III. English Language Arts, Grade 4

Grade 4 English Language Arts Test

The spring 2017 grade 4 English Language Arts test was a next-generation assessment, featuring a new test design and new item types. The test was administered in two formats: a computer-based version and a paper-based version. The test included both operational items, which count toward a student's score, and matrix items. The matrix portion of the test consisted of field-test questions that do not count toward a student's score.

In general, all students were administered the same operational items, regardless of whether they took the computer-based test or the paper-based test. In some instances, the wording or content of a paper item differed slightly from the computer-based version. More information about the differences between the computer-based and paper-based tests will be posted to the MCAS website at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/.

This document displays the **paper-based versions** of the 2017 operational items that have been released. The **computer-based versions** of the released items are available on the MCAS Resource Center website at mcas.pearsonsupport.com.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The grade 4 ELA test was made up of three separate test sessions. Each session included reading passages, followed by selected-response questions and constructed-response or essay questions. On the paper-based test, the selected-response questions were multiple-choice items, in which students select the correct answer from among several answer options.

Standards and Reporting Categories

The grade 4 ELA test was based on Pre-K–5 learning standards in three 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 13–19)

- Writing (*Framework*, pages 23–28)

- Language (*Framework*, pages 33–40)

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 test results are reported under three MCAS reporting categories, which are identical to the three framework content strands listed above.

The tables at the conclusion of this chapter provide the following information about each released and unreleased operational item: reporting category, standard(s) covered, item type, and item description. The correct answers for released selected-response questions are also displayed in the released item table.

Reference Materials

During all three ELA 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 test session.

Grade 4 English Language Arts

This session contains 12 questions.

Directions

Read the passage and questions carefully. Then answer each question as well as you can. You must record all answers in your Student Answer Booklet.

For most questions, you will mark your answers by filling in the circles in your Student Answer Booklet. Make sure you darken the circles completely. Do not make any marks outside of the circles. If you need to change an answer, be sure to erase your first answer completely.

One question will ask you to write an essay. Write your essay in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet. Only essays written within the provided space will be scored.

Read the passage about Irene, a scientist who studied an African grey parrot named Alex. Then answer the questions that follow.

Alex the Parrot: A True Story

by Stephanie Spinner

PICK A PARROT, ANY PARROT

. . .

1   Irene didn't know it then, but Alex was no ordinary parrot. He was going to make history.

2   Irene met Alex at a time when most people thought that animals were just barely intelligent. They could be trained to understand spoken commands, but none of them could respond with speech. The only exceptions, parrots and mynah birds, could speak words and even short sentences, but probably didn't understand what they were saying. They were only imitating, or "parroting," sounds they heard—or so most people thought.

3   Irene didn't agree. She had loved birds from the age of four, when she was given a parakeet for her birthday. Growing up, she had raised many pet parakeets; she had even taught some of them to talk. In her opinion, her birds were highly intelligent.

4   Yet studying parrots didn't occur to Irene until a few years before she bought Alex. She had been studying chemistry at Harvard and planned to teach it.

5   But in the winter of 1974, she happened to see a television series about a new science—the study of animal language. The shows fascinated her. One was about whales singing; another was about the sounds and gestures that chimpanzees make to each other. Most interesting of all to Irene was a show about birdsong.

6 The subject of animal communication drew Irene like a magnet. She began finding out everything she could about it. She read about dolphins who were learning to understand words and recognize symbols. She read about chimps and gorillas who were "speaking" with their trainers using sign language.

7 At the time, most scientists thought that the bigger the brain, the smarter the creature. So studies of animal communication centered on apes and dolphins, whose brain size is similar to ours.

8 African greys, with their walnut-size brains, were at the very bottom of the heap: "birdbrains." Nobody was interested in working with them—yet.

9 There are thousands of bird species. We know now that African grey parrots are among the very smartest. They are also among the most vocal. They squawk, they sing, and they love to imitate noises they hear. They can sound like just about anything.

10 They can also speak as clearly as people—which made an African grey the perfect bird for Irene to study.

11 She knew from her many parakeet pets just how intelligent birds could be. As a scientist, she wanted to prove it.

12 With Alex, she was determined to try.

TESTING, TESTING

13 Alex and Irene got off to a bumpy start. Alex was frightened and unhappy in his new home in the biology lab. He wouldn't eat or come out of his cage.

14 Slowly, patiently, Irene helped him to overcome his fear. Within a few days, he was walking in and out of his cage and perching comfortably on her arm.

15 On his fourth day at the lab, Irene gave Alex an index card. He promptly shredded it with his beak. She gave him another, and another. He shredded away enthusiastically.

