
VI. English Language Arts, Grade 7

A. Composition

B. Reading Comprehension

Grade 7 English Language Arts Test

Test Structure

The grade 7 MCAS English Language Arts test was presented in the following two parts:

- the ELA Composition test, which used a writing prompt to assess learning standards from the Massachusetts *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework's* **Composition** strand
- the ELA Reading Comprehension test, which used multiple-choice and open-response questions to assess learning standards from the *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework's* **Language** and **Reading and Literature** strands

A. Composition

The spring 2010 grade 7 MCAS English Language Arts Composition test and Composition Make-Up test were based on learning standards in the **Composition** strand of the Massachusetts *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* (2001). The learning standards for the Composition strand appear on pages 72–83 of the *Framework*, which 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 Composition test results are reported under the reporting categories **Composition: Topic Development** and **Composition: Standard English Conventions**.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The MCAS ELA Composition test included two separate test sessions, administered on the same day with a short break between sessions. During the first session, each student wrote an initial draft of a composition in response to the appropriate writing prompt on the next page. During the second session, each student revised his or her draft and submitted a final composition, which was scored in the areas of Topic Development and Standard English Conventions. The Scoring Guides for the MCAS English Language Arts Composition are available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/student/elacomp_scoreguide.html.

Reference Materials and Tools

At least one English-language dictionary per classroom was provided for student use during ELA Composition test sessions. The use of bilingual dictionaries was allowed for current and former limited English proficient students only. No other reference materials or tools were allowed during either ELA Composition test session.

Cross-Reference Information

Framework general standards 19–22 are assessed by the ELA Composition.

English Language Arts Composition, Grade 7

Grade 7 Writing Prompt

WRITING PROMPT

Imagine you had the opportunity to live anywhere in the world for a year. Where would you live? Why would you choose this place to live? What would you hope to learn there?

Think of where in the world you would choose to live for a year. In a well-developed composition, explain the reasons you would choose this place to live and what you would hope to learn there.

Grade 7 Make-Up Writing Prompt

WRITING PROMPT

Schools can have many types of problems, such as only offering a limited number of after-school activities or having class sizes that are too large.

Think about a problem at your school and how you might solve it. In a well-developed composition, describe the problem and how you would solve it, and explain why your solution is a good one.

B. Reading Comprehension

The spring 2010 grade 7 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 7 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*, page 14)
- Reading and Literature (*Framework*, pages 35–64; *Supplement*, pages 15–17)

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 7 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.

The play Lost in Yonkers is set in New York City during the 1940s. In the play, brothers Arty and Jay live with their grandmother and Aunt Bella in an apartment above the family's candy store. In this excerpt, the boys are falling asleep after Jay visits the store for a midnight snack of ice cream when their Uncle Louie shows up unexpectedly. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

from Lost in Yonkers by Neil Simon

(They put out the flashlight and turn to go to sleep . . . A moment passes . . . Then the front door opens. We see a man in a hat enter, closing the door, then slowly, quietly cross toward the window. He carries a small black bag)

JAY Who's that?

5 *(Turning the flashlight on the man)*

LOUIE Get that light outa my face and go back to sleep, kid.

JAY There's nothing here to steal, mister. I swear.

LOUIE Is that you, Jay?

JAY Yeah. Who are you?

10 LOUIE It's Uncle Louie.

JAY Uncle Louie? No kidding? . . . Arty! It's Uncle Louie.

ARTY Uncle Louie? . . . Really? Hi, Uncle Louie.

LOUIE Is that Arty?

ARTY Yeah. It's Arty . . . Hi, Uncle Louie.

15 LOUIE Wait a second. *(LOUIE turns on the lamp. LOUIE KURNITZ is about thirty-six years old. He wears a double-breasted suit with a hanky in the breast pocket, black pointy shoes, a dark blue shirt, and a loud tie. He also wears a fedora hat and carries a small black satchel, not unlike a doctor's bag)* Whaddya know?

20 Look at you! Couple a big guys now, ain't you? . . . You don't come around for
 a while and you grow up on me . . . Come here. Come on. I want a hug. You
 heard me. Move it. *(The boys look at each other, not thinking LOUIE was the*
hugging type. They quickly climb out of bed and go to him. He puts his arms
around both their shoulders and pulls them in to him. He looks at JAY) Picture of
 25 your mother. Pretty woman, your mother . . . *(To ARTY)* And you. You look like a
 little bull terrier. Is that what you are, a bull terrier? *(He musses ARTY's hair)*

ARTY Yeah, I guess so.

LOUIE *(Fakes a punch at JAY's midsection)* Hey, watch it! What are you now, a
 middleweight or what? Who's been beefin' you up?

