

---

VII. English Language Arts,  
Reading Comprehension, Grade 8

# Grade 8 English Language Arts

## Reading Comprehension Test

The spring 2008 grade 8 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](http://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 8 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 seventeen multiple-choice questions and two open-response questions. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

*In this famous speech given on January 28, 1986, President Ronald Reagan addresses a nation that has just witnessed the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. Read the introduction and the speech, and answer the questions that follow.*

### *President Ronald Reagan Honors the Memory of the Seven Astronauts Killed in the Space Shuttle Challenger Explosion.*

1 *Officially, it was “Shuttle Mission 51-L,” but every American knew it as “the flight with the teacher” because one of the crew members was a thirty-seven-year-old teacher named Christa McAuliffe. The first civilian to venture into space, McAuliffe had been chosen out of 11,000 volunteers to join six astronauts on the space shuttle Challenger. Promising “the ultimate field trip,” NASA<sup>1</sup> heavily promoted the launch, and tens of millions of Americans—many of them schoolchildren—tuned in to witness the historic event live on January 28, 1986. At 11:39 A.M., cheers erupted at Cape Canaveral and at McAuliffe’s school back in Concord, New Hampshire, as the Challenger soared skyward into a picture-perfect, cloudless sky. And then suddenly, inconceivably, the shuttle disappeared into a massive fireball as the two booster rockets sailed on, leaving behind a billowy pitchfork of smoke. Shock immediately turned to grief as the realization sank in: The shuttle had exploded, killing everyone on board. President Reagan was scheduled to give the State of the Union address before Congress that evening, but instead focused solely on the seven crew members who lost their lives—the first American astronauts ever to die in flight.*

\* \* \*

- 2 Ladies and gentlemen, I’d planned to speak to you tonight to report on the state of the Union, but the events of earlier today have led me to change those plans. Today is a day for mourning and remembering. Nancy and I are pained to the core by the tragedy of the shuttle *Challenger*. We know we share this pain with all of the people of our country. This is truly a national loss.
- 3 Nineteen years ago, almost to the day, we lost three astronauts in a terrible accident on the ground. But we’ve never lost an astronaut in flight. We’ve never had a tragedy like this. And perhaps we’ve forgotten the courage it took for the crew of the shuttle. But they, the *Challenger Seven*, were aware of the dangers, overcame them, and did their

<sup>1</sup> NASA — National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the government agency responsible for space travel and exploration

jobs brilliantly. We mourn seven heroes: Michael Smith, Dick Scobee, Judith Resnik, Ronald McNair, Ellison Onizuka, Gregory Jarvis, and Christa McAuliffe. We mourn their loss as a nation together.

4 To the families of the seven: We cannot bear, as you do, the full impact of this tragedy. But we feel the loss, and we're thinking about you so very much. Your loved ones were daring and brave, and they had that special grace, that special spirit that says, "Give me a challenge, and I'll meet it with joy." They had a hunger to explore the universe and discover its truths. They wished to serve, and they did. They served all of us. We've grown used to wonders in this century. It's hard to dazzle us, but for twenty-five years the United States space program has been doing just that. We've grown used to the idea of space, and perhaps we forget that we've only just begun. We're still pioneers. They, the members of the *Challenger* crew, were pioneers.

5 And I want to say something to the schoolchildren of America who were watching the live coverage of the shuttle's takeoff. I know it is hard to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen. It's all part of the process of exploration and discovery. It's all part of taking a chance and expanding man's horizons. The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave. The *Challenger* crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them.

6 I've always had great faith in and respect for our space program, and what happened today does nothing to diminish it. We don't hide our space program. We don't keep secrets and cover things up. We do it all up front and in public. That's the way freedom is, and we wouldn't change it for a minute. We'll continue our quest in space. There will be more shuttle flights and more shuttle crews and, yes, more volunteers, more civilians, more teachers in space. Nothing ends here. Our hopes and our journeys continue. I want to add that I wish I could talk to every man and woman who works for NASA or who worked on this mission and tell them, "Your dedication and professionalism have moved and impressed us for decades, and we know of your anguish. We share it."

