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

The spring 2014 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 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 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 test sessions. No other reference materials were allowed during any ELA Reading Comprehension test session.
In this article, Deborah Franklin describes how a connection with nature can influence people’s lives. Read the article and answer the questions that follow.

Inviting the Outdoors In
by Deborah Franklin

1 Research shows that regular contact with nature boosts physical and mental health as well as productivity; with a little imagination, even people who are stuck inside can reap these benefits.

2 After enduring one of the wettest winters in Seattle history, Judith Heerwagen, an environmental psychologist and a great believer in the power of nature to restore a weary soul, had to admit last February that 33 straight days of rain had been enough to swamp even her enthusiasm for the great outdoors. “It got to be pretty grim,” Heerwagen recalls. Day after day, her usually splendid window views of trees and a leafy garden were a soupy, storm-battered mess. “Still,” she insists, “I’d much rather have a window view of constant rain than no window at all.”

3 And, apparently, so would the rest of us. In the two decades since Harvard University biologist E.O. Wilson first suggested that fascination with nature might be hardwired into the human brain, health researchers and psychologists such as Heerwagen have amassed significant evidence that he was right.

4 The powerful affinity that Wilson and others have named “biophilia” is more than just puppy love. In hospital studies, Texas A&M University psychologist Roger Ulrich found that surgical patients randomly assigned to a room with a window view of trees not only required less pain medication, but also healed faster and were discharged more quickly than if they had no window or had a view of a brick wall. Tapping into the power of biophilia may also boost a company’s bottom line. In Heerwagen’s own research, Michigan office and factory workers were both happier with their work environment and 20 percent more productive after their firm moved into a building that had skylights and windows that opened onto views of restored prairie with meandering footpaths and wetlands rather than sterile, office park surroundings.

5 “Instead of the big expanse of a clipped lawn and staid fountain that you usually find at a corporate headquarters,
this large furniture manufacturer, Herman Miller, put in a pond and restored acres of prairie around the building with huge windows looking out from the factory showroom,” Heerwagen says. “The building is still just off the highway, and it’s noisy from the manufacturing, but the workers can look outside and see great blue herons in the pond.”

In ongoing efforts to tease out what it is about some landscapes that makes them particularly appealing, researchers have discovered through cross-cultural studies that certain features — the broad, spreading canopies of clustered trees, colorful flowers or sparkling water, for example — are pleasing to people throughout the world. “People are aesthetically drawn to environmental features that have proven instrumental to human survival,” writes Yale University social ecologist Stephen Kellert in his 2005 book *Building for Life: Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection.* Such features, Kellert continues, include “clean flowing water, promontories that foster sight and mobility, areas that offer refuge and shelter, and bright flowering colors that frequently signify the presence of food.” The premium price that people are willing to pay for mountain or water views in hotels or homes provides further anecdotal evidence, he says.

But you don’t need a big budget or floor-to-ceiling windows to bring the benefits of the outdoors in. With a little creativity, even worker bees toiling in windowless cubicles or residents of basement apartments can strengthen their healing connections to the outside world. To see for yourself, try these biophilia-based home decorating tips:

**Value the vista:** No window? No problem. Though nothing can truly replace the sounds, fragrances, fresh air and stimulation we get through genuine windows overlooking a glorious nature scene, we can’t all live and work in Yosemite. If you don’t have an actual view of the horizon, put up photographs, paintings, nature calendars or even postcards that simulate a long view of sky and earth.

**Let there be light:** Studies of office workers show that it’s not just being able to see outside that they crave, it’s also the movement of air and, especially, the shifting patterns of light that signal changes in the time of day and season. Access to daylight, where possible, or glowing or dappled light from track lights or sconces that scatter light against a wall can lift mood and productivity. Improved lighting need not cost more; research shows that energy-saving fluorescent bulbs can be just as effective, if properly deployed.

**Plant a posy:** Houseplants and window boxes of fragrant herbs or flowers literally add life to a room. Watching potted plants grow from tender shoots to pie-ready strawberries or succulent tomatoes may be a particularly sweet way to have your nature and eat it, too. Warning: Toss cut flowers before they wither and smell, and also get rid of what Heerwagen calls “prisoner plants” — the lone, spindly, leafless specimens huddling in a too-small pot in a dark corner. “Live plants and flowers are comforting,” she says. “Dead ones don’t make anyone feel better.”
Play with color: Even a single fresh bloom can add inexpensive delight to a table or desk, and that makes sense evolutionarily: In the wild, flowers are soon followed by fruit. Visit a farmer’s market for local blooms. Exotic choices can be attractive, Kellert says, but the familiar flowers closer to home will likely strike a deeper emotional chord.

