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

The spring 2013 grade 8 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 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.

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 standard it assesses. The correct answers for released multiple-choice questions are also displayed in the released item table.
Food From the Tomb
by Moonsil Lee Kim

Today, Chinese food is well known around the world, and recipes for Chinese cooking can be found in most cookbooks and on many Web sites. While books with some information about ancient Chinese food have survived the centuries, fascinating new information has come more recently from tombs.

Save the Broken Bamboo Strips!

In 1999, a tomb belonging to Wu Yang, the marquis\(^1\) of Yuanling, who lived during the Han dynasty and died in 162 B.C., was discovered at the site of Huxishan. In his tomb was a book made of 300 bamboo strips, every one of which was found broken. Yet, after much painstaking work, conservators were able to reassemble many of the erased and mixed-up fragments. Further study allowed researchers to determine that it was actually a cookbook titled *Meishifang* ("Recipes for Beautiful Food"). It seems that each recipe had a title preceded by a number. In turn, each title began with the phrase “recipe to make....” For example, one began “recipe to make slabs of suckling pig.” Unfortunately, many titles are illegible; so, too, are some of the numbers. Today, work continues on reconstructing and interpreting these texts.

Perhaps those who buried the cookbook with the marquis of Yuanling’s remains expected that it would be used by his servants when they prepared food for him in the afterlife. The recipe ingredients could have been those he enjoyed most when he was alive or perhaps they were the sacred, ideal foods for the afterlife. In any case, the *Meishifang* shows that Han elite enjoyed a varied diet that included vegetables and meats such as pig, chicken, dog, lamb, goose, deer, swallow, beef, and hare. The recipes also offer evidence that the Chinese at the time used a variety of cooking techniques. Among these were steaming, braising, and stewing in liquor with ginger and various other ingredients for flavoring.

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\(^1\) *marquis* — a royal title
This Lady Had It All!

Another tomb that allows us to glimpse ancient cooking practices is Han tomb No. 1 at Mawangdui. It belonged to the wife of the marquis of Dai, who died around 168 B.C. In this tomb, there was a lacquered tray that could hold a single meal for Lady Dai, exactly as she had been accustomed to eating when she was alive. The five small bowls on the tray contained meat dishes. Also buried with her in the tomb were bamboo cases and pottery vessels that held a great variety of foods. These were to nourish her on the long journey in the afterworld. There were seven kinds of grains and beans, five kinds of fruits (melon, jujube, pear, plum, and strawberry), five kinds of vegetables (malva, mustard, ginger, lotus root, and hemp), five mammal meats (hare, dog, deer, ox, and sheep), 13 bird meats and eggs (duck, chicken, pheasant, crane, pigeon, owl, magpie, sparrow, and others), six kinds of fish (carp, bream, catfish, perch, and others), and several spices and medicinal herbs. These foodstuffs show the variety of ingredients used for cooking in ancient China.

What the Dead Eat

In addition to these written records and preserved foods, there is another type of “recipe” in these tombs—mural paintings and relief carvings depicting cooking scenes. The ancient Chinese believed that such images were “real” and had the power to nourish the deceased in the afterlife. These images show various types of meat, cooking utensils, including large cauldrons, and people preparing food. Some people are butchering animals, while others are stirring food in boiling pots, cutting ingredients, and carrying items to cook.

Mural paintings and relief carvings are very informative, as they not only represent kitchen activities, but also explain the process for making food. For example, a series of images was found engraved on a stone slab on a wall in a Han tomb discovered at Dahuting. After much analysis and discussion, scholars determined that the relief (illustration below) describes the process of making tofu:

![Diagram of tofu-making process]

1) soaking soybeans, 2) grinding soybeans, 3) filtering the soymilk, 4) adding brine, and 5) pressing for solidification and dewatering. This

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\[\text{Number unknown}: \text{Title unknown}\]

...boil. When done, lift it out and discard the broth. Shake... Take the fresh sweet fresh broth and add wine, salt, meat sauce liquid, ginger, and magnolia. Boil it again. When done, lift it out and serve. The recipe for making boiled horse, boiled lamb, and boiled deer is like this.