7 There's a coincidence today. On this day 390 years ago, the great explorer Sir Francis Drake died aboard ship off the coast of Panama. In his lifetime the great frontiers were the oceans, and an historian later said, "He lived by the sea, died on it, and was buried in it." Well today we can say of the *Challenger* crew, Their dedication was, like Drake's, complete.

8 The crew of the space shuttle *Challenger* honored us by the manner in which they lived their lives. We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye and "slipped the surly bonds of earth" to "touch the face of God."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> a quotation from the poem "High Flight" by John Gillespie Magee

- 1 According to the introduction, why was “Shuttle Mission 51-L” considered to be historic and different from other space flights?
- A. It included the first private citizen.
  - B. It included the first female astronaut.
  - C. It was the first time a space shuttle was launched.
  - D. It was the first time astronauts planned to walk in space.
- 2 Based on the introduction, what was the **most likely** reason that NASA described the shuttle mission as “the ultimate field trip”?
- A. to emphasize the fact that a teacher was part of the shuttle crew
  - B. to publicize the fact that the mission included the first space walk
  - C. to encourage people to travel to Cape Canaveral to watch the launch
  - D. to indicate that the main purpose of the shuttle mission was educational
- 3 In paragraph 5, how does President Reagan try to console schoolchildren?
- A. by suggesting there will be no future tragedies
  - B. by explaining the tragedy as a risk of exploration
  - C. by promising they will solve the shuttle’s problems
  - D. by explaining the reasons for the shuttle’s accident
- 4 In paragraph 5, President Reagan urges his audience to
- A. solve the problems of the past.
  - B. forget about the tragedies of the past.
  - C. focus on the challenges of the future.
  - D. anticipate further problems in the future.

- 5 In paragraph 7, what is the **main** reason President Reagan refers to Sir Francis Drake?
- A. to show that past explorers are sometimes forgotten
  - B. to show that a person must die to be considered a hero
  - C. to show that the astronauts are as heroic as past explorers
  - D. to show that the frontiers of human exploration have changed
- 6 What is the **main** message of President Reagan's speech?
- A. Americans should question the future of the space program.
  - B. Americans should honor the *Challenger* crew by sharing their dream.
  - C. Americans should trust that a similar tragedy is unlikely to happen again.
  - D. Americans should solve the problems that caused the *Challenger* tragedy.
- 7 In the speech, President Reagan uses the pronoun "we" to refer **mainly** to
- A. the *Challenger* crew.
  - B. government officials.
  - C. the American people.
  - D. himself and his wife.
- 8 What does the colon used at the beginning of paragraph 4 indicate?
- A. President Reagan is beginning a list.
  - B. President Reagan is pausing for suspense.
  - C. President Reagan has omitted some words.
  - D. President Reagan is addressing a specific audience.

Question 9 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 9 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 9 Explain the techniques President Reagan uses in his speech to honor the *Challenger* astronauts. Support your answer with relevant and specific details from the speech.

In the following excerpt from her autobiography, author Zora Neale Hurston recalls a significant memory from her childhood. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

from **DUST TRACKS ON A ROAD**

by Zora Neale Hurston

. . .

1 Naturally, I felt like other children in that death, destruction and other agonies were never meant to touch me. Things like that happened to other people, and no wonder. They were not like me and mine. Naturally, the world and the firmaments\* careened to one side a little so as not to inconvenience me. In fact, the universe went further than that—it was happy to break a few rules just to show me preferences.

2 For instance, for a long time I gloated over the happy secret that when I played outdoors in the moonlight the moon followed me, whichever way I ran. The moon was so happy when I came out to play, that it ran shining and shouting after me like a pretty puppy dog. The other children didn't count.

3 But, I was rudely shaken out of this when I confided my happy secret to Carrie Roberts, my chum. It was cruel. She not only scorned my claim, she said that the moon was paying me no mind at all. The moon, my own happy private-playing moon, was out in its play yard to race and play with her.

4 We disputed the matter with hot jealousy, and nothing would do but we must run a race to prove which one the moon was loving. First, we both ran a race side by side, but that proved nothing because we both contended that the moon was going that way on account of us. I just knew that the moon was there to be with me, but Carrie kept on saying that it was herself that the moon preferred. So then it came to me that we ought to run in opposite directions so that Carrie could come to her senses and realize the moon was mine. So we both stood with our backs to our gate, counted three and tore out in opposite directions.

