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

The spring 2015 grade 6 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 Massachusetts 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.

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.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The 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. 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

During both ELA Reading Comprehension 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 any ELA Reading Comprehension test session.
Observing Mars
from Mars and the Search for Life by Elaine Scott

From the beginning of history, Mars, the small red planet that is fourth from the Sun, has always fascinated—even frightened—those who have watched it move from east to west across the night sky. Ages ago, people may have looked at Mars's reddish color and thought of all the blood that is spilled during war. Perhaps that is why the ancient Assyrians called Mars the “Shedder of Blood,” and the Greeks, Romans, and, later, the Vikings named the planet after their gods of war. Mars was ancient Rome’s god of war, and that is the name that has endured.

Our earliest ancestors used stories and myths to explain the mysteries of nature. They knew little about science, as we think of it today. Nevertheless, astronomy, the study of the universe beyond Earth, is one of the world’s oldest sciences. The earliest astronomers, like Ptolemy (TOLE-uh-me) (approximately A.D. 100–179), who lived in Roman Egypt, didn’t have telescopes or other instruments to help them study the moon and the stars. They had to rely on their own eyesight. Then, in 1608, the telescope was invented by a Dutch optician, Hans Lippershey (LIP-er-shy), who lived from 1570 to 1619. Lippersheys invention had two lenses at either end of a tube. One, called a convex lens, curved outward. It made objects appear bigger than they were, but blurry. The smaller lens, called a concave lens, curved inward. It made objects look smaller, but clearer. When light passed through both lenses, objects appeared three to four times larger and closer than they were. Just a year later, in 1609, the Italian Galileo Galilei (ga-luh-LAY-oh ga-luh-LAY-ee) (1564–1642) made improvements to the instrument that enabled it to make objects appear 20 times larger than their true size.

Telescopes continued to improve. Galileo’s was five to six feet in length, but by the middle of the 17th century, telescopes had grown. In 1656, a telescope made by Dutch mathematician Christiaan Huygens (HOY-gehns) (1629–1695) was 23 feet long and could magnify 100 times.

The telescope changed astronomy forever. Knowledge of the universe grew, and ancient ideas gave way to new ones. The belief that Earth was at the center of our solar system gave way to the theory that the Sun was at the center.
Astronomers continued to observe the planets and stars and make notes about what they saw. In 1877, an Italian astronomer, Giovanni Schiaparelli (joh-von-ne skyah-puh-rel-lee) (1835–1910) trained his telescope on Mars and made a surprising discovery. He announced that the planet seemed to be crisscrossed by a series of channels—or, in Italian, canali. Unfortunately, when Schiaparelli’s work was translated into English, a mistake was made. The word canali was translated as the word “canals.” Though both are waterways, a canal is built by people, while a channel is created by nature. Debate raged among the astronomers of the day: Had the waterways on Mars been created by intelligent beings, or were they natural Martian formations? Throughout his life, Schiaparelli remained neutral on the question. However, many of those who read Schiaparelli’s papers in English believed they were reading about constructed canals, and they drew the conclusion that these canals had been made by a civilization living on Mars. The American astronomer Percival Lowell (1855–1916) was among the biggest believers.

In 1894, Percival Lowell established the Lowell Observatory on top of Mars Hill in Flagstaff, Arizona. For 23 years, Lowell worked at his observatory, studying Mars and making drawings of the features he saw through his telescope. As he observed Schiaparelli’s “canals,” he became convinced they had been built by intelligent beings. Lowell promoted his views in three books: Mars, published in 1895, Mars and Its Canals (1906), and Mars as the Abode of Life (1908). In Mars, Lowell wrote, “Certainly what we see hints at the existence of beings who are in advance of, not behind us, in the journey of life.” Though we know now that he was incorrect, Percival Lowell was relying upon scientific “evidence” to formulate a hypothesis, or prediction, about what Martian life might be like.
At the same time, another man, the English writer H. G. Wells (1866–1946), was using his imagination to form a very different picture of life on Mars. In 1898, Wells’s science fiction novel The War of the Worlds—which was later used as the basis for the famous radio broadcast—was published. It was one of the first books to describe an alien invasion from another planet.

Thanks to the scientific efforts of Lowell and others, and the creative effort of H. G. Wells, the idea of a habitable world somewhere else in our solar system began to capture the world’s imagination.

More About Mars

- Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun.
- Mars orbits the Sun at an average distance of 141.5 million miles.
- Mars’s distance from Earth varies, according to the orbits of both planets. At its closest, Mars is 33.9 million miles away. At its farthest, it is 249 million miles away.
- Mars is about half the size of Earth, though its land area is about the same. This is because our planet is covered with oceans, and Mars is not.
- Because it is smaller than Earth, Mars’s gravity is only 38 percent as strong as Earth’s. A human weighing 160 pounds on Earth would weigh only about 60 pounds on Mars.
- Mars has two tiny moons—Phobos and Deimos. Phobos means “fear,” and Deimos means “panic.” In mythology, Phobos and Deimos were the offspring of Mars. The moons were discovered in 1877 by Asaph Hall, working at the U.S. Naval Observatory.
- The month of March takes its name from Mars.
- One Martian day, or “sol,” lasts 24 hours, 39 minutes, and 35 seconds.
- Traveling at an average speed of 53,979 mph, it takes Mars 687 Earth days to make one orbit around the Sun.
- Mars boasts both the largest volcano and the largest canyon system in the solar system.
- The average temperature on Mars is –64 degrees Fahrenheit, but at its poles the temperature can dip to –225°F and at the equator it can rise to 80°F.
- Martian wind can blow at hurricane force—more than 75 miles per hour.
1. Based on paragraph 1 and the section titled “More About Mars,” how do the names of Mars’s moons mainly reflect ancient thinking?
   A. The names of the moons come from myths.
   B. The names of the moons show that they are small.
   C. The moons were named over one hundred years ago.
   D. The moons were named by a scientist who was mistaken.

