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

The spring 2012 grade 6 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 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

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.
DIRECTIONS
This session contains two reading selections with sixteen multiple-choice questions and two open-response questions. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

It may be important to think about more than just getting a drink when you pick up a bottle of water. This article discusses some of the problems that bottled water causes. Read the article and answer the questions that follow.

All Bottled Up
by Jodie Mangor

Voss and Imsdal come from Norway, Bisleri is bottled in India, and Vata is an Iranian brand. Around the globe, people are quenching their thirst with bottled water. In the past 10 years, sales in Asia and South America have tripled. In 2007, people in the United States drank more than 8 billion gallons of bottled water. The United States currently consumes the most bottled water in the world, followed by Mexico, China, and Brazil. Compared to sugary, caffeinated soft drinks, this seems a healthy choice. But is it a wise one?

Water for One
A single-serve water bottle offers great convenience. It can be bought almost anywhere, carried around for a while, and then thrown away.

The impact of bottled water on the environment, however, is staggering. Approximately 2.7 million tons of plastic are turned into disposable bottles each year. This requires large quantities of crude oil and water. It also produces greenhouse gases. Bottled water is often shipped long distances to reach consumers, sometimes transcontinentally.

This uses even more fossil fuels and creates more pollution.

Although the bottles can be recycled, only a fraction of them are. The United States only recycles about 23 percent. The rest are part of a growing solid waste problem.

Bottled Over Tap?
Convenience isn’t the only reason for bottled water’s rise in popularity. Words like “pristine” and “pure,” together with images of mountains or glaciers, are used to market bottled water. Many people believe that it must be cleaner
and more healthful than tap water\(^1\) from public water systems. But this is a misconception. In developed nations such as the United States and in Europe, regulations that ensure safe water are often stricter for tap than for bottled water. In the United States, tap water is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Bottled water, which is viewed as a packaged food product, is regulated by individual states if it stays within their borders or by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) if it crosses state lines.

Jermuk water, which is bottled in Armenia, provides an example of how bottled water standards vary from place to place. In 2007, Jermuk water was pulled from American shelves by the FDA because it contained arsenic\(^2\) levels as high as 674 micrograms per liter. Armenian standards allow as much as 700 micrograms of arsenic per liter of water, but U.S. standards set the limit at 10 micrograms per liter.

It may come as a surprise that as much as 40 percent of the water bottled in the United States starts out as tap water. Before bottling, some companies filter it, and they might add minerals for taste.

Despite its sometimes humble origins, bottled water can cost anywhere from 240 to 10,000 times more per gallon than tap water.

**Is the Bottle Ever Better?**

At times, bottled water is the best available option. Hurricanes, other natural disasters, and emergency situations such as the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center in 2001 can negatively affect the safety of public water. Reliable water systems may not be in place in developing nations and war-torn countries. In these cases, bottled water can provide an important source of clean, safe, drinking water.

**Future Solutions**

“Back to the tap” movements are cropping up around the world. In order to save money, use fewer resources, and create less waste, they advocate using tap water and reusable “sports” bottles rather than bottled water. San Francisco and other cities across the United States no longer allow their governmental departments to buy single-serve water bottles. Cities in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom are considering similar bans.

Many bottled water companies are trying to do their part, too. They have reduced the amount of plastic in their bottles and bottle caps. Both the Colorado-based BIOTA company and the English company Belu Water use biodegradable plastic bottles derived from corn. Belu takes it a step further by donating some of its profits to clean water projects.

Bottled water has become an international phenomenon.\(^3\) While it is an important source of safe drinking water, we should not lose sight of a more environmentally friendly source: the water that comes out of our taps.

