V. English Language Arts, Reading Comprehension, Grade 6
Grade 6 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension Test

The spring 2011 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.
In scene 1 of this play, Nyame, the sky god, has ordered the forest creatures to make Leopard stop beating on his noisy drum. All the great creatures—Lion, Bear, and Elephant—have excuses for why they cannot approach Leopard, but Turtle says he can do it. Read scenes 2 and 3 of the play to see how Turtle satisfies Nyame’s demands. Then answer the questions that follow.

The Leopard’s Noisy Drum  
by Janice Kuharski

Characters
NYAME, the sky god
ELEPHANT
LION
BEAR
TURTLE
LEOPARD

SCENE 2

SETTING: Deep in the forest. Tall stool is center; shorter stool is left.

AT RISE: LEOPARD is seated on tall stool, beating drum. TURTLE enters left and slowly moves to center and sits on smaller stool.

LEOPARD (Pounding drum and chanting):

5 The forest is mine  
all night and all day.  
The sound of my drum  
keeps others away.  
Let the Lion or Bear  
or the Elephant come;  
each one of them fears  
the sound of my drum.  
My music is magic;  
my singing is grand.

10 While I have a drum,  
I’m king of the land.

TURTLE (Shouting over drum): Good morning, Leopard. I’ve been listening to your music. You have a fine sounding drum and a fine voice as well. (LEOPARD stops pounding drum and looks up.)

20 LEOPARD (Flattered): Why, thank you, Turtle. (Boasting) I do have the best and biggest drum in the forest.
TURTLE: Without a doubt, you have the best sounding drum I've ever heard—but not the biggest.
LEOPARD (Irritated; stepping down from stool): How can you say that? There is no drum in the forest bigger than mine!
TURTLE: That would be true—if the great Nyame did not have an even bigger drum.
LEOPARD: Impossible! No drum is bigger than this. (TURTLE gets up and inspects drum.)
TURTLE: It's a fine drum, indeed. But Nyame's drum is so large that he can fit inside his—with room to spare! Can you do the same?
LEOPARD (Quickly): Of course I can! (Considering) I mean, I'm sure I could if I tried.
TURTLE (Shaking his head): No, I don't think you could fit in this drum. (Smugly) I don't think this drum is even half as big as Nyame's. (TURTLE sits again.)
LEOPARD (Upset): If Nyame can fit inside his drum, then I can fit inside my drum as well.
TURTLE: I've seen Nyame get inside his drum.
LEOPARD (Hotly): Then you shall see me get inside my drum, as well! (Puts drum on its side) But you will need to tell me when I am completely inside. (Begins to crawl into drum head first)
TURTLE (Going to drum): It would be a great honor.
LEOPARD (Wiggling forward inside drum): How am I doing, Turtle?
TURTLE: Your hindquarters are still showing, Leopard.
LEOPARD (Inching forward): Am I inside the drum yet, Turtle?
TURTLE (Smiling broadly): Almost, but your tail is still showing.
LEOPARD (Pulling tail inside drum): I can't see a thing—it's dark in here. Can you see me now?
TURTLE: Not even a speck of you is showing now.
LEOPARD (Panicked): Help me, Turtle. I'm stuck. I can't turn around in here! Get me out!
TURTLE: I will let you out, Leopard, but not until I've brought you to Nyame. (Aside) Thank goodness much of the way back is downhill this time. Leopard's drum should roll nicely—all the way home.
LEOPARD (Pounding frantically): Let me out! Let me out or you'll be sorry, Turtle!
TURTLE: My advice to you, Leopard, is to stop complaining and make yourself comfortable. You'll have plenty of time for a nice long nap. (Curtain)

* * * * *
SCENE 3

SETTING: Same as Scene 1. Tall stool is center.

60 AT RISE: NYAME sits on stool. ELEPHANT, BEAR, and LION sit on floor. TURTLE stands next to drum, center left. Sounds of banging and pounding from inside drum are heard intermittently.¹

ELEPHANT: It’s been so long since you left, Turtle. We didn’t think you were coming back. TURTLE (Proudly): I am not only back, but I have the drum as well.

65 NYAME: How were you able to bring Leopard’s drum back all by yourself?

TURTLE: That was easy. Many animals in the forest wanted to get a closer look at Leopard’s wonderful drum. So they were only too happy to help me push.

NYAME (Admiringly): Ah! A very clever plan, indeed, my friend!

LEOPARD (From inside drum; furious): Let me out! Let me out!

NYAME: What is that horrible racket?

TURTLE: It’s Leopard, and except for when he’s sleeping, he’s been screaming like that since we started out. What should I do with him, Nyame?

ELEPHANT: The only thing you can do, Nyame, is banish² Leopard from the forest.