2. What does the explanation of Lippershey’s telescope in paragraph 2 indicate?
   A. The telescope was considered a useless invention.
   B. The telescope needed a pair of lenses to work properly.
   C. The telescope’s tube was too heavy to make it practical.
   D. The telescope’s design copied that of ancient instruments.

3. Based on paragraph 5, what is the most likely reason people began to believe in life on other planets?
   A. A popular novel spread the idea.
   B. An unclear translation caused confusion.
   C. Ruins of prehistoric structures were found.
   D. Respected scientists made an important discovery.

4. What is the main purpose of the section titled “More About Mars”?
   A. to compare Mars to other planets
   B. to highlight recent discoveries made on Mars
   C. to provide additional information about Mars
   D. to review information presented earlier about Mars

5. In paragraph 8, the word *habitable* most likely means
   A. comfortable.
   B. imaginable.
   C. predictable.
   D. liveable.
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 passage, describe how Mars has fascinated scientists and others throughout history. Support your answer with important details from the passage.
In the novel The Green Glass Sea, Dewey’s father has died; he was a scientist who was working on the top secret development of the atomic bomb (known as the “gadget”) during World War II. Dewey now lives with the Gordons, who are also working on the project. In this selection, Dewey and the Gordons witness the first test of the “gadget” in the deserts of New Mexico. Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.

from The Green Glass Sea
by Ellen Klages

Students read an excerpt from The Green Glass Sea and then answered questions 7 through 17 that follow on pages 71–73 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.

The Green Glass Sea by Ellen Klages. Copyright © 2006 by Ellen Klages. Reprinted by permission of Viking Children’s Books, A Division of Penguin Young Readers Group, A Member of Penguin Group (USA) LLC.
Due to copyright restrictions, the excerpt that appeared on this page cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the citation on the previous page.
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7. According to paragraphs 1–3, Dewey believes her future will be decided by
   A. her extended family.
   B. government officials.
   C. the success of the gadget.
   D. her feelings about the war.

8. Mrs. Gordon’s comments in paragraphs 17–21 contribute most to the
   A. resolution.
   B. suspense.
   C. imagery.
   D. theme.

9. In paragraph 23, the author uses words such as “scrunched” and “scooted” to give
   a sense of Dewey’s
   A. thirst.
   B. fatigue.
   C. restlessness.
   D. disappointment.

10. In paragraph 32, what does calling the test a “show” mainly suggest about Mrs.
    Gordon’s attitude toward the gadget?
    A. She is curious.
    B. She is relieved.
    C. She is doubtful.
    D. She is enthusiastic.

11. Mrs. Gordon’s actions toward Dewey in paragraph 39 mostly show that she is
    A. confused by Dewey.
    B. pleased with Dewey.
    C. protective of Dewey.
    D. nervous around Dewey.

12. Read the description from paragraph 56 in the box below.

   It was like being on a beach that had no ocean.

   The description is used mainly to
   A. show how fun the experience is.
   B. help the reader imagine the scene.
   C. help the reader feel the excitement.
   D. show how common the experience is.
13 Read the descriptions from paragraph 58 in the box below.

- . . . looking out over the edge of the world. It was too dark to see much difference between sky and land, . . .
- . . . a single pair of headlights as tiny as pinpoints moved slowly across the featureless darkness.

Based on the selection, what does the darkness most likely represent?
A. Dewey’s uncertain future
B. Dewey’s quiet personality
C. Dewey’s sense of adventure
D. Dewey’s wish for independence

14 Read the descriptions from paragraphs 61 and 62 in the box below.

- . . . as if it were instantly morning, as if the sun had risen in the south, just this once.
- Time stood still for a moment, and then the light faded.

What is the main effect of the descriptions?
A. They show how frightening the event is.
B. They explain how simple the event seems.
C. They highlight how significant the event is.
D. They suggest how scientific the event seems.

15 Read the sentence from paragraph 8 in the box below.

“The rumor mill down at the Commissary is buzzing at a fever pitch.”

In the sentence, the description “buzzing at a fever pitch” most likely means that people are
A. excited.
B. surprised.
C. uncertain.
D. unhealthy.

16 Which of the following words could best replace transmissions in paragraph 53?
A. reports
B. demands
C. agreements
D. suggestions
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.

Based on the selection, identify and explain the conflicts Dewey faces. Support your answer with important details from the selection.
# Grade 6 English Language Arts
## Reading Comprehension
### Spring 2015 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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