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\(^1\) *tap water* — water drawn from a faucet
\(^2\) *arsenic* — a poisonous chemical
\(^3\) *phenomenon* — any observable fact or event; fad

1. What is the main purpose of the statistics in paragraph 1?
   A. to explain which countries lead in bottled water use
   B. to list the international names of bottled water products
   C. to show readers that bottled water is popular everywhere
   D. to convince readers that bottled water is better than sugary drinks

2. According to the article, what is the main problem with bottled water?
   A. the waste associated with the bottles
   B. the difficulty of transporting the bottles
   C. the amount of water required to fill the bottles
   D. the inconsistent quality of the water in the bottles

3. Based on paragraph 5, why are words such as “pristine” and “pure” used to sell bottled water?
   A. to meet governments’ laws
   B. to influence people’s choices
   C. to present scientific evidence
   D. to show the values of a company
4 Which of the following conclusions is supported by the information in paragraphs 7 and 8?
A. Bottled water has been proven to be of much higher quality than tap water.
B. People may be buying water they could get less expensively at home.
C. People have come to prefer the added flavors of bottled water.
D. Tap water needs to be purified before it is safe to drink.

5 Read the sentence from paragraph 3 in the box below.
Bottled water is often shipped long distances to reach consumers, sometimes transcontinentally.

In the word transcontinentally, the prefix trans- means
A. nearly.
B. across.
C. toward.
D. beneath.

6 Read the sentence from paragraph 10 in the box below.
In order to save money, use fewer resources, and create less waste, they advocate using tap water and reusable “sports” bottles rather than bottled water.

In the sentence, what does the word advocate most likely mean?
A. debate
B. predict
C. research
D. encourage
Question 7 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 7 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

7 Based on the article, explain the positive and negative effects of the use of bottled water. Support your answer with important details from the article.
Reading Comprehension

In the fantasy Abel’s Island, the mouse Abelard (Abel) is stranded by a flood on an island. Even though he misses his wife, Amanda, he comes to find that the island can be a pretty and interesting place. Read the selection from Abel’s Island and answer the questions that follow.

from Abel’s Island
by William Steig

Students read a selection from Abel’s Island and then answered questions 8 through 18 that follow on pages 64 to 66 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.

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 61.
8. What happens in paragraph 2?
   A. Abel decides to try to escape from the island.
   B. Abel feels threatened by the changing weather.
   C. Abel becomes more aware of his surroundings.
   D. Abel discovers that other creatures are on the island.

9. Based on the selection, what is the **main** reason Abel places the statues outside his windows?
   A. to help protect him
   B. to decorate his yard
   C. to show off his talent
   D. to keep him company

10. According to the selection, how does Abel keep track of time?
    A. by using the watch he finds
    B. by marking off days on a tree
    C. by observing changes in nature
    D. by recording the movement of the stars

11. Read the sentence from paragraph 9 in the box below.

   The book was four tails long, three wide, and almost a tail thick.

   What does the sentence explain?
   A. how Abel measures things
   B. why the book interests Abel
   C. how tiny the book seems to Abel
   D. why Abel thinks another mouse is nearby


12 Based on the selection, what is the main reason the book is important to Abel?
A. It is one of his favorite stories.
B. He knows the person who left it.
C. It gives him hope of being rescued.
D. He can use it as a piece of furniture.

13 What does paragraph 15 suggest?
A. Abel is excited by the story.
B. Abel gets cold while reading.
C. Abel is confused by the story.
D. Abel gets hungry while reading.

14 Read the description from paragraph 18 in the box below.

. . . the roaring and gurgling of the river, the wailing and whining of the wind, the pattering and dripping of rain, the chirruping of birds and the chirring of insects, . . .

What is the main effect of the description?
A. to show a break in the sounds
B. to suggest the softness of the sounds
C. to contrast the silence with the sounds
D. to create a sensory image of the sounds

15 Based on the selection, what most helps Abel survive on the island?
A. He is practical and creative.
B. He has lived by himself before.
C. He likes to live and work outdoors.
D. He saved many possessions from the flood.
In paragraph 18, why does Abel most appreciate the ticking of the watch?

A. The ticking helps him sleep better.
B. The ticking reminds him of music.
C. The ticking makes him feel less alone.
D. The ticking drowns out noises that frighten him.

Based on paragraph 3, what does the word *wrought* mean?

A. discovered
B. imagined
C. produced
D. learned

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, describe how Abel shows that he is a civilized mouse. Support your answer with important details from the selection.
Grade 6 English Language Arts  
Reading Comprehension  
Spring 2012 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.
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