KEEPER** (*Standing before KING*): I am the Keeper of the Royal Ointment, Your Majesty.
SOLOMON: Well, you should have something there that would soothe my swollen nose.
KEEPER (*Taking out large magnifying glass*): May I examine Your Majesty's royal nose?
SOLOMON: Do, please.
- 75 **KEEPER** (*Studying nose*): Ah, yes, just as I feared, bad swelling . . . a nasty bee sting!
 You will need a poultice² to ease your pain. (*Places poultice on KING's nose*)
CHAMBERLAIN (*Taking out bright silk scarf*): Here is His Majesty's silk kerchief to hold it in place.
KEEPER: Tie it firmly in the back. (*CHAMBERLAIN does so.*)
- 80 **SOLOMON**: How does it look? (*Takes up mirror*) Dear me, what a strange sight I am!
CHAMBERLAIN (*Placing crown on SOLOMON's head*): Your Majesty's crown.
SOLOMON: I don't think that helps much, do you, Keeper?
KEEPER (*Bowing*): Your Majesty, you must leave the poultice on until two suns have set.
SOLOMON: I believe the village children know more about bee stings than you do. They
- 85 simply put wet mud or clay on the spot, and in an hour or so the whole matter is forgotten. (*Sound of gong or trumpet*)
CHAMBERLAIN (*Looking off*): The Queen of Sheba approaches! (*QUEEN enters, preceded by PAGE, who carries two enormous bouquets of flowers. CHAMBERLAIN and KEEPER kneel. SOLOMON bows. QUEEN curtsies.*)
- 90 **QUEEN**: Hail, O King! Your Majesty, I, the Queen of Sheba, have journeyed for many days over seas and deserts to see the great and wise Solomon.
SOLOMON: I, Solomon, am deeply honored, lovely queen!
QUEEN (*Looking curiously at SOLOMON's bandaged nose*): Pardon the question, Mighty King, but is Your Majesty the victim of some illness?
- 95 **SOLOMON** (*Touching the bandage*): You mean my nose? Nay, I am the victim of my friend, the Keeper of the Royal Ointment. He insists that I keep this stupid poultice on until two suns have set. I have received a very slight injury.
QUEEN: I see. As you have been told, I come here to test the great wisdom of Solomon. I have heard it said that Solomon can always give the correct answer to whatever
- 100 question is asked him.
SOLOMON: It has been my good fortune to be able to solve some of the problems puzzling my people.
QUEEN: Do you draw these answers all from the greatness of your own brain?
SOLOMON: I am always helped by divine guidance and the world around me, Sheba.
- 105 What is your question, gracious queen?
QUEEN (*Gesturing to PAGE*): You see here two bouquets of flowers, both colorful, both fragrant—but only one of them is real. The other is the work of one of my most skillful artisans. Can you tell me without touching them, which one is real?
CHAMBERLAIN: How beautiful they both are!
- 110 **KEEPER**: No one could tell the difference!

² *poultice* — a paste made of herbs and water used to reduce pain and swelling

QUEEN: Look well, O King. Use all the wisdom in your power. Call on all your senses save those of taste and touch. (SOLOMON *examines bouquets closely.*)

SOLOMON (*Bending over to smell flowers*): They are both perfect in fragrance, too.

QUEEN: Yes, but only one is the work of God.

115 SOLOMON: Here, Lord Chamberlain, I command you to untie this scarf. I care not if the Queen *does* gaze upon my nose. I must test the fragrance of these flowers. (CHAMBERLAIN *unties it.*)

KEEPER: Alas! I fear the worst!

SOLOMON: You are always fearing the worst, Keeper. Why not try to expect the best?

120 QUEEN: Solomon is as handsome as the world has reported him.

SOLOMON (*Bowing*): Sheba is as gracious as she is beautiful. Come, Page, let me smell these flowers properly. (*Inhales deeply*) Hm! Quite marvelous! Both have the fragrance of a thousand gardens, and the colors are nature's own!

CHAMBERLAIN (*Aside*): The King's wisdom will fail him. (*Buzzing grows loud.*)

125 SOLOMON: Hush! What is that I hear? (BEE *enters. Others do not notice her.*) I thought I heard you, little friend. What? Where are you going? (BEE *circles around the two bouquets, finally pausing at one and burying her face deep in the flowers to draw out nectar.*) I see! I see! The little creature keeps her promise! Thank you, little friend! (BEE *dances away; SOLOMON points to one bouquet.*) This, O Queen, is the
130 real bouquet, the honey-laden flowers of nature. The others, beautiful as they are, never grew in the earth, but came from the hand of man.