LION (Eagerly): Yes, yes. Banish him—and the sooner the better! (Boastfully) Then I will be the undisputed king of the forest.

BEAR (Scornfully): That’s not true, Lion. I should be the one to rule the forest, not you.

ELEPHANT: I should be the king of the forest. After all, I’m the tallest, the heaviest, and the strongest.

TURTLE: Your Majesty, I have a suggestion. If Leopard is not around, these three will never agree on who should be king of the forest. And the noise from their endless squabbling will be even worse than the sound of Leopard’s drum.

NYAME (Gets down from stool and paces; stroking his chin): An excellent point, Turtle. I could not stand another commotion. Leopard is free to return to his home in the forest. (ELEPHANT helps LEOPARD climb out of drum.)

85 LEOPARD (Shaking himself out; indignantly³): It’s about time! (Fluffing himself) Look! My fur is all matted! (Grumbling as he exits) I’m still king of the forest, you know!

TURTLE (Gestures toward drum): And here is the drum you asked for, Nyame. What will you do with it?

NYAME (Setting drum upright): Leopard’s drum is just what I need to make loud rolls of thunder. Listen! (NYAME beats drum, as thunder is heard offstage. ELEPHANT, BEAR and LION cover and cover ears. NYAME turns toward TURTLE; pleased.) You have done what Elephant, Bear, and Lion could not do. What reward shall I give you?

TURTLE (Thinking): Well . . . I have always wanted a house that I could carry on my back when I travel.

¹ intermittently — starting and stopping
² banish — to send someone away forever
³ indignantly — expressing anger over unfair treatment
NYAME (Nods): A fine idea! That is exactly what you shall have. (Exits and returns carrying shell; ties shell on TURTLE's back)

ELEPHANT (Walking around TURTLE, inspecting shell): It's magnificent! Look at the colors—olive green and yellow, even a bit of red.

BEAR (Looking at shell): And it has a nice design around the edge.

LION (Nodding): The shape fits his body perfectly.

ELEPHANT (Thinking): I could use something like that—only bigger, of course.

BEAR: How ridiculous! You don't need a shell. But I could certainly use one.

LION: And so could I. (Eagerly) Let's ask Nyame. (Turns toward NYAME) Your Majesty, do you think each of us could have a shell just like Turtle's?

NYAME (Stroking chin): Perhaps we should ask Turtle what he thinks of your request.

(Turns to TURTLE) Well, Turtle, what do you say?

TURTLE: I think that if Lion, Elephant, and Bear each had a shell, they would be even stronger than they already are. It would not be fair to give them shells... unless each one agrees to give up something that makes him strong.

NYAME: I see your point. What do you think a fair exchange would be?

BEAR, ELEPHANT, and LION (Excitedly): Yes, tell us! (Each in turn looks taken aback as TURTLE speaks.)

TURTLE: Well, Elephant could give up his strong tusks. Lion could give up his strong teeth, and Bear could give up his mighty claws.

NYAME (Pounding staff): A splendid idea! Shells in exchange for tusks, teeth, and claws. I'll do it at once!

BEAR, ELEPHANT, and LION (Ad lib; alarmed): No! Wait! We can't do that!

ELEPHANT: I really don't need a shell after all!

LION: Nor do I. A shell would cover my beautiful mane.

BEAR: I don't need one either. A heavy shell would just slow me down.

NYAME (Firmly): Then stop wasting my time with your foolishness! I have work to do! (NYAME beats drum, and thunder is heard off.) A rain forest must have rain, you know! Now that I have Leopard's drum, I'll shake the skies open and let the rain come! (Lights dim. Thunder is heard and lights flash. BEAR, LION, and ELEPHANT cower and cover ears. TURTLE pulls head under shell and moves toward exit. Curtain closes.)

THE END

1. Leopard's opening chant suggests that he is
   A. unhappy.
   B. confused.
   C. confident.
   D. generous.

2. Which stage direction would best be added to Turtle's dialogue in lines 53 and 54?
   A. (With fear)
   B. (With relief)
   C. (Impatiently)
   D. (Sorrowfully)

3. Based on the play, which of the following character traits is shared by Leopard, Elephant, Lion, and Bear?
   A. the ability to hunt well
   B. the desire for power
   C. loyalty to Nyame
   D. respect for Turtle

4. In scene 3, how do the animals first react to Turtle's new shell?
   A. They think the shell is a silly idea.
   B. They each want a shell of their own.
   C. They are happy Turtle finally has a home.
   D. They think Turtle should be given a better reward.