5 "Look! Look, Carrie!" I cried exultantly. "You see the moon is following me!"

6 "Aw, youse a tale-teller! You know it's chasing me."

7 So Carrie and I parted company, mad as we could be with each other. When the other children found out what the quarrel was about, they laughed it off. They told me the moon always followed them. The unfaithfulness of the moon hurt me deeply. My moon followed Carrie Roberts. My moon followed Matilda Clarke and Julia Moseley, and Oscar and Teedy Miller. But after a while, I ceased to ache over the moon's many loves. I found comfort in the fact that though I was not the moon's exclusive friend, I was still among those who showed the moon which way to go. That was my earliest conscious hint that the world didn't tilt under my footfalls, nor careen over one-sided just to make me glad.

. . .

---

\* *firmaments* — objects in the sky overhead

- 10 In paragraph 2, what does the sentence “The other children didn’t count” suggest about the narrator?
- A. She did not like to share secrets with others.
  - B. She felt that the moon preferred her over others.
  - C. She knew that she was not allowed to play with others.
  - D. She believed others were less interested in the moon.
- 11 Based on paragraph 7, in what way did the narrator think the moon was “unfaithful”?
- A. The moon was unhappy with her.
  - B. The moon failed to keep its promise.
  - C. The moon followed her friend but not her.
  - D. The moon paid attention to more than one person.
- 12 Based on paragraph 7, what does the narrator begin to realize by the end of the excerpt?
- A. Her future is uncertain.
  - B. She might not be a good friend.
  - C. She is not the center of the universe.
  - D. Her friends might be too competitive.
- 13 Based on the excerpt, what does the incident with the moon **most likely** symbolize for the narrator?
- A. freedom
  - B. loneliness
  - C. losing faith
  - D. growing up

*In this excerpt from the play Tender Offer, Lisa, a girl of around nine, has just finished performing in her dance recital. Paul, her father, arrives to pick her up. He has missed Lisa's recital. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.*

from *Tender Offer*  
by Wendy Wasserstein

Students read a selection titled *Tender Offer* and then answered questions 14 through 19 that follow on pages 182 and 183 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.

TENDER OFFER by Wendy Wasserstein. © 1991 by Wendy Wasserstein. First published in Antaeus, Issue #66, Plays In One Act. No part of this material may be reproduced in whole or part, without the express written permission of the author's agent.

Due to copyright restrictions, the selection that appeared on this page cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the citation on the previous page.

Due to copyright restrictions, the selection that appeared on this page cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the citation on page 178.

Due to copyright restrictions, the selection that appeared on this page cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the citation on page 178.

14 Based on the excerpt, what is the **most likely** reason Lisa loses her leg warmers, talks about Talia's absent father, and throws out her trophy?

- A. She is concerned that they will be late for dinner.
- B. She is trying to get Paul to pay attention to her.
- C. She is unhappy with her dance recital.
- D. She is worried about Talia.

15 Reread lines 120–127. What do the lines suggest about Paul?

- A. He has a gloomy outlook on life.
- B. He thinks only about his business.
- C. He has great faith that the future will be better.
- D. He thinks more about his daughter than he shows.

16 Based on the excerpt, what is the **most significant** change in Paul and Lisa's relationship?

- A. Paul accepts Lisa's immaturity.
- B. Paul is impressed by Lisa's talent.
- C. Paul and Lisa understand each other better.
- D. Paul and Lisa are more afraid of each other.

17 Read the sentence from lines 138 and 139 in the box below.

*(LISA picks up her trophy.)*

Why are the words in italics?

- A. They are the narrator's words.
- B. They are meant to be shouted.
- C. They are directions for the actor.
- D. They are the character's thoughts.

18 Based on lines 23–26, which of the following is a synonym for *procrastinating*?

- A. delaying
- B. changing
- C. annoying
- D. following

Question 19 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 19 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 19** Explain how Lisa's behavior throughout the excerpt affects Paul. Support your answer with relevant and specific details from the excerpt.

# 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.

*The narrator of this tale has just been shipwrecked on a deserted island in Scotland. The island is near the Isle of Iona and an area called the Ross. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.*

*from* **Kidnapped**  
by Robert Louis Stevenson

. . .

