VI. English Language Arts, Grade 7

A. Composition
B. Reading Comprehension
Grade 7 English Language Arts Test

Test Structure

The grade 7 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 Writing strand in the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (March 2011)

- the ELA Reading Comprehension test, which used multiple-choice and open-response questions (items) to assess learning standards from the Reading and Language strands in the Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy

A. Composition

The spring 2013 grade 7 English Language Arts (ELA) Composition test and Composition Make-Up test were based on learning standards in the grades 6–12 Writing strand of the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (March 2011). The learning standards for the grades 6–12 Writing strand appear on pages 53–59 of the Framework, which is available on the Department website at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html.

ELA Composition test results are reported under the reporting categories Composition: Topic Development and Composition: Standard English Conventions.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The 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

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

Cross-Reference Information

Each grade 7 ELA writing prompt assesses standard 1, 2, or 3 in the grades 6–12 Writing strand in the 2011 Framework. All grade 7 writing prompts assess standards 4 and 5 in the grades 6–12 Writing strand.
Grade 7 Writing Prompt

WRITING PROMPT

People’s character traits define who they are and can help them throughout their lives. These character traits could include honesty, bravery, loyalty, compassion, determination, or creativity.

In a well-developed composition, select one character trait you believe is very important in life and explain why that trait is so important.

Grade 7 Make-Up Writing Prompt

WRITING PROMPT

Imagine that you are creating a new middle school for your community, and think about how you would design it. You might describe what the school would look like, what classes would be offered, and what special sporting facilities, classrooms, and technology would be available to the students.

In a well-developed composition, describe the new middle school you would create and explain the reasons why you would design the school in this way.
B. Reading Comprehension

The spring 2013 grade 7 English Language Arts Reading Comprehension test was based on grades 6–12 learning standards in two content strands of the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (March 2011) listed below. Page numbers for the learning standards appear in parentheses.

- Reading (Framework, pages 47–52)
- Language (Framework, pages 64–67)

The Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy 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, Reading and Language, which are identical to the two framework content strands listed above.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The 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

The use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries was allowed for current and former English language learner 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 standard it assesses. The correct answers for released multiple-choice questions are also displayed in the released item table.
DIRECTIONS
This session contains two reading selections with twelve multiple-choice questions and two open-response questions. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

What was life at night like before people had electric light? Read the article and answer the questions that follow.

Summer, Winter, Spring, Fall . . . and Night?

by Meg Moss

Once upon a time, people thought of nighttime as a different season.

1 What’s the first thing you do in a dark room? Turn on the light, of course. Going outside after dinner? Grab a flashlight. You probably don’t even think about the falling darkness as day slips quietly into night. Lights twinkle on and life continues.

2 Imagine what life was like before you could flip a switch. For most of history, with no electricity to light up cities, streets, or living rooms, the nighttime was truly dark. Until Thomas Edison invented the electric lightbulb—100 times brighter than a candle—people depended on fire. They burned wood, oil, or gas in torches, fireplaces, and primitive lamps. Stinky but cheap candles made of animal fat dimly lit many homes.

3 In Europe before electric lights, life in the day and night was so different that people considered the darkness a separate season. To overcome the difficulties of the unlit night and track and tame the darkness, they divided the hours between sunset and dawn into segments.

Sunset

4 Because the earth turns, the sun is forever setting somewhere in the world. In fact, half the globe is always in darkness. That means night is huge—it covers 98.5 million square miles of the earth’s surface all the time. But who cares? Night only matters when it’s falling on you. Long ago, sunset signaled the approaching end of the day’s useful

Our word curfew—a time set to be home or off the street—comes from the French for “cover fire.”
hours; people scurried home from the fields and the shops to prepare for the coming darkness.

Shutting-In

In 15th-century England, people began “shutting-in” as the night fell. In medieval villages and towns, bells, horns, and drums warned folks to hurry home. Walled cities closed their gates and pulled up their drawbridges. Some pulled big chains or logs across the streets to discourage residents from venturing out—and criminals from making fast getaways.

Of all night’s dangers, townsfolk feared fire the most. Candles and fireplaces blazed everywhere and required constant tending. Wood and thatched houses could burn fast, and a shortage of water made firefighting difficult. The most important thing people had to do at shutting-in was to cover their hearth fires with ashes to make them burn slowly and safely.

