
II. English Language Arts, Reading Comprehension, Grade 3

Grade 3 English Language Arts Reading Comprehension Test

The spring 2009 grade 3 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. Specific learning standards for grade 3 are found in the *Supplement to the Massachusetts English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* (2004). Page numbers for the learning standards appear in parentheses.

- Language (*Framework*, pages 19–26; *Supplement*, pages 6–7)
- Reading and Literature (*Framework*, pages 35–64; *Supplement*, pages 7–9)

The *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* and *Supplement* are available on the Department website 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 3 ELA Reading Comprehension test included three separate test sessions. Each session included reading passages, followed by multiple-choice and open-response questions. Selected common reading passages and approximately half of the common test items are shown on the following pages as they appeared in grade 3 test & answer booklets.

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 released item’s reporting category and the *Framework* general standard it assesses. The correct answers for released multiple-choice questions are also displayed in the table.

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION

DIRECTIONS

This session contains two reading selections with twelve multiple-choice questions and one open-response question. For multiple-choice questions, mark your answers by filling in the circle next to the best answer. For the open-response question, write your answer in the space below the question.

When 12-year-old Milton Daub sees snow falling outside the window of his New York home, he has no idea that he is living through a historic storm. The Snow Walker is based on real events from the blizzard of 1888, one of the worst snowstorms in United States history. Read the story to find out what Milton does during the storm and answer the questions that follow.

from **The Snow Walker**

by Margaret K. and Charles M. Wetterer

Monday, March 12, 1888

- 1 Crack! The sound jolted Milton awake. A howling wind rattled the window. Milton jumped out of bed and pushed aside the curtains. A smile lit his face. Snow! Snow was everywhere. He saw that a giant branch had broken from the maple tree. Now wind was tossing it crazily across the yard.
- 2 Quickly Milton pulled on his school clothes and ran downstairs. Snow covered all the windows. The hall and parlor were dark. Back in the kitchen, Mama had lit the kerosene lamp. Everyone was eating breakfast, even baby Jerome in his high chair.
- 3 “Mama! Why didn’t you call me?” Milton asked. “It’s after 7:30. I’ll be late for school.”
- 4 “No school today,” his mother replied. “There’s a wall of snow blocking the front door.”
- 5 “We’ll all stay home,” said his father. “It’s dangerous out in that storm.”
- 6 “We have plenty of food,” Mama said, checking the icebox. “But I do wish we had more milk.”
- 7 “I’ll go and buy some,” Milton offered.
- 8 “Don’t be foolish, Milton!” his father exclaimed. “The drifts¹ are already climbing to the second story. You would be buried out there.”

¹ *drifts* — piles of snow or sand created by the wind

Reading Comprehension

9 “I could go on snowshoes,” Milton insisted.

10 “And where are you going to get snowshoes?” his father asked.

11 “We could make some,” Milton replied. “At school, we’ve been studying the Alaska Territory. There are pictures of snowshoes in my geography book. I bet we could make a pair. Could we try, Papa? Please?”

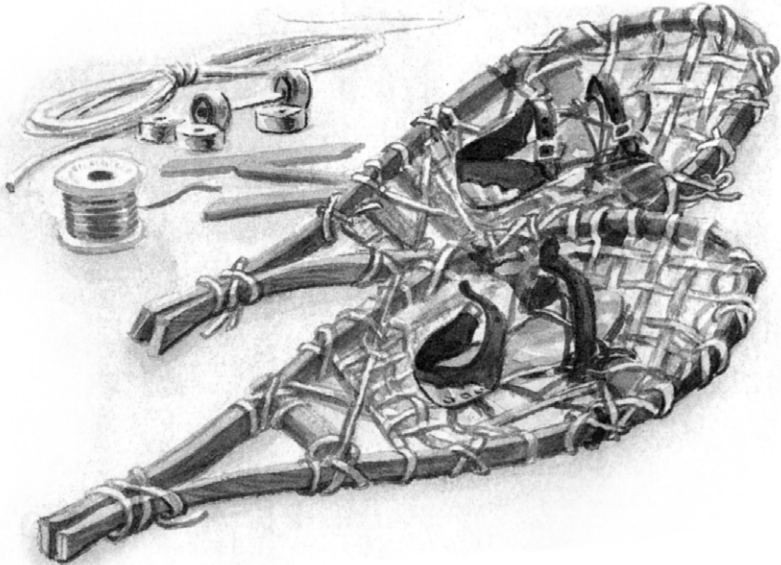
12 His father laughed. “All right, son. Eat your oatmeal,” he said. “Then we’ll try to make you some snowshoes.”