- 1 The time I spent upon the island is still so horrible a thought to me, that I must pass it lightly over. In all the books I have read of people cast away, they had either their pockets full of tools, or a chest of things would be thrown upon the beach along with them, as if on purpose. My case was very different. I had nothing in my pockets but money and Alan's silver button; and being inland bred, I was as much short of knowledge as of means.
- 2 I knew indeed that shell-fish were counted good to eat; and among the rocks of the isle I found a great plenty of limpets, which at first I could scarcely strike from their places, not knowing quickness to be needful. There were, besides, some of the little shells that we call buckies; I think periwinkle is the English name. Of these two I made my whole diet, devouring them cold and raw as I found them; and so hungry was I, that at first they seemed to me delicious.
- 3 Perhaps they were out of season, or perhaps there was something wrong in the sea about my island. But at least I had no sooner eaten my first meal than I was seized with giddiness and retching, and lay for a long time no better than dead. A second trial of the same food (indeed I had no other) did better with me, and revived my strength. But as long as I was on the island, I never knew what to expect when I had eaten; sometimes all was well, and sometimes I was thrown into a miserable sickness; nor could I ever distinguish what particular fish it was that hurt me.
- 4 All day it streamed rain; the island ran like a sop, there was no dry spot to be found; and when I lay down that night, between two boulders that made a kind of roof, my feet were in a bog.
- 5 The second day I crossed the island to all sides. There was no one part of it better than another; it was all desolate and rocky; nothing living on it but game

birds which I lacked the means to kill, and the gulls which haunted the outlying rocks in a prodigious number. But the creek, or strait, that cut off the isle from the main-land of the Ross, opened out on the north into a bay, and the bay again opened into the Sound of Iona; and it was the neighbourhood of this place that I chose to be my home; though if I had thought upon the very name of home in such a spot, I must have burst out weeping.

- 6 . . . I had become in no way used to the horrid solitude of the isle, but still looked round me on all sides (like a man that was hunted), between fear and hope that I might see some human creature coming. Now, from a little up the hillside over the bay, I could catch a sight of the great, ancient church and the roofs of the people's houses in Iona. And on the other hand, over the low country of the Ross, I saw smoke go up, morning and evening, as if from a homestead in a hollow of the land.
- 7 I used to watch this smoke, when I was wet and cold, and had my head half turned with loneliness; and think of the fireside and the company, till my heart burned. It was the same with the roofs of Iona. Altogether, this sight I had of men's homes and comfortable lives, although it put a point on my own sufferings, yet it kept hope alive, and helped me to eat my raw shell-fish (which had soon grown to be a disgust), and saved me from the sense of horror I had whenever I was quite alone with dead rocks, and fowls, and the rain, and the cold sea.
- 8 I say it kept hope alive; and indeed it seemed impossible that I should be left to die on the shores of my own country, and within view of a church-tower and the smoke of men's houses. But the second day passed; and though as long as the light lasted I kept a bright look-out for boats on the Sound or men passing on the Ross, no help came near me. It still rained, and I turned in to sleep, as wet as ever, and with a cruel sore throat, but a little comforted, perhaps, by having said good-night to my next neighbours, the people of Iona.

In the public domain.

- 20 In paragraph 1, what does the narrator mean when he says, “I was as much short of knowledge as of means”?
- A. He lacked the money needed for survival.
  - B. He failed to understand why he had been stranded.
  - C. He had neither the skill nor the supplies to survive.
  - D. He had neither faith nor hope that he would be rescued.
- 21 According to paragraphs 2 and 3, what is the **main** difficulty with the food the narrator eats?
- A. It is difficult to find.
  - B. It fails to satisfy his hunger.
  - C. It sometimes is hard to catch.
  - D. It sometimes makes him sick.

- 22 Read the sentences from the excerpt in the box below.

- All day it streamed rain; the island ran like a sop, . . . my feet were in a bog. (paragraph 4)
- . . . it was all desolate and rocky; nothing living on it but . . . the gulls which haunted the outlying rocks in a prodigious number. (paragraph 5)

The sentences contribute **mainly** to the development of the

- A. mood.
  - B. theme.
  - C. climax.
  - D. character.
- 23 Read the lines from paragraph 7 in the box below.