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\(^2\) lacquered — covered with a clear, glossy protective coating

\(^3\) relief — a flat art form that contains three-dimensional elements
process matches almost exactly the recipe for making tofu in a medieval Chinese cookbook. Moreover, we can see that the same recipe and the utensils, including the millstone and the pressing box shown at the end of the process, are still being used today in the countryside in China.

A Tradition That Endures

These tomb recipes clearly show that many of the foods and methods of preparation found in Chinese kitchens today trace their origins to those living in China more than 2,000 years ago. But, it is not just in China where 21st-century diners will find these foods. Many restaurants in the United States, and indeed around the world, offer them as well.


1. How does the author introduce the topic in paragraph 1?
   A. by outlining the steps in a process
   B. by revealing a personal interest in the subject
   C. by narrowing the focus from general to specific
   D. by making a humorous statement about the subject

2. In paragraph 2, “Yet,” “In turn,” and “Today” are examples of
   A. transition words.
   B. topic statements.
   C. supporting details.
   D. concluding phrases.
According to the article, which conclusion is best supported by discoveries made in the tombs of Wu Yang and Lady Dai?
A. The wealthy made their own meals.
B. The wealthy ate an assortment of foods.
C. The wealthy painted the murals in their tombs.
D. The wealthy were buried with few possessions.

In paragraph 5, the quotation marks surrounding “recipe” mainly indicate
A. a word used in dialogue.
B. an opinion of the author.
C. a term used by many historians.
D. an uncommon meaning of the word.

What is the main purpose of paragraph 7?
A. to suggest further research
B. to connect past and present
C. to offer advice to the reader
D. to separate truth from folklore

If the author were to provide more information about artwork found in tombs, it would most likely appear in which of the following sections?
A. “Save the Broken Bamboo Strips!”
B. “This Lady Had It All!”
C. “What the Dead Eat”
D. “A Tradition That Endures”

The Latin word *conservāre* means “to save or to protect.” In paragraph 2, a *conservator* is someone who
A. defends nature.
B. preserves artifacts.
C. works at a museum.
D. collects pieces of art.
Based on the article, explain how the author shows that food was important to the ancient Chinese people's beliefs about the afterlife. Support your answer with relevant and specific details from the article.
He loved her. It was dead simple, the way he loved her. Seamless. His love was like a wall that he’d built around her, and there wasn’t a chink or flaw in it. Or so he thought. But then she started to float out of the real world, his world, and he was like a little boy trying to dam a stream with stones and mud, knowing that the water would always break through at a place he wasn’t looking at. There was nothing desperate about the way he did it, though. He was always calm, it seemed. Expecting the worst and determined not to crack. She started to get up in the night and turn on all the taps, and he would get up too and stand quietly beside her watching the endless flow of water as if he found it as fascinating as she did. Then he’d guide her back to bed before turning the taps off. One night I heard something and went into the living room and saw the two of them standing out on the balcony. He’d wrapped his dressing gown around her, and I heard him say, “Yes, you are right, Marijke. The traffic is like a river of stars. Would you like to watch it some more, or go back to bed?”

When the calls started coming in from police stations, he handled them as if it were just business, something that happened in the normal course of things. He’d call a taxi, get his coat, rescue her, and return the stolen goods to the supermarket. (Usually it was exotic fruits, sometimes just bags of rice or potatoes.) I never once heard him complain or curse, not even so much as sigh. At first I thought he was being pigheaded stubborn, refusing to recognize the reality of the situation. Sometimes I thought he was just too distant from the world, not really grasping what was going on. But it wasn’t like that at all. He and Gran had gone through terrible things when they were young, during the war. Bravery—endurance, all that—was a deep part of him. In other words, he was being heroic. It took me a long time to see it.

It’s a very private thing, losing your mind. And all sorts of people, complete strangers, get involved. It was that, the invasion of his privacy, that started Grandad crumbling. And the fact that all those people—the social workers, doctors, police, psychiatrists—were younger than him, and not as clever, but more powerful. He felt—he must have felt—control slipping away. And what he did was build the wall higher, work harder to dam the stream, fight even more fiercely to keep the world at arm’s length.
Mum and I both knew that Gran would have to go away sooner or later. Mum was good; she treated me like a grownup; we talked about it all. But with her it was the practical stuff. What if this happens? Do you think we should do this or that? What about the flat? And so on. Which was missing the point, really. It was a small thing that made me realize. I went to the flat after school one day and got out of the lift, and Grandad was standing there in his coat. He couldn’t hide the fact that he was hoping to see Gran, not me. She’d gone wandering. He looked straight past me at the empty lift, and his face just collapsed. I understood then that his walls had fallen at last. That while we’d all been focusing on Gran, he was the one desperate for support, for love. Standing there by the lift, looking up at his desolate face, I realized that there was only one person who could provide it. And it scared me. I didn’t think I was up to it.