JAY Aunt Bella. She's a good cook.

30 LOUIE *(Taking off his hat)* And a couple a midnight trips down to the ice cream
 freezer, heh? Diggin' into the boysenberry with your flashlight? . . . That's
 breakin' and enterin', kid. Two to five years.

JAY You saw me?

LOUIE *(Crosses to GRANDMA's door and listens)* I been down there since Ma closed
 35 the store.

JAY Sitting in the dark?

LOUIE Yeah. Waitin' for her to go to sleep. I wasn't in no mood for long
 conversations.

JAY *(Looks at ARTY, then at LOUIE)* I just took a fingerful, that's all. I love
 40 boysenberry.

LOUIE Big mistake, kid. Mom reads fingerprints. She'll nail you in the morning.

JAY Are you serious?

LOUIE Get outa here. What are you? A couple a pushovers? Like your old man
 . . . What'd he bring up for you, Arty? A thumbful of pistachio?

45 ARTY No. Nothing. I wasn't hungry.

LOUIE You think your pop and I didn't do that when we were kids? That was the
 beauty part. Never took nothin' durin' the day. A ton a ice cream, a store full a
 candy, anything we wanted. Never took nothin' . . . But as soon as Ma let her

50 braids down and turned out the lights, we were down there lappin’ up the cream and meowin’ like cats . . . Ain’t that the way? It’s only fun when there’s a chance a gettin’ caught. Nothin’ sweeter than danger, boys, am I right?

JAY I guess so.

LOUIE Damn right.

ARTY I didn’t know Pop was like that.

55 LOUIE Yeah, well, he was no good at it anyway. Ma knew what was goin’ on. She could tell if there was salt missin’ from a pretzel . . . But she wouldn’t say nothin’. She’d come up from the store with the milk, siddown for breakfast, knowin’ that two scoops of everything was missin’, and she’d just stare at you . . . right into your eyeballs, pupil to pupil . . . never blinkin’ . . . Her eyes
60 looked like two district attorneys . . . and Eddie couldn’t take the pressure. He’d always crack. Tears would start rollin’ down his cheeks like a wet confession . . . and Whack, he’d get that big German hand right across the head . . . But not me. I’d stare her right back until her eyelids started to weigh ten pounds each . . . And she’d turn away from me, down for the count . . . And you know what?
65 She loved it . . . because I knew how to take care of myself . . . Yeah, me and Ma loved to put on the gloves and go the distance.

Lost in Yonkers by Neil Simon. Copyright © 1991 by Neil Simon. Reprinted by permission of the author.

- 1 Based on lines 15–25, what is the boys’ first reaction to Louie?
- A. They wonder why Louie is dressed formally at night.
 - B. They feel that Louie would rather talk to someone else.
 - C. They believe Louie is mistaking them for other relatives.
 - D. They think Louie acts different from how they remember him.

- 2 In lines 23–24, what does Louie mean when he says, “Picture of your mother”?
- A. Jay resembles his mother.
 - B. Louie is becoming confused.
 - C. Jay is remembering his mother.
 - D. Louie is looking at an old photograph.

- 3 Based on the excerpt, why does Louie enter the apartment after it is dark?
- A. He has been delayed in arriving.
 - B. He has been stealing from the store.
 - C. He does not want to disturb the boys.
 - D. He does not want to see his mother right away.

- 4 What does Jay’s reaction in lines 39 and 40 **most** reveal?
- A. He feels he must defend himself.
 - B. He is asking Louie to forgive him.
 - C. He hopes to put the blame on Arty.
 - D. He is planning to get more ice cream.

- 5 What do Louie’s comments in lines 55–66 suggest about his mother?
- A. She admires his defiance.
 - B. She appreciates his honesty.
 - C. She fears he will turn to a life of crime.
 - D. She worries about his influence on his brother.

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 excerpt, describe Louie’s character. Support your answer with important and specific details from the excerpt.

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 2

DIRECTIONS

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

Scorpions—do they deserve their “deadly reputation”? Read the excerpt from Scorpion Man to learn more about these creatures related to spiders and answer the questions that follow.

