
V. English Language Arts,
Reading Comprehension, Grade 6

Grade 6 English Language Arts Reading Comprehension Test

The spring 2010 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.

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 two 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 both ELA Reading Comprehension test sessions. No other reference materials were allowed during any ELA Reading Comprehension test session.

Cross-Reference Information

The tables at the conclusion of this chapter indicate each released and unreleased common item's reporting category and the framework general standard it assesses. The correct answers for released multiple-choice questions are also displayed in the released item table.

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 1

DIRECTIONS

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

In this folktale from Tuscany, a region of Italy, a shepherd tries to stay a step ahead of March weather. Read the folktale and then answer the questions that follow.

March and the Shepherd

Retold by Domenico Vittorini

- 1 *O*ne morning at the very beginning of spring, a shepherd led his sheep to graze, and on the way he met March.
- 2 “Good morning,” said March. “Where are you going to take your sheep to graze today?”
- 3 “Well, March, today I am going to the mountains.”
- 4 “Fine, Shepherd. That’s a good idea. Good luck.” But to himself March said, “Here’s where I have some fun, for today I’m going to fix you.”
- 5 And that day in the mountains the rain came down in buckets. It was a veritable deluge. The shepherd, however, had watched March’s face very carefully and noticed a mischievous look on it. So instead of going to the mountains, he had remained in the plains. In the evening, upon returning home, he met March again.
- 6 “Well, Shepherd, how did it go today?”
- 7 “It couldn’t have been better. I changed my mind and went to the plains. A very beautiful day. Such a lovely warm sun.”
- 8 “Really? I’m glad to hear it,” said March, but he bit his lip in vexation. “Where are you going tomorrow?”
- 9 “Tomorrow I’m going to the plains, too. With this fine weather, I would be crazy if I went to the mountains.”
- 10 “Oh, really? Fine! Farewell.”
- 11 And they parted.
- 12 But the shepherd didn’t go to the plains again. He went to the mountains. And on the plains March brought rain and wind and hail—a punishment indeed from heaven. In the evening he met the shepherd homeward bound.
- 13 “Good evening, Shepherd. How did it go today?”
- 14 “Very well indeed. Do you know? I changed my mind again and went to the mountains after all. It was heavenly there. What a day! What a sky! What a sun!”
- 15 “I’m really happy to hear it, Shepherd. And where are you going tomorrow?”

16 “Well, tomorrow I’m going to the plains. I see dark clouds over the mountains.
I wouldn’t want to find myself too far from home.”

17 To make a long story short, whenever the shepherd met March, he always told
him the opposite of what he planned to do the next day, so March was never able
to catch him. The end of the month came, and on the last day, the thirtieth, March
said to the shepherd, “Well, Shepherd, how is everything?”

18 “Things couldn’t be any better. This is the end of the month and I’m out of
danger. There’s nothing to fear now. I can begin to sleep peacefully.”

19 “That’s true,” said March. “And where are you going tomorrow?”

20 The shepherd, certain that he had nothing to fear, told March the truth. “Tomorrow,”
he said, “I shall go to the plains. The distance is shorter and the work less hard.”

21 “Fine. Farewell.”

22 March hastened to the home of his cousin April and told her the whole story.
“I want you to lend me at least one day,” he said. “I am determined to catch this
shepherd.” Gentle April was unwilling but March coaxed so hard that finally she
consented.

23 The following morning the shepherd set off for the plains. No sooner had his
flock scattered than there arose a storm that chilled his very heart. The sharp wind
howled and growled, snow fell in thick, icy flakes, hail pelted down. It was all the
shepherd could do to get his sheep back into the fold.

24 That evening as the shepherd huddled in a corner of his hearth, silent and
melancholy, March paid him a visit.

25 “Good evening, Shepherd,” he said.

26 “Good evening, March.”

27 “How did it go today?”

28 “I’d rather not talk about it,” said the shepherd. “I can’t understand what happened.
Not even in the middle of January have I ever seen a storm like the one on the plains
today. It seemed as if all the devils had broken loose from hell. Today I had enough
rough weather to last me the whole year. And oh, my poor sheep!”

