VII. English Language Arts, Reading Comprehension, Grade 8
Grade 8 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension Test

The spring 2012 grade 8 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.

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 grade 8 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. Due to copyright restrictions, certain reading passages cannot be released to the public on the website. For further information, contact Student Assessment Services at 781-338-3625.

Reference Materials

The use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries was allowed for current and former English language learner students only, during both ELA Reading Comprehension 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.
Students read a selection titled “A Strange Old Man” from The Conch Bearer and then answered questions 1 through 11 that follow on pages 92 through 96 of this document.

Due to copyright restrictions, the selection cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the copyright citation below.

“A Strange Old Man” by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, from The Conch Bearer. Copyright © 2003 by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company, LLC.
Due to copyright restrictions, the selection that appeared on this page cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the citation on the previous page.
Due to copyright restrictions, the selection that appeared on this page cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the citation on page 89.
1. According to paragraphs 1 and 2, what is most upsetting to Anand?
   A. being dirty
   B. being young
   C. being unable to attend school
   D. being unpopular with the children

2. Reread paragraph 9. The details in the paragraph mostly emphasize the contrast between
   A. hope and reality.
   B. the past and the future.
   C. Anand and the old man.
   D. Anand and other children.

3. Read the sentences from paragraph 11 in the box below.

   Two college students—a young man and his girlfriend, Anand guessed—asked for a plate of pooris and alu dum. Anand’s stomach growled, embarrassing him terribly, as he brought over the puffed fried bread and spicy potatoes, and the young woman gave him a curious look.

   The woman in the tea stall most likely gives Anand a “curious look” because she wonders
   A. if he notices the old man.
   B. if she recognizes him.
   C. if her food is cold.
   D. if he is hungry.
4 Read the details from the excerpt in the box below.

- dirty shirt with a button missing (paragraph 2)
- walked across the floor of the shack (paragraph 3)
- swirling dust and torn newspapers along the street (paragraph 18)
- wrapped a few stale pooris in a torn newspaper (paragraph 27)

What do the details most emphasize?
A. the fashions of the time
B. the poverty of the setting
C. the dryness of the environment
D. the determination of the characters

5 Based on paragraph 23, what is mostly revealed about Anand’s relationship with Haru?
A. Anand admires Haru.
B. Anand is grateful to Haru.
C. Anand is rarely polite to Haru.
D. Anand knows how to deal with Haru.

6 Read the sentence from paragraph 31 in the box below.

His voice was deep and gravelly, as though it came from the bottom of the river, and he spoke the Bengali words with a slight accent, as though he had come from elsewhere.

What does the sentence mostly emphasize about the old man’s voice?
A. It is not very inviting.
B. It is not very forceful.
C. It has an irritating quality.
D. It has an unfamiliar quality.
7. Read the details from the excerpt in the box below.

- The old man raised the glass in a strong smooth motion that surprised Anand . . . (paragraph 30)
- He made a small sign in the air above Anand’s head, . . . (paragraph 31)
- . . . he turned and, moving unexpectedly fast, disappeared . . . (paragraph 31)
- What else could account for the warmth . . . (paragraph 32)

What is the most likely reason the author includes these details in the excerpt?
A. They show ancient rituals.
B. They suggest a dangerous conflict.
C. They reveal a mysterious side to the old man.
D. They emphasize the depression of the old man.

8. Which quotation best represents an example of foreshadowing in the excerpt?
A. “. . . they swung their brightly colored satchels.” (paragraph 1)
B. “. . . until it connected with something—or someone.” (paragraph 9)
C. “‘Out! Out!’ Haru yelled more loudly.” (paragraph 17)
D. “Haru frowned. ‘What’s the matter?’ he said nastily.” (paragraph 24)
Which of the following quotations **best** states an overall theme of the excerpt?

A. “He wanted so much to be like them—and knew so well that it was out of his reach.” (paragraph 1)
B. “... as though I were a bad smell, ...” (paragraph 2)
C. “But he also knew he was lucky to find a job at all.” (paragraph 6)
D. “Sharing what you have with others really makes you feel good.” (paragraph 32)

In paragraph 20, what does the word **docilely** mean?

A. obediently
B. excitedly
C. proudly
D. slowly
Reading Comprehension

Question 11 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 11 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

11 Based on the excerpt, explain Anand’s motivation for helping the old man. Support your answer with relevant and specific details from the excerpt.
Reading Comprehension

Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.

1. Barco que no anda, no llega a puerto.
   A ship that doesn’t sail, never reaches port.

2. There are guavas at the Shop & Save. I pick one the size of a tennis ball and finger the prickly stem end. It feels familiarly bumpy and firm. The guava is not quite ripe; the skin is still a dark green. I smell it and imagine a pale pink center, the seeds tightly embedded in the flesh.