Candlelighting

Once indoors, families carefully got ready for darkness. Folded clothes made it easier to dress in the dark if necessary. Some people pushed furniture against the walls so as not to trip in the pitch black. People believed the night air to be poisonous, or at least unhealthy, so they tightly closed and locked all windows and doors. In wealthy households, thick curtains around the bed helped to block out the bad air. And everyone wore a nightcap.

In winter, people warmed their beds by slipping hot rocks or a metal pan filled with hot coals beneath the covers. Whether bedding down on a straw mattress or an elegant four-post bed, sleepers checked for fleas and lice before turning in. In some homes, entire families slept in the same bed and even shared it with visitors and strangers. Just before bedtime, people prayed for safe delivery through the dark hours.

Bedtime

While some people tucked in, others ducked out. Without streetlights, however, travel at night could be dangerous. People memorized the local landscape, remembering the locations of ditches, ponds, trees, and other obstacles to avoid in the night’s complete darkness. Many people believed that supernatural beings came out at night, so it was smart to know where the ghosts, elves, and fairies lurked.

To find their way, some travelers marked their route during the daytime with white, chalky soil. Those on foot wore light-colored clothing so that coach drivers could see them, and nighttime riders preferred white horses. A gentleman returning home after dark depended on a servant with a lantern. Less well-off or unprepared travelers took their chances, sometimes stumbling to their deaths in a deep ditch or remote lake.
Midnight
11 When you sleep, you probably dream your way right through the midnight hour. In fact, most of us in the modern world think that an uninterrupted night’s sleep is ideal. But it wasn’t always so. Before electric lights, people slept in two phases each night. In between, they awoke and spent an hour or two reading by candlelight, thinking about their dreams, or conversing with a bedfellow. Some folks even arose to tend to animals or chat with neighbors. People valued this dark and peaceful time as an escape from the hard lives they led.

12 Today, people who live in traditional farming societies without electric lights still sleep this way. Curious to find out more about these long, two-part nights, scientists experimented by confining a small group of volunteers every night for a month without electric lights. After a few days, the volunteers began to awaken each midnight for an hour or two and then return to sleep. The researchers identified chemicals in the volunteers’ brains that kept them in a relaxed and peaceful state, even when awake. Darkness, it seems, triggers these chemicals to control and regulate our sleep. Today, instead of responding to natural changes in light and dark, these chemicals don’t go to work until we turn out the lights. Does it matter? Is a longer night’s sleep divided into two segments healthier than our short, modern nights? No one yet knows.

Dead of Night
13 Before streetlights, in the wee hours between midnight and 3 a.m., much mischief could be done. Burglars and other bad guys roamed the streets and country roads, holding up travelers and breaking into homes under cover of darkness. In the cities, noisy gangs might disturb the dark predawn hours. Many towns and cities employed night watchmen to patrol the darkened streets or keep watch from towers or city walls. They rang the fire alarm and enforced the curfew. On quiet nights, they strolled the streets, calling out the time and perhaps the weather or a reassuring “All’s well.” As years went by, police replaced the old-fashioned night watchmen.

Cockcrow
14 For merchants, fishers, and farmers, the working day was not far off by cockcrow at 3 a.m. But some folks were already hard at work by then. Bakers, shepherds, garbage collectors, and street cleaners worked in the darkness. The dark was perfect for digging graves and cleaning out sewers, jobs that were illegal to do by day.

Dawn
15 The “night season” drew to a close at sunrise. People could see again, dress, work, and move about easily without fear. The poisonous night air lifted, and the peril of ghosts, burglars, and large ditches faded away. Until sunset.
In the 1700s, people’s attitudes toward the darkness in countries like England and France changed. They began to believe more in science and less in superstition, so the nighttime became less scary. They invented ways to light the streets, so the nighttime became less dark. Folks stayed up later and went outdoors for fun, shopping, and work. Authors, poets, and artists began to discover the beauty of the night. Sleeping in two phases began to fade. After Edison perfected the lightbulb in 1879, the custom disappeared.

