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V. English Language Arts,  
Reading Comprehension, Grade 6

# Grade 6 English Language Arts

## Reading Comprehension Test

The spring 2009 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 website 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 6 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 test 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: SESSION 1

### 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 article describes the challenges and rewards of growing up with brothers or sisters. Read the article and then answer the questions that follow.*

# Brothers and Sisters

## The Friends You Can't Choose

How to build better relationships with your siblings  
and understand what makes them tick

1 *Chester poked his head into his older sister's room.*

2 *"Hi, Denise," he said.*

3 *"Chester, get out!" Denise screamed. "I told you never to come into my room again. What part of your pea-sized brain finds that hard to understand?"*

4 *"Gee," Chester sighed. "What's your problem?"*

5 What sane person would scream at her brother just for saying "hello"? Every time Denise gets a minute to herself, Chester shows up. Even though she's told him to leave her alone, he listens to her phone conversations and tells her secrets at the dinner table. To Denise, Chester's more of a bother than a brother.

6 What you get in a sibling (brother or sister) is pretty much the luck of the draw. You have no control over who your brothers and sisters are; you're simply stuck with what you've got. You may be one of the lucky ones who has "sibs" who are your best friends. Then again, you may not be so lucky.

7 Why are relationships with siblings such a big deal? Because you live with these people day in and day out. Learning to get along with them can help you learn about yourself. You also learn how to get along in the other relationships you'll have in life. Here are some common roles siblings play. Chances are you'll recognize your sibs in these descriptions.

### Roles Siblings Play

8 • **Pests**—Chester illustrates this role perfectly. What Denise can't see because of her anger is that Chester really admires his older sister. He's always around because the dull, everyday details of her life are interesting to him. He likes being near her.

9 • **Protectors**—It's common for sibs to protect each other. If Denise saw some kids calling Chester names, you can bet she'd forget what a pest he is and run to his rescue. This is normal, says Celia Anita Decker, author of *Children: The Early Years*. She says that sibs protect each other most often in four situations. They

do it when “there is an age gap of three or more years, when siblings come from large families, when children are unsupervised outside, and when peers attack a younger sibling in a physical or verbal way.” Have you ever noticed that, while it seems OK for you to call your brother or sister a name, you sure don’t want anyone else doing it?

- 10 • **Rivals**—Some siblings compete with each other for Mom’s or Dad’s attention and praise, often without even knowing it. Helen Gum Westlake and Donald G. Westlake, authors of *Relationships and Family Living*, explain that rivalry is greatest when the children are between 18 and 36 months apart in age. If you start to feel jealous of a sibling who gets better grades than you or is a better athlete, that’s because rivalry and envy feed off each other. One leads to the other. But there is good news. “Children normally lose their obvious symptoms of jealousy as they grow older and become absorbed in interests outside their family,” write the Westlakes.
- 11 • **Fighters**—Sibs don’t have to be rivals to fight. Some sibs fight intensely about everything—from sharing space to borrowing clothes or using the bathroom. If your home is a battleground, your entire family would appreciate it if you and your sib could declare a truce. Setting up fair rules and respecting each other’s needs can help end wars on the home front.
- 12 • **Friends**—Sibling friendships make the fighting, rivalry, and annoyances worthwhile. Even siblings who claim to despise each other can grow to be best friends. Sibs are natural playmates, and each time you set goals (for work or fun) and make them happen, you build family ties. No other friends know you better or care more for your welfare.