Talk to the animals: Research has repeatedly shown that friendly interaction with animals can ease depression, reduce blood pressure, and otherwise buffer stress and boost self-esteem. No time or space for pets? Put a hummingbird feeder outside your window or offer to walk or play ball with a neighbor’s dog.

Sway with the seasons: No matter how many hours you spend in a virtual world, each physical locale has distinctive scents and sounds that shift with the seasons. Taking note of the seasonal clues in your neighborhood and incorporating some into your decor — a blooming cactus, a rosy branch of redbud — can help ground you in place and time. Fragrant plants — lilac or lavender in spring or summer, say, or rosemary or pine in December — are especially evocative.

Hide when you need to: Biophilia isn’t just a love of pleasant nature; it’s also about feeling safe from danger. Peripheral gloom can feel threatening even when no danger lurks; drawing the shades across windows at night, or adding standing, light-colored screens around a conversation area, can lend coziness to an exposed space.

Walk in the park: Make spending time outdoors a priority. In studies of college students by Uppsala University psychologist Terry Hartig, those who spent 40 minutes walking through a park were more accurate in subsequent proofreading tests and much more likely to say they felt refreshed than those who spent 40 minutes strolling through city streets or those who sat quietly inside reading or listening to music. Such findings would not have surprised 19th century American naturalist Henry David Thoreau, who advised a daily walk “to re-ally ourselves with nature.”

The next step in architecture and other forms of design, Kellert says, is to more fully integrate the principles of biophilia into notions of “sustainable” technology. “I’ve started thinking of it as ‘restorative environmental design’ — a concept that incorporates all those principles,” he says. “It can’t just be about avoiding having negative effects on the environment. We need to think about taking advantage of nature’s benefits, too.”

“Inviting the Outdoors In” by Deborah Franklin, from National Wildlife Magazine (June/July 2006). Copyright © 2006 by Deborah Franklin. Reprinted by permission of the author.
Based on the article, why would a company **most** want to improve its work environment?

A. Maintaining beautiful grounds attracts customers.
B. Providing opportunities to be with animals reduces stress.
C. Creating a pleasant space increases efficiency and profits.
D. Constructing an enclosed conversation area makes people feel safe.

According to the article, which of the following is **most** important to improving a home or an office?

A. large amounts of money to spend
B. the opportunity to consult experts
C. the authority to make changes to a building
D. some imagination in using simple materials

Based on the article, which of the following would **most** help create a healing connection to nature?

A. making an arrangement of dried flowers
B. listening to beautiful and relaxing music
C. increasing the quantity and quality of light
D. displaying pictures of friends and loved ones

What is the effect of the alliteration in the headings of paragraphs 10, 11, 12, and 15?

A. It creates a playful tone in the article.
B. It mimics the sounds found in nature.
C. It emphasizes the importance of music.
D. It gives a professional feel to the article.
Which of the following statements provides the best support for the article’s main idea?

A. “Day after day, her usually splendid window views of trees and a leafy garden were a soupy, storm-battered mess.”

B. “... surgical patients randomly assigned to a room with a window view of trees not only required less pain medication, but also healed faster ...”

C. “Improved lighting need not cost more; research shows that energy-saving fluorescent bulbs can be just as effective ...”

D. “... drawing the shades across windows at night, or adding standing, light-colored screens around a conversation area, can lend coziness to an exposed space.”

What does the word simulate mean as it is used in the last sentence of paragraph 10?

A. extend
B. imitate
C. encourage
D. recommend

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.

Explain how the concepts in the article could be applied to a school environment. Support your answer with relevant and specific information from the article.
In this excerpt from Night Hoops, Nick Abbott, a star player on his high school basketball team, faces a difficult challenge. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

from Night Hoops
by Carl Deuker

1. At the next practice O’Leary moved Trent and me to the first team, and the up-tempo style that suited us was back, too.

2. There is nothing I like more than creating in the open court, and Trent had become a dream finisher. I fed him the ball again and again. Everything was working for him: the drives, the jumper, even the three-pointer.