29 Then at last was March satisfied.

30 And from that time on March has had thirty-one days because, as it is said in
Tuscany, the rascal never returned to April the day he borrowed from her.

- 1 Which of the following phrases from paragraph 5 is an example of figurative language?
- A. “came down in buckets”
 - B. “going to the mountains”
 - C. “remained in the plains”
 - D. “upon returning home”
- 2 Based on paragraph 8, what is **true** about March?
- A. He wants to visit the mountains.
 - B. He does not mean what he says.
 - C. He wants the shepherd to be happy.
 - D. He does not think the shepherd should leave.
- 3 Based on paragraphs 17 and 18, what does the shepherd believe?
- A. that March is sorry for his earlier actions
 - B. that he can continue to fool March forever
 - C. that March has run out of time to bother him
 - D. that he can convince March to leave him alone

- 4 Based on the folktale, which of the shepherd’s statements **most likely** makes March the happiest?
- A. “I changed my mind again . . .” (paragraph 14)
 - B. ““Things couldn’t be any better.”” (paragraph 18)
 - C. ““This is the end of the month . . .”” (paragraph 18)
 - D. ““I’d rather not talk about it,”” (paragraph 28)
- 5 Read the sentence from paragraph 23 in the box below.

It was all the shepherd could do to get his sheep back into the fold.

The word *fold* is used as which part of speech in the sentence?

- A. preposition
- B. adjective
- C. noun
- D. verb

Question 6 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 6 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 6 Based on the folktale, explain how March and the shepherd can **both** be considered tricksters. Support your answer with important details from the folktale.

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 2

DIRECTIONS

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

Dorothea Lange was a photographer who worked during the Depression in the 1930s, when there was much poverty and hardship in the United States. Read the selection about Dorothea Lange and answer the questions that follow.

Dorothea Lange

1895–1965

by Leslie Sills

- 1 Dorothea Lange once said, “A camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera.” She was committed to helping people in trouble. By photographing them, she hoped to awaken and inspire the more fortunate to help, too. That is why her pictures are called documentary, a word that comes from the Latin root *docere*, meaning “to teach.”
- 2 Dorothea became passionate about helping people during the Great Depression, when one out of four Americans lost a job. She had a portrait business in San Francisco then, but outside her window she saw unemployed men lined up for free food. She thought these men were tremendously brave as they endured circumstances they could not control. She *had* to capture their feelings.

. . .
- 3 From 1932 to 1934, Dorothea photographed many of the millions affected by America’s poor economic conditions. During that time, people with jobs suffered because wages were low and hours long. Some protested, and in support, Dorothea photographed their demonstrations. When Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president in 1933, he began programs to help protect Americans and to create jobs for the unemployed.
- 4 A year later, Dorothea exhibited her photographs publicly for the first time. Her show surprised people. They were not used to seeing photographs of social problems that provoked such strong emotions. Dorothea chose just the right person or people and setting to reflect the pain of many Americans.
- 5 One person who loved her work was an economics professor named Paul Taylor. Paul was doing research for President Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration (or WPA). He was trying to help poor Americans in rural areas by talking to them about their lives and then sending reports to the government. When he saw Dorothea’s photographs, he knew his reports

would be more effective if her work accompanied them. Dorothea liked his idea. She was hired by the government as a “typist,” the only job slot available, and went with Paul on his field trips.

6 In 1934 and 1935, thousands of farmers from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arkansas left their farms because a terrible drought had killed their crops. The soil was so dry and the wind so fierce that the area became known as the Dust Bowl. These farmers migrated to California, hoping to find better conditions, but there were far too many workers for the number of available jobs. As the Depression continued, the farms that were successful used machines—tractors and harvesters—instead of workers.

7 Dorothea and Paul worked tirelessly, speaking to the migrants and taking pictures. The conditions were shocking. As *Untitled (Migrant Housing, California, c. 1936)* shows, the migrants’ homes were made of whatever they could find: canvas, cardboard, twigs, and even grasses woven between poles. In one report, Dorothea and Paul wrote, “Words cannot describe some of the conditions we saw.”

