III. English Language Arts, Grade 4

A. Composition
B. Reading Comprehension
Grade 4 English Language Arts Test

Test Structure

The grade 4 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 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy

A. Composition

The spring 2014 grade 4 ELA Composition test and Composition Make-Up test were based on learning standards in the Pre-K–5 Writing strand of the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (March 2011). The learning standards for the Pre-K–5 Writing strand appear on pages 23–28 of the Framework, which is available on the Department website at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html.

Each grade 4 ELA writing prompt assesses standard 1, 2, or 3 in the Pre-K–5 Writing strand in the 2011 Framework. All grade 4 writing prompts assess standards 4 and 5 in the Pre-K–5 Writing strand.

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 two pages. 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.
WRITING PROMPT

You are finally old enough to baby-sit, and your first job is this afternoon! You will be spending the entire afternoon with a one-year-old. When you open the door you realize that instead of watching a one-year-old child, you will be watching a one-year-old elephant!

Write a story about spending your afternoon with a baby elephant. Give enough details to show readers what your afternoon is like baby-sitting the elephant.

You may use the space below to plan what you are going to write (notes, outlines, other pre-writing activities).
WRITING PROMPT

Imagine that you have been given a robot that responds to all of your commands.

Write a story about what you would do with your robot for a day. Give enough details to describe your day with your robot.

You may use the space below to plan what you are going to write (notes, outlines, other pre-writing activities).
B. Reading Comprehension

The spring 2014 grade 4 English Language Arts Reading Comprehension test was based on Pre-K–5 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 13–19)
- 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 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 4 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.
Long ago, back when the world was new, the birds had no feathers. It was difficult for them in those days. When the sun shone down brightly, they were too hot. When the wind blew and the seasons turned to the long white time, they were cold and they shivered in the forest. And so it was that the Creator took pity on them and sent down a message to them in a dream.

All the birds gathered together in council to discuss the dream they had all had, the dream they knew was a message from the Creator. The message was this: If they would appoint one bird to be their messenger, that bird could go to the Skyland and bring back clothing for all the birds. The Eagle, who was the chief, sat on the council rock and began the discussion: Who could fly that long distance, high into the Skyland, to bring back clothing for the birds?

Everyone wanted to go, but some of the birds were too small; their wings were too weak. The great Eagle could fly the highest of all, but as the chief of the birds he had to stay with his people. Finally it was decided that Buzzard, with his long, strong wings, would be the one to fly to the Skyland with the message that they were ready to accept the Creator’s gift of clothing.

Buzzard began to fly. He flew and he flew through the sky. He flew for so long that he became hungry; he had forgotten to eat before he left on his journey. He looked down, and there by the side of the lake he saw some rotten fish. He was so hungry that he flew down and he ate those rotten fish. Then, feeling better, he began to fly again.
Buzzard flew higher and higher, up toward the Skyland. Higher and higher he went, so high that the heat of the sun shone down and burned the top of his bald head. But he was determined to carry the message of all the birds up to the Creator, and so he continued.

Up and up he flew, until at last he came to the Skyland, where the Creator waited. “Buzzard,” the Creator said, “you have done well. You have been brave and determined. You have carried the message of your people to me. I see that you wish to receive this gift of clothing from me. All the birds will have clothes, which you will take back to them. Buzzard, since you were the messenger, and you were so determined and brave, I will give you the first choice of clothing to wear.”

The Creator took Buzzard to a place where many suits of clothing hung, all of them made of beautiful feathers. Buzzard looked around. As the messenger for all the birds, he would have to pick the very best suit of all. As he looked, the Creator came to him and said, “Now, Buzzard, you must remember this. Any one of these suits of feathers will fit you when you put it on. If you do not like it, simply take it off, and it will go to another bird. But remember, once you have tried it on and taken it off, it can never be yours again.” Buzzard understood, and he began to look.

Now, there was a beautiful suit with red feathers and a little black mask. Buzzard tried it on. It was very bright and nice, he thought, but only red? That was not enough, so he took that suit off and it went to Cardinal.

There was another suit with black on it, a little bit of white, a gray back, and a red vest. Buzzard tried that on. Hmmm, he thought, not quite showy enough. That one went to Robin.