. . . and saved me from the sense of horror I had whenever I was quite alone with dead rocks, and fowls, and the rain, and the cold sea.

What is the effect of the repetition in the lines?

- A. It emphasizes the narrator’s isolation.
- B. It emphasizes the narrator’s hopefulness.
- C. It shows the narrator’s love of nature.
- D. It shows the narrator’s fear of the ocean.

- 24 Which sentence from the excerpt **best** indicates that the narrator survives his adventures on the island?
- A. “The time I spent upon the island is still so horrible a thought to me, that I must pass it lightly over.” (paragraph 1)
  - B. “A second trial of the same food (indeed I had no other) did better with me, and revived my strength.” (paragraph 3)
  - C. “. . . I had become in no way used to the horrid solitude of the isle, but still looked round me on all sides . . .” (paragraph 6)
  - D. “I say it kept hope alive; and indeed it seemed impossible that I should be left to die on the shores of my own country . . .” (paragraph 8)

- 25 Based on the excerpt, what is **most** surprising about the narrator’s situation?
- A. He has no money with him.
  - B. The house he found has no roof.
  - C. He is shipwrecked within sight of a town.
  - D. The island where he lives has little vegetation.

- 26 Which of the following is the correct definition of the phrase *cast away* as it is used in paragraph 1?
- A. rejected
  - B. disposed of
  - C. thrown ashore
  - D. left without friends

- 27 Read the dictionary entry in the box below.

**giddy** ('gi-dē) *adj.* **1.** Dizzy  
**2.** Whirling rapidly **3.** Silly  
**4.** Joyfully elated

- Which definition applies to the word *giddiness* as it is used in paragraph 3?
- A. definition 1
  - B. definition 2
  - C. definition 3
  - D. definition 4

**Question 28 is an open-response question.**

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

**Write your answer to question 28 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.**

- 28** Explain the importance of the setting throughout the excerpt. Support your answer with relevant and specific details from the excerpt.

# English Language Arts

## READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 3

### DIRECTIONS

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

*The following article provides the history of some traditional fairy tales. Read the article and answer the questions that follow.*

## Who Wrote “CINDERELLA”?

*by Richard Wolkomir and Joyce Rogers Wolkomir*

1 **O**nce upon a time, in fairy-tale land . . .

Snow White ate a poisoned apple. Rapunzel, in her tower, lowered her hair to reel up a prince. Meanwhile, a wolf put on Granny’s bonnet to fool Red Riding Hood. And a witch plotted to turn Hansel and Gretel into little-kid sandwiches.

- 2 Do you know those old stories? Are you sure? Over the centuries, people have fiddled so much with fairy tales that each story comes in many variations. Take “Cinderella.” Most of us know the Disney movie version, which ends with Cinderella forgiving her nasty stepmother and stepsisters, while sweet-singing doves flutter around. The movie is close to a French version written down in the 1600s by Charles Perrault. But you may also have read the German version, as told by the Grimm brothers. That’s the one where one stepsister squeezes her foot into the tiny glass slipper only by cutting off her own big toe. The Grimms’ version ends with birds, too. But they are not Disney doves: instead they are pigeons that peck out the stepsisters’ eyes.

- 3 And that’s just the start of it. One scholar counted 345 versions of “Cinderella.” According to Maria Tatar, a Harvard University fairy-tale scholar, the story’s earliest known version dates to A.D. 850 in China. In that version, the “fairy godmother” is a 10-foot-long fish. And the wicked stepmother and stepsisters are killed in the end by flying stones.

- 4 “Cinderella” is the champion, but most fairy tales exist in at least dozens of variations. What is the name of the little man who asks for a child in return for spinning straw into gold? Depending on which version you read, it is Titeliture, Doppeltürk, Purzinigele, Batzibitzili, Panzimanzi, Whuppity Stoorie, Ricdin-Ricdon, Tom Tit Tot, Terry-Top—or Rumpelstiltskin.

- 5 Why are there so many versions of fairy tales? Where do the tales come from anyway? Were they originally children’s stories? Why are they so violent? And why do children love them so much?