5. In scene 3, what does Nyame plan to do with Leopard's drum?
   A. play it softly
   B. keep it silent
   C. create storms
   D. rule the animals
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 Explain the different ways Turtle persuades other characters in the play to do what he wants. Support your answer with important details from the play.
Over two thousand years ago, China’s first emperor, Qin Shihuangdi, had thousands of life-size clay soldiers created to guard him in his tomb. The first of these statues was found in 1974, and they are still being unearthed today. Read the passage about these ancient warriors and answer the questions that follow.

from *The Incredible Story of China’s Buried Warriors*  
by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent

### DISCOVERY

1. One morning in the early spring of 1974, a couple of farmers in the countryside near Xi’an, a large city in central China, decided to dig a well. As they turned over the soil, broken pieces of statues began to emerge. It wasn’t the first time people in the area had found such things. Over the years bits of pottery, the heads and arms of ancient statues, and occasionally even an entire clay figure had been unearthed. Archaeologists—scientists who study the way people lived long ago—were fascinated by these findings. So when they heard about the farmers’ new discovery, they were quick to investigate.

2. The archaeologists dug carefully in all directions from the site of the well. As they worked, they were astonished to find a huge underground vault filled with thousands of life-size warriors made of terra-cotta, a kind of hard-baked clay. Along with the very real-looking soldiers were many full-size horses, weapons, and the remains of wooden chariots. Three smaller pits were also found. Two of these contained more soldiers and warhorses. Altogether it was an amazing find—a gigantic army frozen in time for more than two thousand years.

### An Underground Empire

3. The terra-cotta warriors were buried about a mile east of the tomb of China’s first emperor, Qin Shihuangdi. Shihuangdi lived in the third century B.C. The location of his tomb, under a large mound of earth that rises 250 feet (76 meters) above the surrounding plains, has been known for centuries. But no one knew that a huge army lay hidden nearby. What was it doing there?
TO LIVE FOREVER

4 Qin Shihuangdi had two goals in life. The first was to unite China. The second was to live forever. He believed that he could achieve his second goal and become immortal if he could just find a substance called the elixir of life. During his reign Shihuangdi made five journeys to sacred mountains in search of that magical potion.

The Eternal City

5 Even as Shihuangdi searched for immortality, he was building his own tomb and underground empire. Perhaps he thought that if he could not find eternal life in the physical world, he might at least live forever in the world of the spirits.

6 Work on the tomb complex began shortly after the First Emperor came to power and continued throughout his rule. More than 700,000 people labored on the project, but it was still not completed by the time the emperor died thirty-six years later.

7 Shihuangdi's underground city is the largest known tomb complex devoted to a single ruler. From the giant mound of earth that rises above the tomb itself, the city stretches for more than nine miles (fifteen kilometers) in all directions. So far, archaeologists working at the site have uncovered the remains of a palace as well as miniature bronze chariots, perhaps intended to help the emperor's soul on its journeys after death. They have uncovered the skeletons of people, horses, and rare animals. Their most interesting find so far, however, are the pits holding the First Emperor's clay army. The largest of these pits is 775 feet (236 meters) long and 321 feet (98 meters) wide—about the size of five football fields.

“A Sea of Warriors”

8 Thousands of warrior statues stand poised for battle in the pits near the emperor's tomb, ready to protect and defend his fabulous eternal city. Shihuangdi's real army was reportedly one million strong, "a sea of warriors with the courage of tigers." The statues were meant to represent these courageous soldiers as closely as possible.

9 Of the thousands of clay warriors unearthed so far, no two are exactly alike. Young men eager for battle stand beside older, more thoughtful soldiers. A general calmly surveys his troops,
while a broad-cheeked swordsman glares fiercely. Because each statue has its own unique personality—and because they all look so lifelike—some archaeologists believe that soldiers in the emperor’s living army must have posed for them.

10 The Qin army was made up of the tallest, strongest men in the empire. The terra-cotta warriors are tall, too. On average the figures are 5 feet, 11 inches (1.8 meters) in height. Some are as tall as 6 feet, 7 inches (2 meters)—probably taller than any of the emperor’s real warriors.

Dressed for War

11 The faces of the statues show that the emperor’s army included men from many different parts of China. Some figures have the facial features of present-day farmers from China’s plains, while others look like shepherds from the country’s northern grasslands. Altogether the statues represent ten different head shapes. To the Chinese, each shape indicated a different type of personality. For example, a person with a broad forehead and pointed chin was thought to be watchful and alert. Many warriors with these features are found in the front of the clay army, where a special alertness to approaching danger would be valuable.

12 The statues’ hairstyles vary, too. Most of the warriors have long hair that is braided and gathered up into a knot on top of the head. Some wear the knots in the center of the head, others off to a side. Some have a beard or mustache, while others are clean-shaven.

