



MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF  
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY  
**EDUCATION**

*Release of Spring 2021  
MCAS Test Items*

*from the*

*Grade 3 English Language Arts  
Paper-Based Test*

**June 2021**

**Massachusetts Department of  
Elementary and Secondary Education**



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# Overview of Grade 3 English Language Arts Test

The spring 2021 grade 3 English Language Arts (ELA) test was a next-generation assessment that was administered in two primary formats: a computer-based version and a paper-based version. The vast majority of students took the computer-based test. The paper-based test was offered as an accommodation for students with disabilities who are unable to use a computer, as well as for English learners who are new to the country and are unfamiliar with technology.

Most of the operational items on the grade 3 ELA test were the same, regardless of whether a student took the computer-based version or the paper-based version. In places where a technology-enhanced item was used on the computer-based test, an adapted version of the item was created for use on the paper test. These adapted paper items were multiple-choice or multiple-select items that tested the same ELA content and assessed the same standard as the technology-enhanced item.

**This document displays released items from the paper-based test**, along with associated reading passages.

Released items from the computer-based test are available on the MCAS Resource Center website at

[mcas.pearsonsupport.com/released-items](https://mcas.pearsonsupport.com/released-items).

## Test Sessions and Content Overview

The grade 3 ELA test was made up of two 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 and multiple-select items, in which students select the correct answer(s) from among several answer options.

In 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department reduced testing time for students in grades 3–8 through a session sampling approach, in which each student took only a portion of each MCAS assessment. Instead of taking two sessions in each subject, individual students took one session each.

## Standards and Reporting Categories

The grade 3 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* (2017), listed below.

- Reading
- Writing
- Language

The *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy* is available on the Department website at [www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html](https://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 document 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 both ELA test sessions, the use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries was allowed for current and former English learner students only. No other reference materials were allowed during any ELA test session.

# Grade 3 English Language Arts

This session contains 18 questions.

## Directions

Read each passage and question carefully. Then answer each question as well as you can. You must record all answers in this Test & Answer Booklet.

For most questions, you will mark your answers by filling in the circles in your Test & 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.

Some questions will ask you to write a response. Write your response in the space provided. Only responses written within the provided space will be scored.

Read the story about a mother bear and her two cubs, Natook and Kimwa, who are brother and sister. Then answer the questions that follow.

### from *Trouble in a Fur Coat*

by Janette Oke

- 1 "Hmmm," I sighed. I stretched and rolled over. It felt as if I had been asleep forever. It was hard to pry my eyes open, but I could hear something moving next to me. I wanted to see what was going on.
- 2 Mother was up on her feet, stretching her legs. Her sharp ears were perked forward to catch the faintest sound. I heard other sounds, too.
- 3 Then my mother did the strangest thing. With one large, clawed paw, she reached out and swatted at the wall before her. It moved. Suddenly, there was a small opening at the end of our den. Bushes and leaves had been shoved aside.
- 4 Mother stopped and sniffed and listened again. Then she went to work once more. She was working to make the opening even larger.
- 5 For a moment, my eyes could not stand the sudden brightness. I looked away, blinking. It was then that I noticed my sister.
- 6 Kimwa was curled up in a corner, her back against the dirt wall. Her eyes were huge in her small face, and she looked scared. That was when I giggled.
- 7 "Shhh" came Mother's sharp voice. I bit my tongue and scurried out of her reach.
- 8 Mother waited for a few moments, sniffing and listening. I backed into one corner, and my little sister crouched in another. We weren't sure what was going on.
- 9 Then Mother slowly stepped forward. Her big head rolled from side to side. Her nose lifted even higher. She shifted her weight slightly from one foot to another. After a long time, she stepped back in the den.
- 10 "It's time," she said softly.  

\* \* \*
- 11 I could not believe my eyes. Just outside of our den was the most incredible sight one could imagine. For a moment I thought I was dreaming. Then I heard Kimwa let out her breath in a long, deep sigh as she said, "Oooh." And I knew that what I was seeing must be real.



- 12 "Oooh," Kimwa said again. "Look!"
- 13 I was too busy looking myself to pay attention to Kimwa. But I wanted to share the excitement with her. I stood next to her, and together we let our eyes adjust to the new world before us.
- 14 Large things reached right up to the sky, stretching out this way and that. Others were dressed in green, prickly fur. All about us was a jumble of tangled things—little ones, big ones, bushy ones, skinny ones. I couldn't really tell where one stopped and the next started.
- 15 Then there were big and little lumps and mounds. Hard ones and softer ones, brown ones and gray ones. And beyond all that, the ground began to slope away, deeper and deeper. All the way along the slope were more tall and short things and more lumps and mounds.
- 16 I let my gaze travel off farther and farther. I saw an upward slope, and then another, and another. It seemed to go on forever.
- 17 I could stand it no longer. "Mother," I cried, tugging on one big shaggy paw. "What is it all?"
- 18 "Such impatience," said Mother, but she was smiling.
- 19 "Tell us. Tell us," squealed Kimwa. I realized that she was as excited as I was.
- 20 Mother smiled again. "You'll learn all about it in time."