- 6 **H**ave you ever noticed how much spinning goes on in fairy tales? In “Rumpelstiltskin” the miller’s daughter

must spin straw into gold. In “Sleeping Beauty,” the princess falls asleep when she pricks her finger on a spindle. Scholars think that fairy tales were originally told by peasants at the fireside or in spinning circles to keep one another awake and relieve boredom. As the writer John



Updike puts it, they were the television of their time. Some of the earliest illustrations for collections of the tales show the storyteller spinning as she talks. Sometimes there are children in the illustrations, but judging by the tales themselves, many of which are very rude, scholars think they were told to amuse adults.

- 7 The peasants could neither read nor write and so told stories strictly from memory. Tracing these memorized stories back to their origins is virtually impossible. There never was a sacred original, just endless retellings. Storytellers constantly adjusted their tales to match audiences. And stories changed between countries.

- 8 But this oral tradition came to an end when printing presses appeared and scholars began writing down the old stories. Among the earliest of the fairy-tale collectors was a French official, Charles Perrault, born in 1628. He chose the architects for two of the world’s most famous buildings, Versailles and the Louvre. For fun, he met with a group of aristocratic women and their children to swap fairy tales. And in 1697 he published a collection of eight fairy tales called *Stories, or Tales from Past Times, with Morals*, also known as *Tales of Mother Goose*.

- 9 Perrault’s audience consisted of sophisticated aristocrats, not rude peasants, and he altered the tales to suit them. The old peasant-told tales featured millers and half-starved woodcutters. “Perrault revised them to emphasize beautiful dresses and elegant architecture and ballrooms and servants,” says Alison Lurie, a professor at Cornell University who studies fairy tales. In his stories, characters notice if a dress is out of style or another character behaves impolitely. Not surprisingly, most modern retellings of “Cinderella” are based on Perrault’s version, and the illustrations show characters dressed in the fashions of his time.

- 10 Perrault focused on heroines because he was writing mainly for aristocratic women and their daughters. He also ended his stories with rhyming morals, mostly directed at girls. But how seriously should we take these morals? Perrault tells the story of Bluebeard, a maniac who chops up his wives and stores their bloody corpses in a little room. When Bluebeard is called away, he gives his new wife the key to the room and tells her she is not on any account to enter it. Of course she goes into the room, of course he finds

out, and of course he tries to kill her for disobeying him. Perrault says the moral of the story is that curiosity can get women into trouble. But shouldn't the moral be: Don't marry a serial killer?

- 11 Maybe Perrault's morals were tongue-in-cheek. After all, he was a sophisticated man. Do you remember the plot of "Puss in Boots"? In an elaborate con, the cat convinces the king that a miller's son is a wealthy man called the Marquis de Carabas. Perrault says the moral is that hard work will get you farther than an inheritance, but in the story the miller's son barely lifts a finger. It would be nearer the truth to say that the moral is that you can get what you want if you are a good liar. Perrault's morals are so ill-suited to the tales that Tatar suggests they might be his way of poking sly fun at the attitudes of his aristocratic friends.

- 12 **T**he most famous collections of fairy tales, however, are the ones by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm. They began studying fairy tales in Germany in 1806, more than a hundred years after Perrault. By then, the old farmhouse-fireplace tales faced extinction. So the Grimms set out to preserve the ancient stories in print.

- 13 The Grimms published their first fairy-tale collection in 1812. They didn't think they were writing for children, either. They thought they were preserving vanishing German folk culture (even though many of the stories they collected were French or Italian in origin). Their first edition was a scholarly book, with no illustrations and many footnotes, that carefully reproduced the rude language and wandering plots of the oral tales. They were surprised when some of their early readers suggested that the stories might be interesting to children.

- 14 But the Grimms needed money. Unworldly and trusting, they had made a bad deal with their publisher and received little payment for their first book. At one point Wilhelm complained there wasn't a chair in his house you could sit on without worrying it would break. So he took the hint and set to work to make a book that would be suitable for children. He selected a few of the tales, made them much longer, and polished up the prose. He didn't tack on morals like Perrault, but he did slip in character judgments and moralizing comments wherever he could. He was particularly concerned that the beautiful characters also be hard working, which is why Snow White keeps the dwarfs' house so tidy.