There was a yellow-and-black suit. This too was nice, but the messenger of all the birds must have many colors in his suit of feathers, thought Buzzard. So he took that suit off too; it went to Goldfinch.
Buzzard tried on one suit of feathers after another. The Creator patiently waited and watched, until finally, Buzzard tried on a suit that fit so tightly, it didn’t cover his legs. It left his bald, red, sunburned head bare, and the feathers were brown and dirty. Buzzard looked at himself, and Buzzard was not pleased. “Ugh!” he said. “This suit is the worst of them all!” And the Creator said, “Buzzard, it is the last of all the suits. It has to be yours.”

So it came to be that from that day on, Buzzard wore that suit of dirty feathers. And ever since then, too, because he stopped to eat those rotten fish on his journey, Buzzard has had an appetite for things that are long dead. But still, when he flies high in the sky with his wings spread, up there close to the Skyland, you may remember that he was the messenger for all the birds. Despite his dirty suit of feathers, he still has reason to be proud.


1. According to the folktale, Buzzard is chosen to travel to the Skyland because of his
A. ideas.
B. voice.
C. colors.
D. strength.

2. What does paragraph 4 mostly show about Buzzard?
A. He needs to eat alone.
B. He does not plan ahead.
C. He is lost during his trip to the Skyland.
D. He is not big enough to fly to the Skyland.
3 Based on paragraph 5, how does Buzzard feel about his trip to the Skyland?
A. He hopes it will be short.
B. He takes it very seriously.
C. He wants it to be a secret.
D. He thinks it will be simple.

4 What lesson does Buzzard learn in the folktale?
A. Try your best.
B. Listen to others.
C. Do not be picky.
D. Do not travel alone.

5 Read the sentence from paragraph 2 in the box below.

The message was this: If they would appoint one bird to be their messenger, that bird could go to the Skyland and bring back clothing for all the birds.

Which word has the same meaning as appoint?
A. hear
B. watch
C. follow
D. choose
ELA Reading Comprehension

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 folktale, explain the problems Buzzard experiences. Support your answer with important details from the folktale.
Read the article about the life of Louis Braille. Then answer the questions that follow.

Louis Braille

*Opening the Doors of Knowledge*

by James Rumford

1 Two hundred years ago, if you were blind, you became a beggar. Or maybe, if you were lucky, a circus musician or a fortuneteller. Most seeing people pitied you because they thought you had only half their wits. Few understood that it was only your eyes that did not work. Your heart and your mind were like everyone else’s.

2 So said a Frenchman named Haüy [ah-wee], who opened a school in Paris for blind children in 1784. He spent all his money to prove that the blind could learn. He even invented special books with huge, raised letters so that they could read with their fingertips.

3 News of Haüy’s school spread across France, arriving one day in 1818 at the doorstep of a poor saddle maker named Simon Braille. Several years before, the saddle maker’s three-year-old son Louis had punctured his eye with a sharp, pointed awl while playing. Infection quickly sealed his eyes shut, and within days he was blind.

4 Everyone knew what was in store for the boy—a life of begging. But Louis’s father and mother would have none of that. The village priest and the village schoolteacher agreed, and they taught Louis, even though there were no books for blind children to read or ways for them to write. But Louis was bright and in two years had learned all he could at the village school.

5 Then the village priest came knocking at the Brailles’ door with an astounding proposal: send Louis to Paris, to Haüy’s school. But how? There was no money. So the priest went to the most powerful man in the county, who wrote a letter to the school.

6 Within a few months, Louis had a scholarship and left his village of Coupvray [coo-vray] for a new life in Paris. He was only 10.
7 When Louis was 12, an extraordinary man named Captain Barbier [bar-bee-ay] came to the school. He wanted to show off his invention, called “night writing.” This was a code of 12 raised bumps that made it possible for soldiers to send and read messages in the dark.

8 The sighted teachers called Captain Barbier a clever man, but, when Louis slid his fingers over the bumps, he whispered, “No, he’s a genius!”

9 Louis realized that night writing was a way for blind people to write down the ideas that filled their heads. No longer would they have to ask seeing people for help. And night writing was a way for blind people to read, really read, instead of slowly tracing their fingers over giant, raised letters.

10 But night writing needed work. Its clumps of dots took too much time to write and were almost as hard as Haüy’s letters to read. For three years Louis punched out new combinations of dots, but nothing worked. Then one summer, when he was 15, he had a breakthrough. Instead of basing his letters on 12 dots, Louis based them on six. This made his letters easy to write—and easy to read, for each letter was small enough to fit under a fingertip.