Today, people live and work 24/7. Life in the darkness of night differs little from life in the lightness of day. We sleep, of course, but around us the world is alive with activity and bright with light. Have we gone too far? Some people think so. The International Dark-Sky Association believes that light pollution—too much artificial light at night—wastes energy, harms the health of humans and nighttime animals, and destroys the beauty of the night. Its mission is “to preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies.” In response, cities, companies, and universities are installing dark-friendly lights to reduce the glare and glow that destroy our sense of the darkness and our view of the night.
ELA Reading Comprehension

1. In paragraph 1, what point is the author making?
   A. People should spend more time outside at night.
   B. People today are wasteful with electricity at night.
   C. People want to return to a time when night was exciting.
   D. People today take their mastery over the night for granted.

2. Which of the following examples is the most similar to the way people in medieval times prepared to travel at night?
   A. A blind person memorizes the location of the furniture in her home.
   B. A person fills up her car with gas before driving to her night job.
   C. A hiker brings a sleeping bag with him during a nighttime hike.
   D. A person researches the history of a town he is going to.

3. What do the results of the experiment described in paragraph 12 suggest about sleeping in phases?
   A. It can make people smarter.
   B. It can make people irritable.
   C. It might be more natural for people than continuous sleep.
   D. It might promote more frightening dreams than continuous sleep.

4. Based on paragraph 14, in medieval times how were merchants and farmers different from bakers and street cleaners?
   A. Merchants and farmers woke up later.
   B. Merchants and farmers worked harder.
   C. Merchants and farmers earned more money.
   D. Merchants and farmers did more dangerous work.
**5.** What does the satellite image of the earth *mainly* show?
A. how many people travel around the world at night
B. how beautiful the earth is at night from outer space
C. the number of people who wake up once during the night
D. the different amounts of nighttime illumination across the earth

**6.** What is the *main* purpose of the subheadings in the article?
A. to lead the reader through the stages of night
B. to show how nighttime changed through history
C. to highlight the author’s feelings about nighttime
D. to set up a comparison between ancient and modern times

**7.** In paragraph 4, what does the use of the word “scurried” suggest about people in the past?
A. They were mischievous.
B. They disliked their jobs.
C. They enjoyed sleeping long hours.
D. They were eager to be inside at night.
Question 8 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 8 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

8 Based on the article, explain what people in the past did to protect themselves from the dangers of nighttime. Support your answer with important and specific information from the article.
The Graveyard Book is about a young boy named Bod who is raised by ghosts after his parents die. He lives in an English graveyard with the Owenses, the family of ghosts who adopt him, and Silas, the ghost who is his guardian. In this excerpt, Bod meets Scarlett, a little girl whose parents let her play in the area. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

from The Graveyard Book
by Neil Gaiman

1 The next night, Silas appeared at the front of the Owenses’ cozy tomb carrying three large books—two of them brightly colored alphabet books (A is for Apple, B is for Ball) and a copy of The Cat in the Hat. He also had paper and a packet of wax crayons. Then he walked Bod around the graveyard, placing the boy’s small fingers on the newest and clearest of the headstones and the plaques, and taught Bod how to find the letters of the alphabet when they appeared, beginning with the sharp steeple of the capital A.

2 Silas gave Bod a quest—to find each of the twenty-six letters in the graveyard—and Bod finished it, proudly, with the discovery of Ezekiel Ulmsley’s stone, built into the side of the wall in the old chapel. His guardian was pleased with him.

3 Every day Bod would take his paper and crayons into the graveyard and he would copy names and words and numbers as best he could, and each night, before Silas would go off into the world, Bod would make Silas explain to him what he had written, and make him translate the snatches of Latin which had, for the most part, baffled the Owenses.

4 A sunny day: bumblebees explored the wildflowers that grew in the corner of the graveyard, dangling from the gorse and the bluebells, droning their deep lazy buzz, while Bod lay in the spring sunlight watching a bronze-colored beetle wandering across the stone of Geo. Reeder, his wife, Dorcas, and their son Sebastian (Fidelis ad Mortem). Bod had copied down their inscription and now he was only thinking about the beetle when somebody said,

5 “Boy? What’re you doing?”

6 Bod looked up. There was someone on the other side of the gorse bush, watching him.

7 “Nuffing,” said Bod. He stuck out his tongue.

8 The face on the other side of the gorse bush crumpled into a gargoyle, tongue sticking out, eyes popping, then returned to girl.

9 “That was good,” said Bod, impressed.