13 After breakfast, Milton and his father set to work. They used wooden barrel hoops, thin slats, wire, heavy cord, and the bottom of an old pair of roller skates with the wheels off.

Finally, after almost two hours, the snowshoes were ready to try out.

14 Everyone crowded into the little upstairs bedroom. Milton piled on sweaters, an overcoat, a wool hat, a scarf, and mittens. His father helped him strap on the snowshoes. Then he tied a rope around his son’s waist. “Okay, Milton. I’ll hold onto the line until we’re sure your snowshoes work,” he said. “If you start to sink, I’ll pull you back.” He opened the window. An icy wind swept snow into the room. The girls shrieked. Mama covered Jerome with her shawl.

15 Milton pulled his hat down over his ears and his scarf up over his mouth. He wished he had an Alaskan parka. He took one step, then a second, and a third. He had to keep his feet apart. Otherwise, he stepped one snowshoe on the other, and couldn’t walk. Milton climbed up and down the snowdrift to the window several times. At last, his father nodded. The snowshoes worked.



Reading Comprehension

Milton untied the clothesline. His father handed him a sled with a wooden box nailed to it. “Watch for landmarks so you don’t get lost,” Papa warned.

16 “Please be careful,” his mother called.

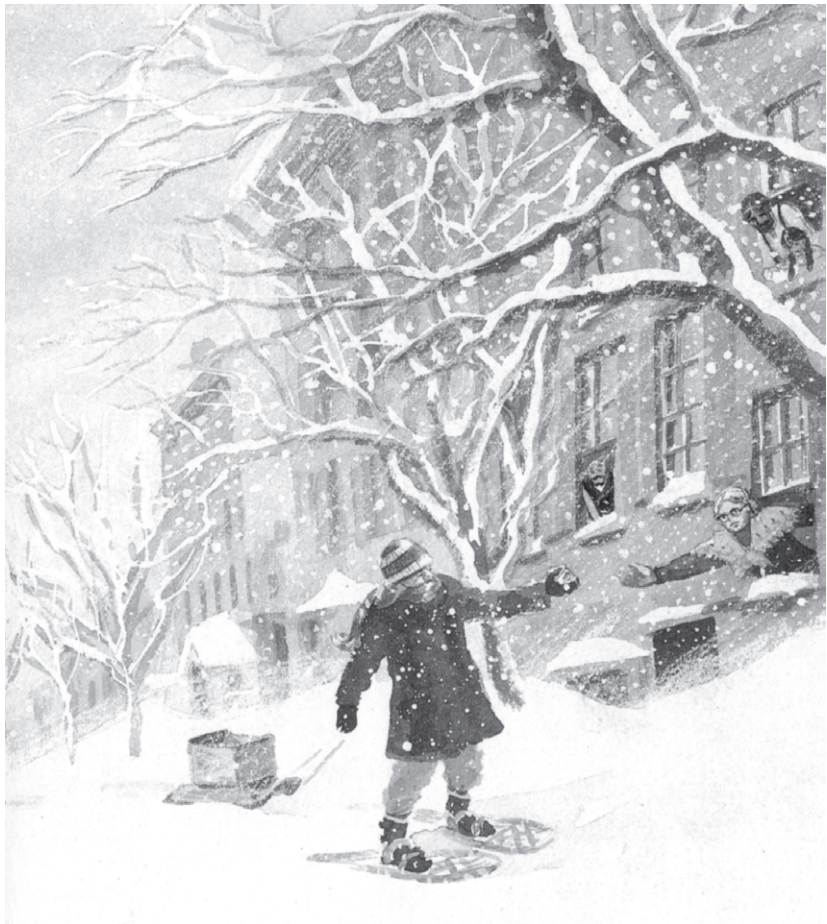
17 Milton leaned into the biting wind. He snowshoed across the front yard and over the garden fence. Wind had swept the road clear to an icy base in some places. In others, Milton had to climb over drifts of snow. Some drifts were as hard as icebergs. Some moved beneath his feet. At times, gusts of wind scooped up fallen snow and tossed it back into the air.

18 When that happened, Milton saw nothing, only whiteness swirling around him. He hardly recognized the houses he passed. Everything looked so different piled with snow and hung with icicles.

19 Milton reached the spot where he knew Mike Ash’s grocery store should be. At first, he couldn’t find it. The sign had blown away, and snow covered the door and window. Then he climbed up the snowdrift and tapped on the window of the Ashes’ apartment above the store. He held onto the window ledge to keep from being blown away. Mr. Ash opened the window a crack. “Milton! What are you doing out in this storm?” he yelled above the wind.

20 “How did you get up here?” his son Mickey wanted to know.

21 “My mother needs milk, Mr. Ash,” Milton shouted back with a grin. “Like my snowshoes, Mickey?”