### How to Win the Sibling Game

- 13 A sibling can be friend, foe, or a little of both. If you play the game right, though, you’ll learn how to get along with your sibs before it’s time to move out of the house.
- 14 **Rule 1: Respect your opponent.** Earn points by showing your sibs a little respect. Remember, to earn it for yourself you must also give it. So, respect each other’s property, privacy, space, and needs. Be sure to talk to, instead of yell at, each other at least once each day.
- 15 **Rule 2: Set the rules.** Decide what bugs you, then set ground rules. If it’s privacy you crave, create a “Knock before entering” or “Keep out of my closet” rule. Once you set the rules, follow them and play fair. You may want to ask your parents to act as mediators and help you set up these rules.
- 16 **Rule 3: Give a little, get a little.** Do your sibs think your stuff is theirs simply because you share the same last name? You can protect your possessions by letting sibs use some of them—and declaring the important ones “off-limits.”
- 17 **Rule 4: Know what to hold on to.** When something is important to you, find a way to save it. For example, how can you get the privacy you need? Maybe you can take an unused attic or basement and make it your own. Another idea: Talk to your sibs about dividing your room into “privacy zones.” Feeling satisfied about what matters most to you can make you more patient in other areas.
- 18 **Rule 5: Know when to give in.** Sometimes giving in to small arguments can help you settle the big ones more peacefully. If you and a sib are arguing over something small, give in and move on.
- 19 **Rule 6: When you win, don’t brag.** Keep your attitude fair and friendly. This

will show sibs you respect them and value your family ties.

- 20 Sibling relationships aren't always easy. But, in the end, there is usually a big payoff. A bond between sibs can last a lifetime, often getting stronger as years

go by. When you think about it, it's the longest relationship you will ever have—from the very beginning of your life to the end. Wouldn't it be nice to make it a great one?

"Brothers and Sisters: The Friends You Can't Choose" from *Current Health 1*, November 1998. Copyright © 1998 by Weekly Reader Corporation. Published by Weekly Reader Corporation. Reprinted by permission of Weekly Reader.

- 1 According to paragraph 7, what is **one** benefit of learning to get along with siblings?
- A. avoiding punishment
  - B. earning good grades in school
  - C. understanding more about others
  - D. recognizing a problem when it occurs
- 2 According to the article, what would **most likely** cause a sister to be protective of a younger brother?
- A. the brother being bullied at school
  - B. the brother making new friendships
  - C. the brother being disciplined by their parents
  - D. the brother deciding to try out for a sports team

- 3 According to the article, what often causes sibling rivalry?
- A. children liking different activities
  - B. children thinking parents are unfair
  - C. children getting bored with each other
  - D. children wanting their parents to notice them
- 4 According to the article, when are siblings **most often** rivals?
- A. when they are close in age
  - B. when they are of opposite sexes
  - C. when they are part of a large family
  - D. when they are old enough to attend school

- 5 According to paragraph 19, what should siblings **never** do?
- A. boast about their successes
  - B. make deals with one another
  - C. borrow clothes from one another
  - D. ask parents to help with their problems
- 6 Which of the following is the **main** purpose of the article?
- A. to challenge the idea that sibling rivalry rarely occurs
  - B. to explain ways siblings can improve their relationship
  - C. to detail steps parents must take to prevent sibling rivalry
  - D. to highlight the challenges parents face when raising siblings

- 7 Which of the following is a **main** heading in the article?
- A. Protectors
  - B. Fighters
  - C. How to Win the Sibling Game
  - D. When you win, don't brag.

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

• **Pests**—Chester illustrates this role perfectly.

- Which of the following **best** replaces the word *illustrates* in the sentence?
- A. defends
  - B. calculates
  - C. understands
  - D. demonstrates

**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** Based on the article, explain how siblings can work together to get along. Support your answer with important information from the article.

# 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.

*Henry David Thoreau was a well-known American writer and philosopher. In 1845, when he was 27 years old, he began to build a house on the shores of Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. In a famous work titled Walden, or Life in the Woods, Thoreau described his experiences. Read the following passage, which includes selections from Thoreau's work, and answer the questions that follow.*

### Henry David's House

compiled by Steven Schnur

Every spirit builds itself a house,  
and beyond its house a world,  
and beyond its world a heaven.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson



- 1 Near the end of March I borrowed an axe and went down to the woods by Walden Pond and began to cut down some tall white pines for timber.
- 2 It was a pleasant hillside where I worked, covered with pine woods, through which I looked out on the pond. The ice in the pond was not yet dissolved, though there were some open spaces, and it was all dark colored and saturated with water.
- 3 On the 1st of April it rained and melted the ice, and in the early part of the day, which was very foggy, I heard a stray goose groping about over the pond and cackling as if lost, or like the spirit of the fog.
- 4 So I went on for some days cutting and hewing timber, and also studs and rafters, all with my narrow axe, singing to myself.
- 5 My days in the woods were not very long ones; yet I usually carried my dinner of bread and butter, and read the newspaper in which it was wrapped, at noon, sitting amid the green pine boughs which I had cut off. Sometimes a rambler in the wood was attracted by the sound of my axe, and we chatted pleasantly over the chips which I had made.
- 6 By the middle of April my house was framed and ready for the raising.<sup>1</sup> I had already bought the shanty of James Collins, an Irishman who worked on the Fitchburg Railroad, for boards.

<sup>1</sup> ready for the raising — ready to be constructed

7 I took down this dwelling, drawing the nails,<sup>2</sup> and removed it to the pond side by small cart-loads. One early thrush gave me a note or two as I drove along the woodland path.

8 I dug my cellar in the side of a hill sloping to the south, where a woodchuck had formerly dug his burrow, down through sumach and blackberry roots, six feet square by seven deep, to a fine sand where potatoes would not freeze in any winter.

9 At length, in the beginning of May, with the help of some of my acquaintances, I set up the frame of my house.

10 I began to occupy my house on the 4th of July, as soon as it was boarded and roofed, but before boarding I laid the foundation of a chimney at one end, bringing two cartloads of stones up the hill from the pond in my arms.

11 I built the chimney after my hoeing in the fall, before a fire became necessary for warmth, doing my cooking in the mean while out of doors on the ground, early in the morning.

12 I have thus a tight shingled and plastered house, ten feet wide by fifteen long, and eight-foot posts, with a garret and a closet, a large window on each side, two trap doors, one door at the end, and a brick fireplace opposite. I have also a small wood-shed adjoining, made chiefly of the stuff which was left after building the house.

13 My furniture, part of which I made myself, consisted of a bed, a table, a desk, three chairs (one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society), a looking-glass three inches in diameter, a pair of tongs and andirons, a kettle, a skillet, and a frying-pan, a dipper, a wash-bowl, two knives and forks, three plates, one cup, one spoon, a jug for oil, a jug for molasses, and a japanned lamp.<sup>3</sup>

14 My dwelling was small, but it seemed larger for being a single apartment and remote from neighbors. All the attractions of a house were concentrated in one room; it was kitchen, chamber, parlor, and keeping-room.<sup>4</sup>

15 Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie,<sup>5</sup> amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time.

16 In warm evenings I frequently sat in a boat playing the flute, and saw the perch, which I seemed to have charmed, hovering around me, and the moon travelling over the ribbed bottom, which was strewn with the wrecks of the forest.

17 By the first of September I saw two or three small maples turned scarlet across the pond. Gradually from week to week the character of each tree came out, and it admired itself reflected in the smooth mirror of the lake.

18 In October I went a-graping to the river meadows, and loaded myself with clusters more precious for their beauty and fragrance than for food. I collected a small store of wild apples for coddling. When chestnuts were ripe I laid up half a bushel for winter. It was very exciting at that season to roam the boundless chestnut woods with a bag on my shoulder, and a stick to open burrs with in my hand. Occasionally I climbed and shook the trees.