- 15 Despite Wilhelm's efforts to brush up the tales, it is pretty obvious that good role models and advice have very little to do with their appeal. Compare the fairy tales with Aesop's fables. The fable "The Hare and the Tortoise" teaches that slow and steady wins the race. What does the fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel" teach? Never use bread to mark a trail in the woods?

- 16 The Grimms' fairy tales also have one characteristic that would seem to make them unsuitable for children. Many of them include gruesome or violent incidents. In "Hansel and Gretel" an old woman is burned to death in an oven, and in "Little Red Riding Hood" a child is eaten by a wolf. When he revised the tales for children, Wilhelm Grimm left in the violence. In fact, he sometimes even ramped it up. For example, in the first edition of the tales, Cinderella is reconciled to her stepsisters at the end. It's only in the second edition, the one intended for children, that her birds peck out their eyes.

17 So here is a puzzle. The fairy tales Perrault and the Grimms recorded were not intended to be children's stories. They don't teach lessons, and they are far more violent than the children's stories being written today. Why, then, have they become classics of children's literature, so much so that it is hard to imagine a child who doesn't know Cinderella's story or Snow White's?

18 **O**ne answer is that only a few of the tales made it through the long sifting and winnowing process that started with Perrault and the Grimms. The first edition of Grimms' fairy tales had 210 tales. By 1825 it was down to 50. And today only a dozen or so of the tales are often reprinted in children's collections.

19 But the deeper answer is that the tales that have lasted are magical adventures that help children (and adults) deal with the struggles and fears of their everyday lives. What are the tales about? One answer is they are family dramas that deal with our fear (as Tatar puts it) "that every sibling is a rival and at least one parent is an ogre." We secretly fear we were adopted, that we will be abandoned by our parents, that our parents will love our siblings more than us, that our siblings

will be allowed to mistreat us, or that we will somehow lose our rightful place in the family.

20 The fairy tale reassures us that, no matter how mistreated we may feel, it will all come right in the end. A tale often begins with a child whose mother has died and who has been cast out by the stepmother. The child goes "into the woods," a magic realm where she is likely to encounter a witch suspiciously like her stepmother. Once she outwits or kills the witch, she can rejoin her true family (the stepmother having disappeared) or a new, better family (by marrying a prince).

21 But what about all the violence? Tatar wisely says that Wilhelm Grimm probably made the tales more rather than less attractive to children by leaving in the fright scenes. The tales appeal to children because they show the weak overcoming the strong. The more miserable the story's main characters, the more children identify with them. The tale then gives shape to disguised dreams of revenge. The villain comes to a bad and bloody end, it is true. But in the realm of the fairy tale, the villain's suffering (and the victim's reward) are richly deserved. That's what we mean when we say "it was like a fairy tale."

- 29 Based on paragraph 2, what is the **main** difference between Perrault’s version and the Grimms’ version of “Cinderella”?
- A. The Grimms’ version is more violent.
  - B. The Grimms’ version is more realistic.
  - C. The Grimms’ version is less authentic.
  - D. The Grimms’ version is less entertaining.
- 30 According to paragraph 6, why do many fairy tales feature spinning wheels in them?
- A. Peasants imagined that everyone used spinning wheels.
  - B. Peasants thought fairy tales could teach useful skills.
  - C. Peasants told the fairy tales while using spinning wheels.
  - D. Peasants believed the circle was a symbol of good fortune.
- 31 According to paragraph 6, how were fairy tales “the television of their time”?
- A. They kept people amused.
  - B. They were sometimes offensive.
  - C. They were based on imaginary situations.
  - D. They kept people from getting enough sleep.
- 32 Read the sentence from paragraph 7 in the box below.
- There never was a sacred original . . .
- What does the sentence mean?
- A. The source of the stories is unknown.
  - B. The stories have religious beginnings.
  - C. The first version of the stories is best.
  - D. The stories come from many countries.
- 33 According to paragraph 9, why did Perrault change the stories he published?
- A. His audience consisted of young children.
  - B. His audience consisted of the upper class.
  - C. He thought the fairy tales needed less violence.
  - D. He thought earlier versions focused too much on heroines.