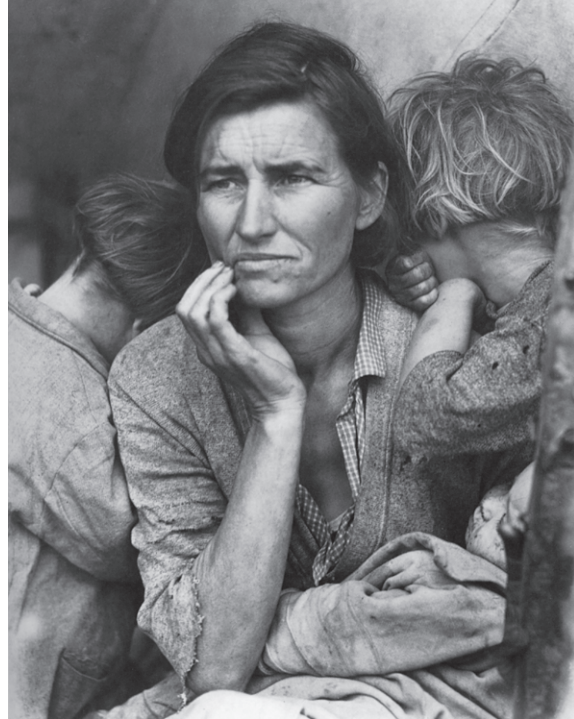


Untitled (Migrant Housing, California, c. 1936)

8 When the government officials received the reports along with Dorothea’s photographs, they understood the suffering. President Roosevelt responded quickly. He set up camps with tents and trailers and provided food and clean sanitary facilities. Dorothea’s photographs were among the first in America to lead to government action.

9 *Migrant Mother, 1936*, perhaps Dorothea’s most famous photograph, was taken during this time. Dorothea had been photographing for weeks and was anxiously driving home alone in a rainstorm. She passed a sign that said Pea Pickers Camp but was too weary to stop. Twenty miles down the road, she felt she must return. She turned around and drove right in “like a homing pigeon,” she recalled. There she found a rain-soaked woman trying to shelter her children. Along with twenty-five hundred men, women, and children in the camp, this family was trying to survive by eating common birds killed by the children and peas that had frozen on the vine. The family could not leave because the mother had had to sell their car tires to buy food.

10 Dorothea spent ten minutes taking photographs. She took six pictures, talking very little. She learned only that the migrant mother was thirty-two years old and that the father of her seven children was a native of California. Because Dorothea was unsteady on her feet but used a large, heavy camera, each photograph had to be planned quickly. Her first two photographs were taken from a distance and included a teenage daughter. With each following photograph, Dorothea moved in closer. While all the photos clearly portray the pain of this family's life, the last photograph, known as *Migrant Mother*, is the most powerful. Here the mother is the focus. She looks to the side with her hand held to her mouth as if she is in a state of despair. The children at her sides have turned their heads and are leaning on their mother as if for comfort. Perhaps Dorothea suggested this to avoid including the children's expressions, which she may have feared might compete with their mother's worried look. The baby sleeping on her mother's lap is dirty, further emphasizing their horrible conditions. This composition became a symbol for all suffering families of the Depression.



Migrant Mother, 1936

11 Dorothea drove straight home and rushed to develop and print the film. She quickly sent copies not only to the government but also to a San Francisco newspaper, which distributed them along with a story about the pea pickers to other newspapers. The alarmed United States government hurriedly sent the migrants twenty thousand pounds of food. *Migrant Mother* kept many people from starving.

“Dorothea Lange (1895–1965)” by Leslie Sills, from *In Real Life: Six Women Photographers*. Copyright © 2000 by Leslie Sills. Reprinted by permission of Holiday House, Inc. Photograph of migrant housing by Dorothea Lange. Copyright © the Dorothea Lange Collection, the Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Paul S. Taylor. “Migrant Mother” in the public domain.

- 7 What is the **most likely** reason the author begins the selection with a quotation from Dorothea Lange?
- A. to provide information about photography
 - B. to introduce Dorothea Lange’s views about photography
 - C. to explain what other photographers were doing at the time
 - D. to compare Dorothea Lange’s early photographs to her later photographs

- 8 Read the sentence from paragraph 4 in the box below.