13 Clothing styles also vary greatly. Armor capes in many different styles protect the warriors’ chests, shoulders, and upper arms. In real life these armor garments were made of leather with pieces of bronze attached. Some warriors lack armor, allowing them to move quickly. The army’s leaders look different from the foot soldiers. The generals wear double-layered robes with plates of armor across the chest, and the tips of their shoes turn up. While most of the lower-ranking soldiers are bareheaded, those of higher rank may wear flat caps.

14 In some cases clothing style has helped archaeologists identify the regions the emperor’s soldiers came from. For example, the style of clothing and the skullcaps worn by the cavalrymen (soldiers who ride on horseback) indicate that these soldiers came from the lands along China’s northern borders. The northern peoples were known as skilled horsemen, so it is not surprising that they would be chosen to serve in the great army’s cavalry.

15 All the many different statues, arrayed in battle formation, form a strong and balanced force, ready to face any enemy. Like the real army of Qin, the terra-cotta warriors seem well able to protect an empire.
Unlike the warriors, the horses that serve in the First Emperor's clay army are not unique individuals. More than six hundred chariot and cavalry horses have been uncovered, all with the same basic form. Each horse is life-size, at 5 feet, 8 inches (1.7 meters) tall. Each is powerfully built, with a sturdy body and strong legs. The manes are cut short and the forelocks (locks of hair on the forehead) are divided in half and brushed to the sides. The horses look alert, with heads raised and ears pricked forward.

Warhorses

Four chariot horses stand side by side before each chariot. Their harnesses, made of golden beads and bronze tubes, have fallen from their bodies. The cavalry horses wear blankets topped with saddles. The saddles were shaped from clay and painted in shades of red, white, brown, and blue. Each cavalry horse also has a bronze bit as well as a bridle and reins made from stone tubes strung on wires.

Before the pits were discovered, historians thought that the saddle was invented during a later dynasty. Now we know that the Qin also saddled their horses.

7. In paragraph 2, what does the phrase “frozen in time” suggest about the figures?
   A. They had been buried by accident.
   B. They had been preserved by the cold.
   C. They had been untouched for centuries.
   D. They had been abandoned during a war.

8. Read the sentences from paragraph 3 in the box below.
   But no one knew that a huge army lay hidden nearby. What was it doing there?

   What is the most likely purpose of the sentences?
   A. to question the value of the discovery
   B. to suggest the statues had been moved
   C. to challenge the research of the scientists
   D. to create a sense of mystery about the find

9. Based on the passage, what was the main purpose of the items found in the tomb complex?
   A. to trick the emperor’s enemies
   B. to protect the emperor in the afterlife
   C. to show the emperor possessed wealth
   D. to show the skill of the emperor’s artists

10. In paragraph 8, the description “a sea of warriors with the courage of tigers” is meant to suggest
    A. the army’s size and power.
    B. the soldiers’ great independence.
    C. the soldiers’ cruelty and suffering.
    D. the army’s demanding assignments.
Based on the passage, what is one conclusion archaeologists have reached about the statues?

A. They were used to deceive enemies.
B. They may represent individual people.
C. They were made of a variety of materials.
D. They may have come from different periods of time.

What is the main purpose of the section “Dressed for War”?

A. to provide historical information about battles
B. to give details about the appearance of the statues
C. to describe how the statues have been damaged by weather
D. to explain how the uniforms are similar to those worn today

According to the passage, the statues’ facial features and clothing provide a clue to

A. the age ranges of the soldiers.
B. how healthy the soldiers were.
C. where the soldiers came from.
D. the religious beliefs of the soldiers.

According to the section “Warhorses,” which detail of the statues most surprised historians?

A. the saddles
B. the chariots
C. the blankets
D. the harnesses
15 Read the sentences from paragraph 1 in the box below.

It wasn’t the first time people in the area had found such things. Over the years bits of pottery, the heads and arms of ancient statues, and occasionally even an entire clay figure had been unearthed.

Based on the sentences, what does the word unearthed most likely mean?
A. described
B. destroyed
C. enclosed
D. exposed

16 Read the words from the passage in the box below.

- cavalrymen (soldiers who ride on horseback)
- forelocks (locks of hair on the forehead)

The words in parentheses are used to
A. define a term.
B. give an opinion.
C. compare two different ideas.
D. contrast modern terms with old terms.
Based on the passage, explain why the author calls the discovery of China's underground city an "incredible story." Support your answer with important details from the passage.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
<th>Reporting Category</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Correct Answer (MC)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Answers are provided here for multiple-choice items only. Sample responses and scoring guidelines for open-response items, which are indicated by the shaded cells, will be posted to the Department's website later this year.
Grade 6 English Language Arts  
Reading Comprehension  
Spring 2011 Unreleased Common Items: 
Reporting Categories and Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Reporting Category</th>
<th>Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>