1 Fidelis ad Mortem — Faithful until Death
“I can make really good faces,” said the girl. “Look at this one.” She pushed her nose up with one finger, creased her mouth into a huge, satisfied smile, squinted her eyes, puffed out her cheeks. “Do you know what that was?”

“No.”

“It was a pig, silly.”

“Oh.” Bod thought. “You mean, like P is for Pig?”

“Of course like that. Hang on.”

She came around the gorse bush and stood next to Bod, who got to his feet. She was a little older than he was, a little taller, and was dressed in bright colors, yellow and pink and orange. Bod, in his grey winding sheet, felt dowdy and drab.

“How old are you?” said the girl. “What are you doing here? Do you live here? What’s your name?”

“I don’t know,” said Bod.

“You don’t know your name?” said the girl. “Course you do. Everybody knows their own name. Fibber.”

“I know my name,” said Bod. “And I know what I’m doing here. But I don’t know the other thing you said.”

“How old you are?”

Bod nodded.

“Well,” said the girl, “what was you when you was last birthday?”

“I didn’t,” said Bod. “I never was.”

“Everybody gets birthdays. You mean you never had cake or candles or stuff?”

Bod shook his head. The girl looked sympathetic. “Poor thing. I’m five. I bet you’re five too.”

Bod nodded enthusiastically. He was not going to argue with his new friend. She made him happy.

Her name was Scarlett Amber Perkins, she told him, and she lived in a flat with no garden. Her mother was sitting on a bench by the chapel at the bottom of the hill, reading a magazine, and she had told Scarlett to be back in half an hour, and to get some exercise, and not to get into trouble or talk to strangers.

“I’m a stranger,” pointed out Bod.

“You’re not,” she said, definitely. “You’re a little boy.” And then she said, “And you’re my friend. So you can’t be a stranger.”

Bod smiled rarely, but he smiled then, hugely and with delight. “I’m your friend,” he said.

“What’s your name?”

“Bod. It’s short for Nobody.”

She laughed then. “Funny sort of a name,” she said. “What are you doing now?”

“ABCs,” said Bod. “From the stones. I have to write them down.”

“Can I do it with you?”

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2 flat — apartment
For a moment Bod felt protective—the gravestones were his, weren’t they?—and then he realized how foolish he was being, and he thought that there were things that might be more fun done in the sunlight with a friend. He said, “Yes.”

They copied down names from tombstones, Scarlett helping Bod pronounce unfamiliar names and words, Bod telling Scarlett what the Latin meant, if he already knew, and it seemed much too soon when they heard a voice further down the hill shouting, “Scarlett!”

The girl thrust the crayons and paper back at Bod. “I got to go,” she said.

“I’ll see you next time,” said Bod. “Won’t I?”

“Where do you live?” she asked.

“Here,” he said. And he stood and watched her as she ran down the hill.

On the way home Scarlett told her mother about the boy called Nobody who lived in the graveyard and had played with her, and that night Scarlett’s mother mentioned it to Scarlett’s father, who said that he believed that imaginary friends were a common phenomenon at that age, and nothing at all to be concerned about, and that they were fortunate to have a nature reserve so near.

9. Based on paragraphs 1–3, living in a graveyard encourages Bod to
   A. learn in a unique way.
   B. develop poor manners.
   C. lead an active lifestyle.
   D. recover quickly from illness.

10. In paragraph 2, which letter in the name “Ezekiel Ulmsley” most likely enabled Bod to complete his quest?
    A. the letter k
    B. the letter z
    C. the letter s
    D. the letter y

11. What is the main effect of the description in paragraph 4?
    A. It creates a peaceful mood.
    B. It emphasizes Bod’s curiosity.
    C. It emphasizes the dangers of nature.
    D. It reveals Bod’s feelings about the past.
Based on the excerpt, how does Scarlett mainly react to Bod’s lack of knowledge about himself?

A. She acts superior to Bod.
B. She feels admiration for Bod.
C. She becomes angry with Bod.
D. She feels compassion for Bod.

Based on paragraph 15, which of the following words could best replace *dowdy*?

A. little
B. plain
C. exposed
D. comfortable
Based on the excerpt, explain why Bod and Scarlett are excited about their new friendship. Support your answer with important and specific information from the excerpt.
# Grade 7 English Language Arts
## Reading Comprehension
### Spring 2013 Released Items:
#### Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers*

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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.
### Reporting Categories and Standards

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