Reading Comprehension

22 “No fresh milk was delivered today, Milton,” said the grocer. “But I can sell you condensed milk.”²

23 Milton gave him fifty cents. Mr. Ash went downstairs to the store. He returned with five cans of milk. Mickey leaned out the window for a better look at Milton’s snowshoes. Quickly, Mr. Ash pulled him back in and shut the window.

24 Milton tugged his scarf up over his face and started for home. A neighbor who was watching from her upstairs window shouted, “Young man, can I buy some of that milk?” Milton sold her a can of milk. He asked for ten cents, but the woman insisted he take a quarter. Another neighbor called to him. Then another.

25 Soon Milton had sold all the cans of milk. He snowshoed back to Mr. Ash’s store and bought more condensed milk. But again, at almost every house he passed, someone shouted for milk.

26 As he dragged his sled back to Ash’s store, Milton pictured the dogsleds of Alaska. Maybe he and his father could make a dogsled, he thought.

27 When he got back to the store, he bought a whole case of milk with the extra money people had given him. He sold this milk, and then another case, to neighbors.

28 By now, half the kids in the neighborhood had seen and admired his snowshoes.

29 Milton grinned when he thought of how surprised they would be if he came by on a dogsled. He imagined himself and all the dogs of the neighborhood out in the storm, and all the rest of the world snowed in.

30 Just then, the noon whistle blew at the factory. Milton was surprised. He didn’t feel as if he had been out for almost two hours. He set out for home at once. Snow clung to his clothes like lint. Snowflakes driven by the wind stung and reddened his eyes and nose. His toes ached from the cold. But Milton felt like cheering as he snowshoed home, pulling the sled after him.

² *condensed milk* — a thick, sweetened milk in a can

Reading Comprehension

Mark your choices for multiple-choice questions 1 through 8 by filling in the circle next to the best answer.

1 In the story, what causes Milton to wake up?

- (A) He hears a loud noise outside.
- (B) He smells his breakfast cooking.
- (C) He remembers he has to go to school.
- (D) He feels cold because of the storm outside.

2 Read the sentence from paragraph 4 in the box below.

“There’s a wall of snow blocking the front door.”

The description “wall of snow” shows

- (A) how wet the snow is.
- (B) how cold the snow is.
- (C) how deep the snow is.
- (D) how white the snow is.

3 According to the story, how does Milton come up with the idea to make snowshoes?

- (A) He hears about them from his family.
- (B) He copies an example from friends.
- (C) He remembers a lesson from class.
- (D) He sees a pair in the store window.

4 In paragraph 15, why does Milton walk up and down the snowdrift outside his house?

- (A) to keep himself warm in the snow
- (B) to make sure the snowshoes are safe
- (C) to make a path to follow in the snow
- (D) to show how much he likes the snowshoes

Reading Comprehension

5 In paragraph 24, what is the **most likely** reason the woman insists on paying Milton a quarter for the milk?

- Ⓐ She is thankful for Milton's help.
- Ⓑ She is unhappy with regular milk.
- Ⓒ She is excited about the snowstorm.
- Ⓓ She is unsure how much Mr. Ash's milk costs.

6 At the end of the story, why is Milton surprised to learn that he has been outside for nearly two hours?

- Ⓐ He is too tired to think about time.
- Ⓑ He is too young to know how to tell time.
- Ⓒ He is so busy he does not notice time passing.
- Ⓓ He is so worried he does not notice time passing.

7 Which of the following events from the story does Milton imagine?

- Ⓐ He sells a case of milk to his neighbors.
- Ⓑ He notices a sign blown down in the wind.
- Ⓒ He rides a dogsled through the neighborhood.
- Ⓓ He stays home from school because of the snow.

8 Read the words from the story in the box below.

- snowdrift
- clothesline
- landmarks

The words in the box are

- Ⓐ verbs.
- Ⓑ adjectives.
- Ⓒ proper nouns.
- Ⓓ compound words.

Reading Comprehension

The *Nautilus* was the first submarine that used nuclear power. Read about its most famous trip and then answer the questions that follow.