Dorothea chose just the right person or people and setting to reflect the pain of many Americans.

What does the sentence suggest about Dorothea Lange?

- A. She wanted her photographs to communicate a message.
- B. She wanted the public to become familiar with photography.
- C. She felt it was important to create beauty with her photography.
- D. She believed children were the best subjects for her photographs.

- 9 Based on paragraph 5, what was the **most likely** reason Paul Taylor wanted to include Dorothea Lange’s photographs in his reports?
- A. The photographs showed what his words described.
 - B. The photographs helped to get his reports published.
 - C. The photographs allowed him to travel to new places.
 - D. The photographs allowed him to write shorter reports.

- 10 Based on paragraph 7, why were the migrants’ homes made of canvas, twigs, and other unusual materials?
- A. The migrants did not need sturdy homes.
 - B. The migrants could not afford better homes.
 - C. The migrants needed lightweight homes because they moved often.
 - D. The migrants hoped their interesting homes would attract attention.

- 11 According to paragraph 8, what effect did Dorothea Lange’s photographs have on President Roosevelt?
- A. He began to send aid to migrant workers.
 - B. He encouraged farmers to move to the cities.
 - C. He asked farmers to reduce the size of their farms.
 - D. He wrote letters asking for more support for migrant workers.

- 12 What does paragraph 9 suggest about Dorothea Lange’s photograph *Migrant Mother*?
- A. Dorothea originally planned to photograph another subject.
 - B. Dorothea hoped the photograph would win an award.
 - C. Dorothea almost did not take the photograph.
 - D. Dorothea felt it was not her best photograph.

- 13 Based on the selection, what is the **most likely** reason Dorothea Lange did not include the children’s faces in *Migrant Mother*?
- A. Dorothea Lange wanted to show how shy the children were.
 - B. Dorothea Lange wanted to photograph the children individually.
 - C. Dorothea Lange wanted to express the mother’s love for her family.
 - D. Dorothea Lange wanted to highlight the mother’s feelings about her life.

- 14 Read the sentences from paragraph 1 in the box below.

She was committed to helping people in trouble. . . . That is why her pictures are called documentary, a word that comes from the Latin root *docere*, meaning “to teach.”

- Based on the sentences, why are Dorothea Lange’s photographs called “documentary”?
- A. because they were printed on paper
 - B. because they were exhibited in public
 - C. because they showed the conditions of real life
 - D. because they looked like other portraits of the time

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

As the Depression continued, the farms that were successful used machines—tractors and harvesters—instead of workers.

Why are the dashes (—) used in the sentence?

- A. to indicate an opinion
- B. to show a change in topic
- C. to take the place of periods
- D. to set off additional information

- 16 Read the sentence from paragraph 10 in the box below.

While all the photos clearly portray the pain of this family’s life, the last photograph, known as *Migrant Mother*, is the most powerful.

In the sentence, what does the word *portray* **most likely** mean?

- A. increase
- B. prevent
- C. change
- D. show

Question 17 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 17 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 17 Based on the selection, explain why Dorothea Lange became a famous photographer. Support your answer with important details from the selection.

**Grade 6 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2010 Released Items:
Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers***

Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Correct Answer (MC)*
1	55	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	A
2	55	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	B
3	55	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	C
4	55	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	D
5	55	<i>Language</i>	5	C
6	56	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	
7	60	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	B
8	60	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	A
9	60	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	A
10	60	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	B
11	61	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	A
12	61	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
13	61	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
14	61	<i>Language</i>	4	C
15	62	<i>Language</i>	5	D
16	62	<i>Language</i>	4	D
17	62	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	

* 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.

**Grade 6 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2010 Unreleased Common Items:
Reporting Categories and Standards**

Item No.	Reporting Category	Standard
18	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
19	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
20	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8
21	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
22	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8
23	<i>Language</i>	4
24	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
25	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
26	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
27	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
28	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15
29	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15
30	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15
31	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
32	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
33	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
34	<i>Language</i>	5
35	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
36	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	14
37	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	14
38	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	14
39	<i>Language</i>	4
40	<i>Language</i>	5