<sup>2</sup> *drawing the nails* — removing the nails

<sup>3</sup> *japanned lamp* — a lamp painted with a shiny varnish

<sup>4</sup> *keeping-room* — a storage room

<sup>5</sup> *reverie* — daydream

- 19 Many a traveller came out of his way to see me and the inside of my house. One real runaway slave, among the rest, whom I helped to forward toward the northstar. Children come a-berrying, railroad men taking a Sunday morning walk in clean shirts, fishermen and hunters, poets and philosophers, in short, all honest pilgrims,<sup>6</sup> who came out to the woods for freedom's sake, and really left the village behind, I was ready to greet.
- 20 At length the winter set in in good earnest, just as I had finished plastering, and the wind began to howl around the house.
- 21 One night in the beginning of winter, before the pond froze over, I was startled by the loud honking of a goose, and, stepping to the door, heard the sound of their wings like a tempest in the woods as they flew low over my house. A slight sound at evening lifts me up by the ears, and makes life seem inexpressibly grand.
- 22 I also heard the whooping of the ice in the pond, as if it were restless in its bed. Sometimes I heard the foxes as they ranged over the snow crust, in moonlight nights, in search of a partridge or other game, barking like forest dogs. Usually the red squirrel waked me in the dawn, coursing over the roof and up and down the sides of the house.
- 23 One attraction in coming to the woods to live was that I should have leisure and opportunity to see the Spring come in. In April the pigeons were seen again and in due time I heard the martins twittering over my clearing. Early in May, the oaks, hickories, maples, and other trees, just putting out amidst the pine woods around the pond, imparted a brightness like sunshine to the landscape, especially in cloudy days, as if the sun were breaking through mists and shining faintly on the hillsides here and there.
- 24 On the third or fourth of May I saw a loon in the pond, and during the first week of the month I heard the whippoorwill. The phoebe<sup>7</sup> had already come and looked in at my door and window.
- 25 We can never have enough of Nature.

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<sup>6</sup> *pilgrims* — travelers

<sup>7</sup> *whippoorwill, phoebe* — types of birds

- 10 In the passage, Thoreau reads the newspaper in which his sandwich is wrapped and makes his shed out of leftover wood. What do these details **best** show about Thoreau?
- A. He is sometimes lazy.
  - B. He is careless with his things.
  - C. He believes in reusing materials.
  - D. He knows he has unlimited supplies.
- 11 What does the description in paragraph 15 **most strongly** suggest about Thoreau?
- A. He is busy in the afternoons.
  - B. He is unsuited for hard work.
  - C. He is content in his surroundings.
  - D. He is displeased by the interruptions.

- 12 In paragraph 16, the phrase “strewed with the wrecks of the forest” **most likely** refers to
- A. fallen trees.
  - B. severe storms.
  - C. piles of rocks.
  - D. schools of fish.
- 13 In paragraph 17, what is the **most likely** reason Thoreau uses the phrase “it admired itself”?
- A. to make the tree seem old
  - B. to make the tree seem large
  - C. to make the tree seem human
  - D. to make the tree seem mysterious

- 14 Read the sentence from paragraph 21 in the box below.

A slight sound at evening lifts me up by the ears, and makes life seem inexpressibly grand.

Based on the sentence, which word **best** describes how Thoreau feels?

- A. troubled
  - B. doubting
  - C. delighted
  - D. courageous
- 15 Which word **best** describes the tone of Thoreau’s writing?
- A. gloomy
  - B. peaceful
  - C. humorous
  - D. disappointed

- 16 Which phrase or sentence from the passage **best** expresses the theme?
- A. “. . . a pleasant hillside where I worked . . .”
  - B. “I dug my cellar in the side of a hill sloping to the south . . .”
  - C. “Occasionally I climbed and shook the trees.”
  - D. “We can never have enough of Nature.”

- 17 Read the text from paragraph 13 in the box below.

. . . three chairs (one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society) . . .

Based on the text, what does the word *solitude* mean?

- A. the state of being lost
- B. the state of being busy
- C. the state of being alone
- D. the state of being sorry

**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 passage, explain how Thoreau’s experiences at Walden Pond helped him to appreciate nature. Support your answer with important details from the passage.

**Grade 6 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	54	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	C
2	54	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	A
3	54	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	D
4	54	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	A
5	55	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	A
6	55	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	B
7	55	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
8	55	<i>Language</i>	4	D
9	56	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	
10	60	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	C
11	60	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	C
12	60	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	A
13	60	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	C
14	61	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	C
15	61	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	B
16	61	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	11	D
17	61	<i>Language</i>	4	C
18	62	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	11	

\* 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 website later this year.