- 34 According to paragraph 15, which feature of Grimms' fairy tales was **least** influential in their popularity?
- A. the morals of the stories
  - B. the violence in the stories
  - C. the creativity of the stories
  - D. the characters in the stories
- 35 What does the phrase "ramped it up" mean as it is used in paragraph 16?
- A. started
  - B. allowed
  - C. clarified
  - D. increased

---

**Question 36 is an open-response question.**

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

**Write your answer to question 36 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.**

- 36 Based on the article, describe how fairy tales changed over time. Support your answer with relevant and specific information from the article.

The following myth is from the Greek epic *The Iliad*. In the myth, Achilles has organized a footrace in which his friends Ajax, Odysseus, and Antilochus run against one another. Read the myth and answer the questions that follow.

from **The Iliad**  
**HOMER**

*Translated by Robert Fagles*

Students read a selection titled *The Iliad* and then answered questions 37 through 40 that follow on page 197 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.

“Funeral Games for Patroclus” by Homer, from *THE ILIAD* by Homer, translated by Robert Fagles, copyright © 1990 by Robert Fagles. Used by permission of Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

Due to copyright restrictions, the selection that appeared on this page cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the citation on the previous page.

- 37 Which of the following statements **best** summarizes what happens in lines 1–14?
- A. Jason receives an ox and half a bar of gold.
  - B. Priam pays a ransom for the release of his son.
  - C. Achilles offers prizes to encourage his friends to race.
  - D. Phoenician traders create the finest bowl in the world.
- 38 In lines 2–12, why is the silver mixing bowl described in such detail?
- A. to emphasize the size of the bowl
  - B. to reveal that Achilles is related to royalty
  - C. to show that the bowl is a worthy prize for the winner
  - D. to demonstrate the skills of the craftsmen from Sidonia

- 39 Read lines 47–49 in the box below.

“Foul, by heaven! The goddess fouled my finish! Always beside Odysseus—just like the man’s mother, rushing to put his rivals in the dust.”

What is the reason for Ajax’s frustration?

- A. He is disappointed in the way he ran.
  - B. He believes Odysseus’s mother helped Odysseus win.
  - C. He thinks the goddess Athena’s interference made him lose.
  - D. He wishes he had been competing against an easier opponent.
- 40 Based on the myth, what conclusion can be drawn about Achilles?
- A. He is slow.
  - B. He is young.
  - C. He is jealous.
  - D. He is generous.

**Grade 8 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        | 173      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8        | A                    |
| 2        | 173      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13       | A                    |
| 3        | 173      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13       | B                    |
| 4        | 173      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13       | C                    |
| 5        | 174      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13       | C                    |
| 6        | 174      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 11       | B                    |
| 7        | 174      | <i>Language</i>               | 5        | C                    |
| 8        | 174      | <i>Language</i>               | 5        | D                    |
| 9        | 175      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 10       |                      |
| 10       | 177      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12       | B                    |
| 11       | 177      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12       | D                    |
| 12       | 177      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12       | C                    |
| 13       | 177      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 11       | D                    |
| 14       | 182      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 17       | B                    |
| 15       | 182      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 17       | D                    |
| 16       | 182      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 17       | C                    |
| 17       | 182      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 17       | C                    |
| 18       | 182      | <i>Language</i>               | 4        | A                    |
| 19       | 183      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 17       |                      |
| 20       | 186      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8        | C                    |
| 21       | 186      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8        | D                    |
| 22       | 186      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 15       | A                    |
| 23       | 186      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 15       | A                    |
| 24       | 187      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12       | A                    |
| 25       | 187      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12       | C                    |
| 26       | 187      | <i>Language</i>               | 4        | C                    |
| 27       | 187      | <i>Language</i>               | 4        | A                    |
| 28       | 188      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 12       |                      |
| 29       | 193      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13       | A                    |
| 30       | 193      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8        | C                    |
| 31       | 193      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13       | A                    |
| 32       | 193      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13       | A                    |
| 33       | 193      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13       | B                    |
| 34       | 194      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8        | A                    |
| 35       | 194      | <i>Language</i>               | 4        | D                    |
| 36       | 194      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 13       |                      |
| 37       | 197      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 8        | C                    |
| 38       | 197      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 15       | C                    |
| 39       | 197      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 16       | C                    |
| 40       | 197      | <i>Reading and Literature</i> | 16       | D                    |

\* 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.