16 Each time she gave him a card, she would say, "Paper." She wanted him to understand that "paper" meant the stuff he was ripping apart.

17 But did he? It was too soon to tell.

18 Young parrots in the wild learned by imitating their parents. Parrots in captivity learned by imitation, too. But exactly what they learned, and how well they understood it, was still a question. By using a new teaching method with Alex (called the "model-rival" method), Irene hoped to find the answer.

19 She and a student assistant would sit in front of Alex and pretend to teach each other a word. For example, Irene would show the student a key, saying "key." The student would repeat the word "key," and Irene would hand the object over. The student would handle the key with great interest, and then show the key to Irene. When Irene responded by again calling it "key," she would get to hold it.

20 Then it was Alex's turn. If he said "key," he would be given the key as a reward. He liked this "game" and caught on very quickly.

21 Within a few weeks, Alex was saying "ee" for "key" and "pay-er" for "paper." Next he began labeling materials, such as "cork" and "wood," and colors—"green" and "blue."

22 Alex picked up words for his favorite foods all by himself: "nut," "banana," "corn," "grape," "cherry," and "pa," his special word for pasta. He even made up a word for apple—he called it "banerry," a combination of "banana" and "cherry."

23 Alex was a great student. And as he learned more words, he lost his shyness. In fact, he turned into a very bossy parrot. He let everybody know what he wanted, pretty much all the time.

24 "Want nut!" and "Want banana!" were two of his favorite commands. "Wanna go back" was another. It meant he was tired of working and ready for a break.

25 Alex made it very clear that he liked to be obeyed. If he asked for a grape and got a banana, somebody was going to end up with a banana facial.

26 It wasn't long before "no" became one of Alex's favorite words, too.

27 Alex got lots of attention, treats, and toys, every day. Yet he still got bored. And he had his own way of showing it.

28 He would ignore his trainers.

29 Or tease them by giving wrong answers.

30 Or throw things onto the floor.

31 Or chew up telephone books.

32 He spent most of his time with two teachers, going over the same questions again and again. He knew the answers, but he had to take the same test dozens of times.

33 "Alex, what color?"

34 "Green."

35 "What matter?"

36 "Wood."

37 "Alex, what shape?"

38 "Ball."

39 "What color?"

40 "Blue."

41 "What matter?"

42 "Wool."

43 Sometimes he had to take the same test fifty or sixty times.

44 Boring!

45 Irene knew Alex was bored, but her work with him required repetition. If her tests weren't absolutely thorough, they would be dismissed as "unscientific." Worse, her parrot would be called just another Clever Hans.

46 Clever Hans was a horse who lived in Germany more than 100 years ago. He seemed to be highly intelligent, and people flocked to see him perform.

47 Hans's owner, Wilhelm von Osten, would ask Hans math questions. If he asked Hans to add two and two, Hans would answer by tapping his hoof four times.

48 Six minus three? Three taps. Two plus three? Five taps. Hans always gave the right answer.

49 Von Osten believed that Hans could really add and subtract. But he was wrong. Von Osten was moving his head—very, very slightly—when Hans came to the right number. Without knowing it, he was sending cues to his horse.

50 Hans couldn't do math after all. But he did understand body language. Von Osten's signals were almost invisible, but Hans saw them.

51 Irene made sure that nobody sent cues to Alex. Many different people tested him. Complete strangers sometimes asked him questions. Even without Irene in the room, Alex got the answers right.

English Language Arts

1 Based on the passage, what first made Irene want to study parrots?

    A. She studied birdsong while at Harvard.

    B. She owned several birds while at Harvard.

    C. She learned from a pet store owner that birds could talk.

    D. She learned from a television show that birds use language.

2 Based on paragraphs 7–8, scientists studied other animals because they believed birds were

    A. too wild.

    B. too large.

    C. too common.

    D. too simpleminded.

3 In paragraph 20, "game" is in quotation marks to show that Alex

    A. did not want others to play.

    B. did not understand the rules.

    C. did not realize he was learning.

    D. did not want to play any longer.

4 Which of the following is the **main** idea of paragraphs 21 and 22?

A. Alex saw colors.

B. Alex liked fruits.

C. Alex tried new foods.

D. Alex learned new words.

5 Based on paragraph 24, which of the following **best** shows how well Alex could communicate?

A. He used only verbs.

B. He answered questions.

C. He named different foods.

D. He stated what he would like.

6   In paragraphs 29–31, the author repeats the word "or" **mostly** to show

   A. the amount of time Alex wasted.

   B. the order in which Alex did things.

   C. the different ways Alex solved problems.

   D. the different ways Alex acted when bored.

7   Based on the passage, what is the **main** lesson in the story about Clever Hans?

   A. Some people will believe anything.

   B. Things can be different than they appear.

   C. Some people will learn from their mistakes.

   D. Appearances are more important than facts.

8   Based on the passage, what does the author **most likely** believe about Alex?

   A. He could actually understand language.

   B. He was the only bird that talked to humans.

   C. He was more intelligent than most humans.

   D. He could really teach language to other birds.

9   Read the sentence from paragraph 2 in the box.

> They were only imitating, or "parroting," sounds they heard—or so most people thought.