3. A ripe guava is yellow, although some varieties have a pink tinge. The skin is thick, firm, and sweet. Its heart is bright pink and almost solid with seeds. The most delicious part of the guava surrounds the tiny seeds. If you don’t know how to eat a guava, the seeds end up in the crevices between your teeth.

4. When you bite into a ripe guava, your teeth must grip the bumpy surface and sink into the thick edible skin without hitting the center. It takes experience to do this, as it’s quite tricky to determine how far beyond the skin the seeds begin.

5. Some years, when the rains have been plentiful and the nights cool, you can bite into a guava and not find many seeds. The guava bushes grow close to the ground, their branches laden with green then yellow fruit that seem to ripen overnight. These guavas are large and juicy, almost seedless, their roundness enticing you to have one more, just one more, because next year the rains may not come.

6. As children, we didn’t always wait for the fruit to ripen. We raided the bushes as soon as the guavas were large enough to bend the branch.

7. A green guava is sour and hard. You bite into it at its widest point, because it’s easier to grasp with your teeth. You hear the skin, meat, and seeds crunching inside your head, while the inside of your mouth explodes in little spurts of sour.

8. You grimace, your eyes water, and your cheeks disappear as your lips purse into a tight O. But you have another and then another, enjoying the crunchy sounds, the acid taste, the gritty texture of the unripe center. At night, your mother makes you drink castor oil,* which she says tastes

*castor oil—oil made from castor beans, used as a home remedy for digestive problems
Reading Comprehension

better than a green guava. That’s when you know for sure that you’re a child and she has stopped being one.

I had my last guava the day we left Puerto Rico. It was large and juicy, almost red in the center, and so fragrant that I didn’t want to eat it because I would lose the smell. All the way to the airport I scratched at it with my teeth, making little dents in the skin, chewing small pieces with my front teeth, so that I could feel the texture against my tongue, the tiny pink pellets of sweet.

Today, I stand before a stack of dark green guavas, each perfectly round and hard, each $1.59. The one in my hand is tempting. It smells faintly of late summer afternoons and hopscotch under the mango tree. But this is autumn in New York, and I’m no longer a child.

The guava joins its sisters under the harsh fluorescent lights of the exotic fruit display. I push my cart away, toward the apples and pears of my adulthood, their nearly seedless ripeness predictable and bittersweet.

Meet the Writer

Esmeralda Santiago

Between Two Worlds

Esmeralda Santiago (1948– ) grew up in Puerto Rico, the eldest of eleven children. At the age of thirteen, she moved to New York City with her mother, her brothers, and her sisters. Living in Puerto Rico and in New York, she says, has to some extent made her feel that she doesn’t quite fit into either culture—a feeling she highlights in the title of her memoir, When I Was Puerto Rican. In a note to readers of the book she writes:

When I returned to Puerto Rico after living in New York for seven years, I was told I was no longer Puerto Rican because my Spanish was rusty, my gaze too direct, my personality too assertive. . . . Yet, in the United States, my darkness, my accented speech, my frequent lapses into confused silence between English and Spanish identified me as foreign, non-American. In writing the book I wanted to get back to that feeling of Puertoricanness I had before I came here. Its title reflects who I was then, and asks, who am I today?

After graduating from Harvard University, Santiago earned a master’s degree from Sarah Lawrence College. She currently lives in Westchester County, New York. Now, after years of struggling with not being entirely at home in her two cultures, Santiago says she defines home “as the place where I am.”

Reading Comprehension

12 According to the selection, what does eating a guava mainly require?
   A. time
   B. daring
   C. practice
   D. inspiration

13 According to paragraph 9, why does Santiago want to save her guava?
   A. She wants to extend her appreciation of it.
   B. She wants to give it to her mother as a present.
   C. She wants to plant it near her new home.
   D. She wants to eat it when she is hungry.

14 According to paragraphs 12–14, why did Santiago write her book?
   A. to define what it means to be a writer
   B. to understand what makes her American
   C. to reconnect with her cultural background
   D. to communicate with relatives in Puerto Rico

15 Which statement best reflects a theme of the selection?
   A. Hard work guarantees success.
   B. Education is a key to freedom.
   C. Our lives change as we grow older.
   D. Our true homes are where we were born.

16 Which quotation from the selection is an example of personification?
   A. “I pick one the size of a tennis ball . . .”
   B. “We raided the bushes as soon as the guavas were large enough . . .”
   C. “It smells faintly of late summer afternoons and hopscotch . . .”
   D. “The guava joins its sisters under the harsh fluorescent lights . . .”

17 Based on paragraphs 7 and 8, a grimace is a facial expression of
   A. anger.
   B. sadness.
   C. discomfort.
   D. nervousness.
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.

Based on the selection, explain how Santiago feels about growing up in two cultures. Support your answer with relevant and specific details from the selection.
# Grade 8 English Language Arts
## Reading Comprehension
### Spring 2012 Released Items:
**Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
<th>Reporting Category</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Correct Answer (MC)*</th>
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*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.*
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