A Deadly Reputation

from *Scorpion Man* by Laurence Pringle

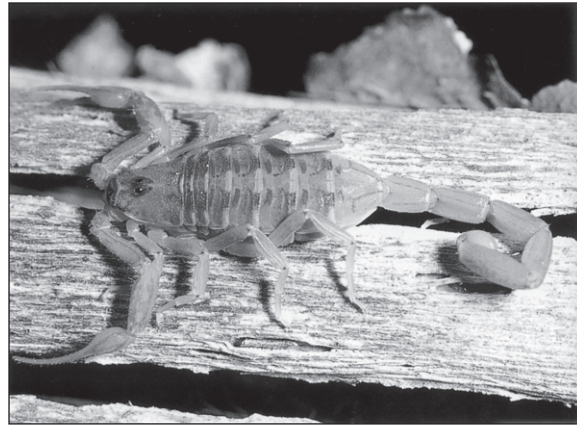
- 1 Say *scorpion* to most people, and they will picture a small desert-dwelling animal, its curved tail tipped with a deadly stinger.
- 2 This description fits some scorpions, but it is about as accurate as saying that all humans are lawyers who live in cities. Less than 2 percent—about twenty-five of fifteen hundred known scorpion species—have venom that can kill people. And scorpions live not only in deserts but also in jungles, grasslands, caves, along seashores, and high on mountains.
- 3 Overall, scorpions are far more varied and much less dangerous than people imagine. Still, throughout history the few poisonous species have killed many people. As a result, in many cultures the scorpion is a symbol of evil and death. In the 1991 book he edited, *The Biology of Scorpions*, Gary Polis wrote, “The scorpion has appeared repeatedly in religious cults of ancient and modern history as an agent of the night, the devil, or the gods of the underworld.”
- 4 Even though he knows how to handle scorpions safely, Gary Polis chooses not to study any deadly species. There are no accurate figures of deaths caused by scorpions worldwide, but estimates range from three thousand to five thousand victims a year. Medicines called antivenins can now save lives, but scorpions are still a major health hazard in parts of India, Africa, South America, and Mexico.
- 5 Just one deadly species lives in the United States. Its range extends from Mexico into Arizona and southern Utah. All other scorpions that live in the United States (and one species found also in southern Alberta and British Columbia, Canada) have poison stings that are no worse than those of honeybees or wasps. “I have been stung seven times by scorpions,” Gary Polis says, “and the pain was never bad enough to make me stop what I was doing.”



A desert scorpion in its defensive position, ready to sting.

6 A scorpion's stinger is located at the tip of its tail. The tail whips forward in a split second to jab a victim and inject venom. Chemists have discovered that scorpion venoms are a mixture of up to thirty neurotoxins (poisons that affect the nervous system). Each toxin is effective against different organisms, for example, insects, mice, and spiders.

7 Scorpions sting to defend themselves or to get food. However, many species rely more on their front claws, or pedipalps, than on venom for defense and food capture. "The bigger a scorpion's



Just one scorpion species with a deadly sting lives in parts of the southwestern United States.

claws," says Gary Polis, "the less dangerous its venom. Avoid scorpions that have thin little, forcepslike pedipalps. These claws can't be very good for grabbing and crushing prey, so their presence is a warning that their owners have powerful poisons. In fact all of the most deadly scorpions, in the family Buthidae, have slender pedipalps."

8 Growing numbers of biologists have become fascinated with scorpions. "When you talk about scorpions, you tend to use a lot of words like 'the only known example,' 'the first,' 'the largest,'" says Gary Polis. "It's just one gee-whiz fact after another."

9 Scorpions are arachnids, related to spiders, mites, and ticks. All arachnids have eight legs while insects have six. Other arachnids include wind scorpions, false scorpions, and whip scorpions, also called vinegarroons. Despite their names, none of these creatures is a true scorpion.

10 Fossils of "water scorpions" have been found that are about 450 million years old. Some measured ten feet long. Some early land-dwelling scorpions were three feet long. All of these giant scorpions died out, but scorpions have been a remarkably successful and diverse group on land for the past 325 million years. They thrived before, during, and after the dinosaurs.

11 Today's scorpions resemble the body plan of their ancient ancestors. They all look generally alike. The smallest scorpion, a half inch long, lives on Caribbean islands. The largest, eight inches long, lives in tropical Africa. Overall, scorpions are big creatures—the larger scorpion species are bigger than nearly all arachnids, insects, and other animals without backbones (invertebrates). In fact they are bigger than many lizards, rodents, frogs, and other vertebrates (animals with backbones).

12 Scorpions live on all major land masses except Antarctica. They thrive in many habitats. Some species are found right along ocean shores, where the tides carry in an abundance of food. Other species spend most of their lives in trees; an Australian scorpion that lives in pines has been found more than one hundred twenty feet above the ground.

13 Several kinds of scorpions live in caves. One of these was discovered more than a half mile below the surface. And still other species are mountain dwellers. They are found on ten thousand-foot-tall mountains in the southwestern United States. Some species live under snow-covered stones at even higher elevations in the Himalayas and Andes.