What does the word *parroting* mean as it is used in the sentence?

   A. copying

   B. arranging

   C. listening to

   D. thinking about

10 Read the sentence from paragraph 6 in the box.

> The subject of animal communication drew Irene like a magnet.

Which meaning of the word **_drew_** is used in the sentence?

A. pulled toward

B. made a picture of

C. stretched away from

D. described something

11 Based on paragraphs 13 and 14, what does "a bumpy start" mean?

A. a fun beginning

B. a calm beginning

C. a boring beginning

D. a difficult beginning

English Language Arts

This question is a text-based essay question. Write your essay in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet. Your essay should:

- **Present and develop a central idea.**
- **Provide evidence/details from the passage(s).**
- **Include correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.**

12 Based on the passage, write an essay to explain how Alex changed as he spent more time with Irene. Be sure to use information from the passage to develop your essay.

Grade 4 English Language Arts
Spring 2017 Released Operational Items:
Reporting Categories, Standards, Item Descriptions, and Correct Answers

Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Item Type*	Description	Correct Answer (SR)**
1	27	*Reading*	RI.4.1	SR	Make an inference based on information from the passage.	D
2	27	*Reading*	RI.4.1	SR	Make an inference based on information from the passage.	D
3	27	*Reading*	RI.4.4	SR	Infer the meaning in the passage of a word that is set off by punctuation.	C
4	28	*Reading*	RI.4.2	SR	Identify the main idea of a portion of the passage.	D
5	28	*Reading*	RI.4.3	SR	Use information from the passage to determine why an event happened.	D
6	29	*Reading*	RI.4.5	SR	Analyze how the author uses a structural element to communicate meaning.	D
7	29	*Reading*	RI.4.2	SR	Identify the main idea of the passage.	B
8	30	*Reading*	RI.4.6	SR	Analyze evidence to determine the author's point of view.	A
9	30	*Language*	L.4.4	SR	Determine the meaning of a word in context.	A
10	31	*Language*	L.4.4	SR	Determine the meaning of a word in context.	A
11	31	*Language*	L.4.5	SR	Identify a word relationship in context.	D
12	32	*Writing Language*	W.4.2, W.4.4, L.4.1, L.4.2, L.4.3	ES	Write an essay to explain how a character changed over time; use information from the passage to support your explanation.	

* ELA item types are: selected-response (SR), constructed-response (CR), and essay (ES).

**Answers are provided here for selected-response items only. Sample responses and scoring guidelines for any constructed-response and essay items will be posted to the Department's website later this year.

Spring 2017 Unreleased Operational Items:
Reporting Categories, Standards, and Item Descriptions

Item No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Item Type*	Description
13	*Reading*	RL.4.3	SR	Identify a character's problem and how the solution was achieved.
14	*Reading*	RL.4.3	SR	Identify a description of a character and supporting evidence from the passage.
15	*Language*	L.4.5	SR	Determine the meaning of a word in context and identify supporting evidence from the passage.
16	*Reading*	RL.4.3	SR	Identify how the character has changed by the end of the story and identify supporting evidence from the passage.
17	*Writing Language*	W.4.3, W.4.4, L.4.1, L.4.2, L.4.3	ES	Write a narrative about the events in the passage from another character's point of view.
18	*Reading*	RL.4.4	SR	Analyze a metaphor to determine its meaning in the poem.
19	*Reading*	RL.4.3	SR	Determine what the speaker is mainly doing in the poem.
20	*Reading*	RL.4.1	SR	Make an inference to determine how the speaker is feeling in the poem.
21	*Reading*	RI.4.6	SR	Identify the common purpose of two sections of the article.
22	*Reading*	RI.4.2	SR	Identify the main idea of a portion of the article.
23	*Reading*	RI.4.6	SR	Analyze evidence to determine the author's point of view.
24	*Language*	L.4.4	SR	Determine the meaning of a word in context.
25	*Reading*	RL.4.2	CR	Write a paragraph that compares the main ideas of the poem and the article; include important details from both texts.

* ELA item types are: selected-response (SR), constructed-response (CR), and essay (ES).