He was not what you’d call a lovable man, my grandad. It wasn’t that he was cold, exactly. It was more as though he had a huge distance inside himself. There’s a game I used to play with my friends. One of us had to think of someone we all knew, and the others had to work out who it was by asking questions like “If this person was a musical instrument, what would it be?” or “If this person was a place, what would it be?” I used to think that if Grandad were a place, it would be one of those great empty landscapes you sometimes see in American movies: flat, an endless road, tumbleweed blown by a moaning wind, a vast blank sky. And after Dad disappeared, he withdrew even further into this remote space.

It was a funny thing, a surprising thing, that brought him back to me. It was algebra.

I collided with algebra in my first year at secondary school, and it sent me reeling. The very word itself seemed sinister, a word from black magic. Algebracadabra. Algebra messed up one of those divisions between things that help you make sense of the world and keep it tidy. Letters make words; figures make numbers. They had no business getting tangled up together. Those $a$s and $b$s and $x$s and $y$s with little numbers floating next to their heads, those brackets and hooks and symbols, all trying to conceal an answer, not give you one. I’d sit there in my own little darkness watching it dawn on the faces of my classmates. Their hands would go up—“Miss! Miss!”—and mine never did. The homework reduced me to tears.

“I don’t see the point of it,” I wailed. “I don’t know what it’s for!”

Grandad, as it turned out, liked algebra, did know what it was for. But he sat opposite me and didn’t say anything for a while, considering my problem in that careful, expressionless way of his.

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1. flat — apartment
2. lift — elevator
Eventually he said, “Why do you do PE at school?”
“What?”
“PE. Why do they make you do it?”
“Because they hate us?” I suggested.
“And the other reason?”
“To keep us fit, I suppose.”
“Physically fit, yes.” He reached across the table and put the first two fingers of each hand on the sides of my head. “There is also mental fitness, isn’t there?”

Behind us, Gran was watching a comedy game show with the sound off.
“I can explain to you why algebra is useful. But that is not what algebra is really for.” He moved his fingers gently on my temples. “It’s to keep what is in here healthy. PE for the head. And the great thing is you can do it sitting down. Now, let us use these little puzzles here to take our brains for a jog.”

And it worked. Not that I ever enjoyed algebra. But I did come to see that it was possible to enjoy it. Grandad taught me that the alien signs and symbols of algebraic equations were not just marks on paper. They were not flat. They were three-dimensional, and you could approach them from different directions, look at them from different angles, stand them on their heads. You could take them apart and put them together in a variety of shapes, like Lego. I stopped being afraid of them.

I didn’t know it at the time, of course, but those homework sessions were a breakthrough in more ways than one. If Grandad had been living behind an invisible door, then algebra turned out to be the key that opened it and let me in. And what I found wasn’t the barren tumbleweed landscape that I’d imagined. It was not like that at all.

I’d known for a long time that he was fond of puzzles. When I was younger he used to send me letters with lots of the words replaced by pictures or numbers. They always ended 02U, which meant Love to you, because zero was “love” in tennis. He was often disappointed when I couldn’t work them out. Or couldn’t be bothered to. Now I discovered that Grandad’s world was full of mirages and mazes, of mirrors and misleading signs. He was fascinated by riddles and codes and conundrums and labyrinths, by the origin of place names, by grammar, by slang, by jokes—although he never laughed at them—by anything that might mean something else. He lived in a world that was slippery, changeable, fluid.

He taught me that language was rubbery, plastic. It wasn’t, as I’d thought, something you just use, but something you can play with. Words were made up of little bits that could be shuffled, turned back to front, remixed. They could
be tucked and folded into other words to produce unexpected things. It was like cookery, like alchemy.³ Language hid more than it revealed. Gradually I became a crossword freak.