3. At the end of practice, O’Leary had me wait on the court until all the guys were in the locker room. “That was solid, Nick. Real solid,” he said. “I like the way you and Trent play. You have a feel for each other, and that’s something you can’t coach.”

4. “We’ve been practicing together,” I explained. “I know where and when he likes the ball.”

5. “Yeah? Well, that’s good. That’s real good. Only don’t forget about Luke and Darren. Those guys can score, too, and they get itchy when they’re not getting their shots.”

6. “Trent was hot today,” I said, defending myself. “So I got him the ball. I’ll get them the ball when they’re hot.”

7. He nodded. “Fair enough. Find the hot hand and feed it—you do that and you’ll be starting at point guard for the next three years. Guaranteed. Now go shower up.”

8. The victory over Roosevelt was just the beginning. Against Woodinville Trent had ten rebounds and twenty-two points, while I added eight points and dished out eight assists. The Juanita Rebels were next. Again Trent had a double double—twenty-four points and eleven rebounds. I handed out nine assists, seven of them to him. After that we avenged our earlier loss to the Eastlake Wolves, then beat the two dogs of our league, Redmond and Lake Washington. Our overall record was a mediocre 8–6, but in the league we were 8–3, and we still had two games left against first-place Garfield.

9. You put together a winning streak like that, and the locker room should be a wild place. Guys singing, towels snapping, water splashing everywhere. But the energy in our locker room wasn’t that much greater than when we’d been losing. Sure, guys congratulated each other, said “Good game” and all that. But they dressed quickly and left in little groups of two and three.

10. On the day of our first game against Garfield, I was sitting alone eating a grilled cheese sandwich and soup in the cafeteria. Luke spotted me and came over. “You mind if I sit here?”
“No problem,” I said, glad for the company. We talked about the food, the game coming up, school. I wanted to relax, have it be the way it was early in the year, but there was a tightness to his jaw that made me uncomfortable. He had something to say, something I wasn’t going to like. He finished off his milk shake and put the cup down on the table. “We can’t keep winning this way, you know.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, even though I knew.

He tipped the empty cup back and forth. “Come on, Nick. The other coaches aren’t stupid. They read the papers, check the box scores, scout the games. It’s Trent and you, and the rest of us just run up and down the court. That works against lousy teams, but a great team like Garfield will shut one or both of you down, and that’ll be that.”

“It hasn’t happened yet,” I said.

“It will. We’re not a real team, Nick.”

His words hung there for a moment, like a ball hanging on the rim. I swallowed. “Okay. If you get open, I’ll get you the ball. The same thing with Darren, with everybody.”

Luke stuck his hand out across the table. I reached out and shook it. Then he left.

I finished my lunch alone. The tomato soup was watery, the milk was warm, and the grilled cheese looked and tasted like yellow rubber. It was the best-tasting lunch I’d had in weeks.

8. According to the excerpt, what is the flaw in Nick’s style of play?
A. He relies too heavily on Trent.
B. He does not play aggressively enough.
C. He focuses too much on what O’Leary says.
D. He does not have enough confidence in himself.

9. What is the main conflict in the excerpt?
A. The team is not working well together.
B. The team is losing interest in basketball.
C. The team is not happy with their schedule.
D. The team is under pressure to keep winning.

10. In the excerpt, what is the main effect of using the first person point of view?
A. The reader can understand the motivation of the team.
B. The reader can imagine the sights and sounds of basketball.
C. The reader can understand the narrator’s thoughts and feelings.
D. The reader can observe the narrator’s relationship with his coach.

11. Which of the following is a compound sentence?
A. “There is nothing I like more than creating in the open court, and Trent had become a dream finisher.”
B. “But the energy in our locker room wasn’t that much greater than when we’d been losing.”
C. “On the day of our first game against Garfield, I was sitting alone eating a grilled cheese sandwich and soup in the cafeteria.”
D. “He finished off his milk shake and put the cup down on the table.”
Question 12 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 12 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

Based on the excerpt, explain how Nick changes. Support your answer with relevant and specific details from the excerpt.
### Grade 8 English Language Arts

#### Reading Comprehension

#### Spring 2014 Released Items:

**Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
<th>Reporting Category</th>
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<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.*
Grade 8 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2014 Unreleased Common Items:
Reporting Categories and Standards

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