CHAMBERLAIN: Great King Solomon!

KEEPER (*Astonished*): How did he guess?

SHEBA (*Impressed*): Wise he is, indeed!

135 SOLOMON (*Leading QUEEN to window*): Look among my garden flowers, O Sheba. There you will see the little creature who wounded me earlier. Now she makes amends by solving your riddle.

QUEEN: Ah, yes, I see! The little bee flying from flower to flower. You are wise in your friendship with all the earth's creatures, for even the tiniest can serve you.

140 SOLOMON: Now may I lead you to the feast that is prepared for Solomon's royal guest?

CHAMBERLAIN (*Pounding floor with staff and intoning*): Make way, make way, for the Queen of Sheba, the royal guest of His Majesty, King Solomon, the wise! Make way! (CHAMBERLAIN *exits, followed by SOLOMON and QUEEN. PAGE places bouquets*
145 *into large vases and exits, followed by KEEPER. BEE reenters, music grows louder. She dances around flowers, hovers over real ones, as curtain falls.*)

THE END

- 36 Read the examples from lines 14 and 15 in the box below.

- (*Yawning*)
- (*Stretching out on bench*)

In the play, what is the **main** purpose of the words in parentheses?

- A. The words are spoken by a narrator.
- B. The words give directions to the actors.
- C. The words tell which character is speaking.
- D. The words explain the thoughts of characters.

- 37 What do lines 20–25 suggest about the bee stinging King Solomon?

- A. The bee wants to warn the king.
- B. The bee hopes to wake the king.
- C. The bee does not mean to sting the king.
- D. The bee does not think the sting will harm the king.

- 38 In line 59, what does King Solomon describe as “gauze and velvet”?

- A. the flower’s fragrance
- B. the bee’s appearance
- C. the flower’s beauty
- D. the bee’s calmness

- 39 Which of the following **best** states the theme of the play?

- A. Patience is a virtue.
- B. It is better to be happy than rich.
- C. Even the smallest creature is important.
- D. Courage can be found in surprising places.

- 40 Read the sentence from lines 2 and 3 in the box below.

SETTING: . . . *Ornamental vases stand at right.*

Based on the meaning of the word “ornament,” what does the word *ornamental* **most likely** mean?

- A. practical
- B. historical
- C. decorative
- D. imaginary

Grade 6 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2008 Released Items:
Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers*

| Item No. | Page No. | Reporting Category | Standard | Correct Answer (MC)* |
|----------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|----------------------|
| 1 | 110 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13 | C |
| 2 | 110 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13 | D |
| 3 | 110 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8 | D |
| 4 | 110 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8 | A |
| 5 | 110 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 15 | A |
| 6 | 111 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13 | D |
| 7 | 111 | <i>Language</i> | 4 | D |
| 8 | 111 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13 | |
| 9 | 113 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 10 | C |
| 10 | 113 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12 | B |
| 11 | 114 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12 | A |
| 12 | 114 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12 | D |
| 13 | 114 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12 | D |
| 14 | 116 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 14 | A |
| 15 | 116 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 14 | D |
| 16 | 116 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 14 | C |
| 17 | 116 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 15 | B |
| 18 | 117 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 14 | |
| 19 | 122 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 15 | B |
| 20 | 122 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12 | B |
| 21 | 122 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8 | D |
| 22 | 122 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8 | B |
| 23 | 122 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12 | D |
| 24 | 123 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12 | B |
| 25 | 123 | <i>Language</i> | 4 | D |
| 26 | 123 | <i>Language</i> | 4 | D |
| 27 | 124 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12 | |
| 28 | 128 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 15 | A |
| 29 | 128 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13 | C |
| 30 | 128 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8 | B |
| 31 | 128 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8 | C |
| 32 | 129 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13 | A |
| 33 | 129 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 15 | A |
| 34 | 129 | <i>Language</i> | 4 | B |
| 35 | 130 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13 | |
| 36 | 135 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 17 | B |
| 37 | 135 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 17 | C |
| 38 | 135 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 15 | B |
| 39 | 135 | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 11 | C |
| 40 | 135 | <i>Language</i> | 4 | C |

* Answers are provided here for multiple-choice items only. Sample responses and scoring guidelines for open-response items, which are indicated by shaded cells, will be posted to the Department's Web site later this year.