The *Nautilus*

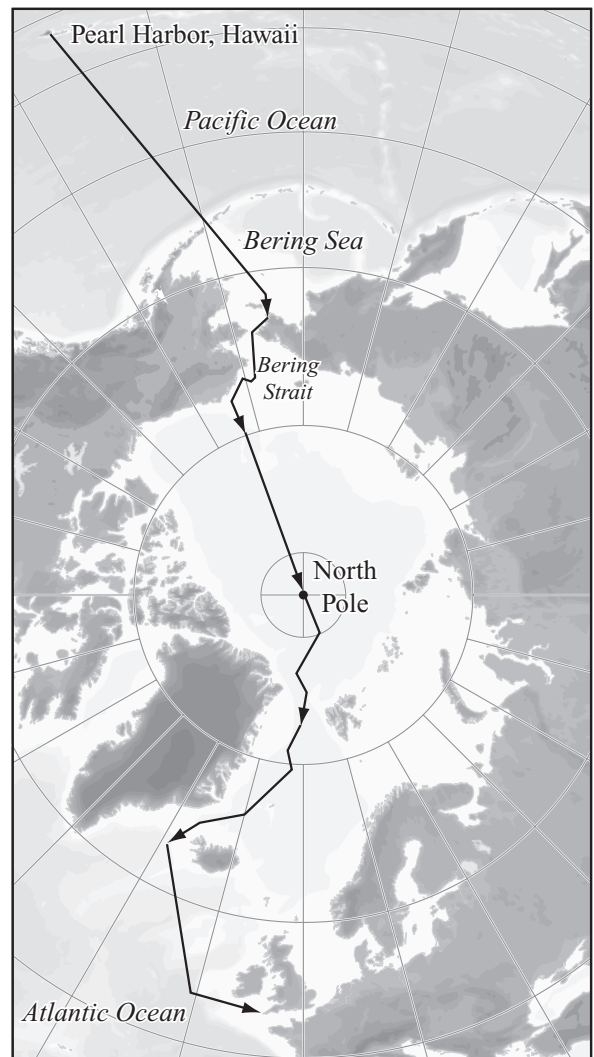
by Patrick O'Brien

1 The *Nautilus* was the first nuclear-powered submarine. Before the *Nautilus* was launched in 1954, submarines ran on electric power when cruising underwater and used diesel fuel when on the surface. They were slow, and they could only stay underwater for a few hours at a time. Because the *Nautilus* used nuclear power it was twice as fast as any other submarine and could stay underwater for weeks.

2 In June of 1958 the *Nautilus* set out from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on a top-secret mission to reach the North Pole. There is no land at the North Pole. It is in the middle of the Arctic Ocean, and the water is covered with a huge sheet of ice hundreds of miles across. The captain of the *Nautilus*, William Anderson, steered his sub north toward the Pole, and in the Bering Sea between Russia and Alaska, dove under the Arctic ice sheet. But the bottom of the ice sheet went down so deep that the *Nautilus* was forced to a depth of only a few feet off the seafloor. It was too dangerous, and Captain Anderson had to turn the *Nautilus* back.

3 The ice sheet melted a little as summer arrived, and the *Nautilus* tried again in July. Captain Anderson was able to find an area where the ice sheet was not too thick. He had plenty of room between the bottom of the ice and the seafloor, but he still had to steer carefully around the

**The *Nautilus*'s Route
beneath the North Pole**



Reading Comprehension

huge bottom parts of icebergs that hung down into the sea. At last, on August 3, 1958, at 11:15 P.M., the crew gave a wild cheer as they became the first people ever to travel under the North Pole.

“The Nautilus” by Patrick O’Brien, from *The Great Ships*. Copyright © 2001 by Patrick O’Brien. Reprinted by permission of Walker Books.

Mark your choices for multiple-choice questions 10 through 13 by filling in the circle next to the best answer.

- 10 According to the selection, the *Nautilus* was different from other submarines because it could

- (A) float above the ice.
- (B) rest on the seafloor.
- (C) use electricity for power.
- (D) remain underwater for a long time.

- 11 According to the selection, what was the captain of the *Nautilus* trying to do?

- (A) go to the North Pole
- (B) find a new route to Alaska
- (C) go all the way to Pearl Harbor
- (D) study the area around Russia

Reading Comprehension

12 Based on the selection, why did Captain Anderson turn back on the first trip?

- Ⓐ The ice sheet was too thick.
- Ⓑ The submarine was too slow.
- Ⓒ The seafloor could not be seen.
- Ⓓ The submarine did not have enough fuel.

13 Read the sentence from paragraph 1 in the box below.

Before the *Nautilus* was launched in 1954, submarines ran on electric power when cruising underwater and used diesel fuel when on the surface.

In the sentence, what does the word *cruising* mean?

- Ⓐ rising
- Ⓑ steering
- Ⓒ traveling
- Ⓓ returning

**Grade 3 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2009 Released Items:
Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers***

Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Correct Answer (MC)*
1	11	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	A
2	11	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	C
3	11	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	C
4	11	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	B
5	12	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	A
6	12	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	C
7	12	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	C
8	12	<i>Language</i>	5	D
9	13	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	
10	15	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
11	15	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	A
12	16	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	A
13	16	<i>Language</i>	4	C

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