“These people who make them up,” Grandad said, “the compilers, they all have their own little codes. You can learn these codes, break them, and that can lead you to the answer.”

“Show me. Give me an example, Grandad.”

“Okay. This one here,” he said, tapping the *Guardian* with his pen, “he is fond of using the language of maps. When he says *going north* in a down clue, it means the word is written backwards from the bottom to the top. Because north is always at the top of a map.”

“Like *drawer* and *reward,*” I said, remembering. “That could be *Artist going north for prize,* yeah?”

He leaned back in his chair, faking amazement. “Hey, that’s right. Well done. PE for the head, yes?”

Then he took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. “It seems to me,” he said, “that your grandmother is talking to us in crossword clues these days. And unfortunately I am not clever enough to work many of them out.”

³ *alchemy* — changing something common into something special

Read the sentences from paragraph 1 in the box below.

He loved her. It was dead simple, the way he loved her. Seamless.

The sentences establish a tone of
A. despair.
B. certainty.
C. disinterest.
D. forgiveness.

Read the sentence from paragraph 1 in the box below.

But then she started to float out of the real world, his world, and he was like a little boy trying to dam a stream with stones and mud, knowing that the water would always break through at a place he wasn’t looking at.

What does the comparison in the sentence most suggest?
A. Marijke wants Grandad’s memories to be her own.
B. Grandad is helpless to stop Marijke’s mental decline.
C. Grandad is creative in dealing with Marijke’s imagination.
D. Marijke wants to escape from Grandad’s controlling ways.

Read paragraphs 16 and 17 in the box below.

“Physically fit, yes.” He reached across the table and put the first two fingers of each hand on the sides of my head. “There is also mental fitness, isn’t there?”

Behind us, Gran was watching a comedy game show with the sound off.

What do the paragraphs most reveal?
A. the contrast between comedy and drama
B. that algebra is less difficult than it seems
C. that physical education is easier than algebra
D. the contrast between healthy and unhealthy minds

What does Grandad’s comment at the end of paragraph 18 suggest?
A. that doing equations requires relaxation
B. that answering riddles is a fun pastime
C. that thinking strengthens the mind
D. that homework is a duty
13 Based on the excerpt, what is the main way the narrator becomes closer to Grandad?
A. by being kind to him
B. by helping him do chores
C. by doing algebra with him
D. by joking around with him

14 Read the sentence from paragraph 19 in the box below.

They were three-dimensional, and you could approach them from different directions, look at them from different angles, stand them on their heads.

What does the sentence suggest about math problems?
A. They are easy to solve.
B. They can be seen in many ways.
C. They are designed for a range of ages.
D. They can best be solved through teamwork.

15 Which sentence contains the best example of alliteration?
A. “You could take them apart and put them together in a variety of shapes, like Lego.” (paragraph 19)
B. “Now I discovered that Grandad’s world was full of mirages and mazes, of mirrors and misleading signs.” (paragraph 21)
C. “Words were made up of little bits that could be shuffled, turned back to front, remixed.” (paragraph 22)
D. “He leaned back in his chair, faking amazement.” (paragraph 27)

16 Read the sentence from paragraph 1 in the box below.

She started to get up in the night and turn on all the taps, and he would get up too and stand quietly beside her watching the endless flow of water as if he found it as fascinating as she did.

Which of the following parts of speech is the word taps?
A. a verb
B. a noun
C. a pronoun
D. a preposition
Read the sentences from paragraph 7 in the box below.

Those *as* and *bs* and *xs* and *ys* with little numbers floating next to their heads, those brackets and hooks and symbols, all trying to conceal an answer, not give you one. I’d sit there in my own little darkness watching it dawn on the faces of my classmates.

In the second sentence, the pronoun “it” refers to the
A. darkness.
B. numbers.
C. symbols.
D. answer.

Read the sentence from paragraph 7 in the box below.

The homework reduced me to tears.

Which of the following is the best definition of *reduced* as it is used in the sentence?
A. to lower in price
B. to bring under control
C. to evaporate water from
D. to bring to a lesser condition
Question 19 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 19 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

Describe how the narrator’s view of Grandad changes throughout the excerpt. Support your answer with relevant and specific details from the excerpt.
Grade 8 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2013 Released Items:
Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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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