11 Louis couldn’t wait to teach his friends back at school. Within days of his return, his friends were gliding their fingertips across words they had written. No longer did they need sighted people to write for them. Louis’s dots meant freedom!

12 The head of the school, Director Pignier [peen-yay], welcomed Louis’s dot system, but some of the teachers scoffed at the boy’s foolishness. How could the blind learn without the help of the seeing? How could the blind lead the blind? But Louis paid no attention. Before long, dot-filled books appeared in classrooms.

13 At age 17 Louis was made a teacher at the school; at 24, a full professor. Students filled his classes, and he in turn filled them with hope and the promise that they each had something valuable to contribute to the world.

14 Louis even used his dots to write down music. His students no longer had to memorize every piece. Now they could compose as well. More freedom. More promise.
In 1840, Director Pignier was dismissed and a teacher named Dufau [dew-foe] took his place. Dufau didn’t like Louis’s dots. They made the students too independent. One summer, when Louis was back in Coupvray, Dufau introduced a simplified form of Haüy’s raised letters. Then, to make sure that everyone used the new system, he burned Haüy’s books and Louis’s as well. There was also a new rule: No more dot writing.

But no one gives up newly won freedom without a fight. Louis, even in his grief, knew that. The students defied the director. They wrote in secret. They passed notes at night.

When Dufau saw how the students supported Louis, he gave in. Dot books and dot writing were back. For the next eight years, Louis continued to teach, and his system of reading and writing flourished.

Then, in 1852, he became seriously ill and died. No newspaper mentioned his death. Only people at the school knew that a great man had passed away. They built a statue of their beloved teacher and wrote his life story.

Slowly, the world came to know of Louis Braille and adopted his system of dot writing. In 1952, 100 years after his death, his body was taken to Paris and buried alongside the heroes of France. That day, every newspaper in the world wrote about Louis, and thousands of blind people lined the streets to honor him. Louis Braille had given them the means to prove that their hearts and minds were like everyone else’s.

Based on paragraph 2, how could Haüy best be described?
A. caring
B. foolish
C. nervous
D. grateful

According to paragraph 4, why did Louis need to leave the village school?
A. The school was too expensive for his family.
B. The school ran out of supplies for him to use.
C. The school ran out of new things to teach him.
D. The school was a great distance from his home.

Based on the article, what was one reason Louis thought Captain Barbier was a genius?
A. His ideas helped Louis read more easily.
B. He trained the soldiers to work with Louis.
C. His messages introduced Louis to a new school.
D. He wrote many books that Louis enjoyed reading.

According to the article, how did Louis improve night writing?
A. He used fewer dots.
B. He used higher dots.
C. He used shorter words.
D. He used smaller letters.
11. Based on paragraph 11, how did Louis feel about sharing his discovery with his friends?
   A. eager
   B. curious
   C. amazed
   D. nervous

12. Based on the article, how was Louis’s invention important to blind people?
   A. It gave them back their sight.
   B. It gave them ideas for their writing.
   C. It helped them decide what to study.
   D. It helped them become more independent.

13. The information in the article is mainly organized by
   A. the order of events.
   B. problem and solution.
   C. compare and contrast.
   D. the order of importance.

14. Which of the following best explains why the article is a biography?
   A. It includes pictures.
   B. It takes place in the past.
   C. It gives facts about a person’s life.
   D. It describes details of a person’s friends.
15. Based on paragraphs 5 and 6, what is a scholarship?
   A. a way to pay for school
   B. a way to travel the world
   C. a plan to make oneself better
   D. a plan for what to study in school

16. Read the words from the article in the box below.
   fortuneteller
   fingertips
   doorstep
   newspaper

   What do the words in the box have in common?
   A. They are adjectives.
   B. They are contractions.
   C. They are proper nouns.
   D. They are compound words.

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.

17. Based on the article, explain what people thought of Louis Braille. Support your answer with important information from the article.
Grade 4 English Language Arts  
Reading Comprehension  
Spring 2014 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 the open-response items, which are indicated by the shaded cells, will be posted to the Department’s website later this year.
### Grade 4 English Language Arts

**Reading Comprehension**

**Spring 2014 Unreleased Common Items:**

**Reporting Categories and Standards**

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