- 14 “Scorpions,” says Gary Polis, “are not distributed randomly within a habitat. Rather, particular species are normally found in specific microhabitats. For example, in North America there are scorpions that live only in sand and others that live only on rock.
- 15 “The bodies, tails, and pedipalps of rock-dwelling scorpions are long and flat, adapted for slipping into cracks and crevices. Sand dwellers, on the other hand, are adapted for travel in loose sand. They have very long hairs that stick out from their legs. These and long claws allow the scorpions to walk on loose sand without sinking.”
- 16 While some scorpions live only in certain habitats, many others are more “plastic,” able to inhabit a variety of environments. One example is the scorpion species that lives on Socorro Island off the coast of Baja California in Mexico. It is found in jungle, heavy brush, rocky terrain, and sand, and also on the ground, in vegetation, and near the surf.
- 17 Scorpions are rather primitive, ancient animals, but are highly successful. Biologists are curious about the reasons for their success. One is their sense organs. Of all animals, scorpion eyes are the most sensitive to low levels of light. They can navigate using shadows cast by starlight. “Star shadows,” says Gary Polis, “are probably as bright to scorpions as sun shadows are to people.”
- 18 Sensitive hairs on the pedipalps of some scorpions detect air movements, including those caused by an insect flying nearby. These scorpions reach and grab prey out of the air. Some scorpions also have slitlike organs on their legs that detect vibrations in the ground caused by insects or other animals walking or burrowing several feet away.

“A Deadly Reputation” by Laurence Pringle, from *Scorpion Man*. Text copyright © 1994 by Laurence Pringle. Photographs copyright © 1994 by Gary A. Polis. Reprinted by permission of Atheneum Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing Division.

- 7 Which of the following **best** explains the relationship between the information in paragraph 1 and the information in paragraph 2?
- A. Paragraph 1 presents a theory; paragraph 2 supports it with data.
 - B. Paragraph 1 describes common views; paragraph 2 counters them with facts.
 - C. Paragraph 1 provides a historic belief; paragraph 2 gives current information.
 - D. Paragraph 1 gives a general summary; paragraph 2 focuses on a personal experience.
- 8 According to paragraph 6, what is one reason scorpion venom is effective?
- A. The venom is difficult to detect.
 - B. The venom kills prey immediately.
 - C. The venom completely paralyzes victims.
 - D. The venom contains many types of toxins.
- 9 According to the excerpt, which physical feature provides the **best** clue to how dangerous a scorpion is?
- A. the curve of the tail
 - B. the length of the body
 - C. the position of the stinger
 - D. the size of the front claws
- 10 According to the excerpt, which of the following is a defining characteristic of arachnids?
- A. type of venom
 - B. number of legs
 - C. function of pedipalps
 - D. presence of a backbone
- 11 Based on the excerpt, what is one way some ancient scorpions were different from modern scorpions?
- A. Some ancient scorpions had fewer legs than modern scorpions.
 - B. Some ancient scorpions had smaller pedipalps than modern scorpions.
 - C. Some ancient scorpions were much larger than modern scorpions.
 - D. Some ancient scorpions were much more vicious than modern scorpions.

- 12 In the excerpt, what is the **main** focus of paragraphs 12–14?
- A. physical differences among scorpions
 - B. environmental threats to scorpion survival
 - C. varied environments in which scorpions live
 - D. reasons why scorpions have evolved into subspecies
- 13 Which quotation from the excerpt **best** states the main idea?
- A. “Say *scorpion* to most people, and they will picture a small desert-dwelling animal, its curved tail tipped with a deadly stinger.”
 - B. “Overall, scorpions are far more varied and much less dangerous than people imagine.”
 - C. “As a result, in many cultures the scorpion is a symbol of evil and death.”
 - D. “Growing numbers of biologists have become fascinated with scorpions.”
- 14 What is the **most likely** reason for including quotations from Gary Polis in the excerpt?
- A. to add humor to the excerpt
 - B. to provide an expert opinion
 - C. to engage the reader in the subject
 - D. to compare his views to those of other scientists
- 15 Based on the prefix *anti-* and the root “venom,” an *antivenin* is used to
- A. kill scorpions.
 - B. repel scorpions.
 - C. treat scorpion stings.
 - D. study scorpion stings.

Question 16 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 16 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 16** Based on the excerpt, explain why scorpions have been able to survive for millions of years. Support your answer with important and specific information from the excerpt.

**Grade 7 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	71	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	D
2	71	<i>Language</i>	6	A
3	72	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	17	D
4	72	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	17	A
5	72	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	17	A
6	72	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	17	
7	76	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	B
8	76	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
9	76	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	D
10	76	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	B
11	76	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
12	77	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
13	77	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	B
14	77	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	B
15	77	<i>Language</i>	4	C
16	78	<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 7 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2010 Unreleased Common Items:
Reporting Categories and Standards**

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