\* \* \*

- 21 We learned a lot that first morning. But it was later that day that Kimwa and I got some real lessons in life.
- 22 Mother was leading us at a fast pace.
- 23 “Where are we going?” I asked when I could catch my breath.
- 24 “To the stream,” answered Mother.
- 25 “What’s a stream?” puffed Kimwa, having as much trouble as I was trying to keep up.
- 26 “You’ll see,” said Mother, and we had to be content with that.
- 27 It was not easy making our way through the thick bushes and rocks. Both Kimwa and I puffed and panted as we hurried to keep up.
- 28 Mother seemed to be in a hurry to get somewhere. As we rushed on, there was so much that I wanted to know about. But I didn’t have the time or the breath to ask her.
- 29 It felt like we had been walking for hours. I was about to collapse when I noticed Mother’s steps slowing. I saw her head lift, and I knew that she was sniffing and listening carefully again.
- 30 Mother grunted then—a happy kind of sound—and dropped back down on all fours. We began to move forward again. Mother always made sure it was safe for us.
- 31 Soon I could hear a new sound. It was strange and low and gurgling. I wondered what kind of animal laughed like that. But it wasn’t an animal at all.
- 32 “What’s that?” I asked in a whisper, not sure if I should be talking.
- 33 “This is the stream,” said Mother. Without waiting a minute more, she walked right into it.
- 34 Kimwa and I stopped in our tracks and stared. Would the strange stream gobble her up?
- 35 But Mother had stopped now, and she lowered her head and began to drink up the stream. She just kept drinking and drinking, and the stream kept flowing with water.
- 36 At last, she stopped and looked at us. “Come,” she urged. “Come try the water.”

## English Language Arts

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- 37 Kimwa lowered her black nose, and I put my first paw in. Kimwa tried to drink, but something went wrong. She jumped, sputtered, then choked and began to cough. I guessed Kimwa didn't care much for the water.
- 38 "Try slowly," Mother said gently. "Little swallows, until you know how to drink."
- 39 Kimwa was still shaking her head and giving little grunting coughs.
- 40 "Like this," said Mother. She lowered her head again to show us how it was done.



- 41 It was my turn now. At first I just pretended to suck in a bit of the water. Then I actually took a sip. It was cold and didn't really have a taste, but it felt good in my mouth. I reached down to take another sip.
- 42 Suddenly, Kimwa came up from behind and gave me a hard push. I fell face first into the cold stream, sputtering and soaked!
- 43 "I'll get you for that, little sister!" I yelled playfully.
- 44 Kimwa and I wound up having a great water fight. Mother stayed off to the side, drinking when she was thirsty. But for Kimwa and me, it turned out the stream was good for more than just drinking.

*Trouble in a Fur Coat* by Janette Oke. Illustrated by Nancy Munger. Copyright © 1990, 2001 by Janette Oke. Reprinted by permission of Bethany House/Baker Publishing Group.



## English Language Arts

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- 1 Read the sentence from paragraph 2 of the story and select the correct meaning of the word **sharp** as it is used in the sentence.

Her sharp ears were perked forward to catch the faintest sound.

- Ⓐ angry and not gentle
- Ⓑ clear and easy to see
- Ⓒ cuts easily
- Ⓓ good at noticing things
- Ⓔ smells strong

Read the sentences from paragraph 7 of the story and select the correct meaning of the word **sharp** as it is used in the sentences.

"Shhh" came Mother's sharp voice. I bit my tongue and scurried out of her reach.

- Ⓐ angry and not gentle
- Ⓑ clear and easy to see
- Ⓒ cuts easily
- Ⓓ good at noticing things
- Ⓔ smells strong

## English Language Arts

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- 2 What is the mother bear doing in paragraphs 4–9?
- Ⓐ deciding if they should leave
  - Ⓑ telling the cubs what to do next
  - Ⓒ warning other animals to stay away
  - Ⓓ showing the cubs how to protect themselves
- 3 Based on paragraphs 8–11, which phrase helps the reader understand the meaning of **incredible** in paragraph 11?
- Ⓐ “. . . weren’t sure what was going on.” (paragraph 8)
  - Ⓑ “Her big head rolled. . . .” (paragraph 9)
  - Ⓒ “. . . could not believe my eyes.” (paragraph 11)
  - Ⓓ “For a moment I thought. . . .” (paragraph 11)

## English Language Arts

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- 4** Read the sentences from paragraph 14 in the box.

Large things reached right up to the sky, stretching out this way and that. Others were dressed in green, prickly fur. All about us was a jumble of tangled things—little ones, big ones, bushy ones, skinny ones.

What is being described in the sentences?

- Ⓐ sun and clouds
  - Ⓑ puddles and stones
  - Ⓒ trees and other plants
  - Ⓓ people and other animals
- 5** In paragraph 16, why does the author use the phrase “another, and another”?
- Ⓐ to show how open the forest is
  - Ⓑ to show how nearby the hills are
  - Ⓒ to show how many hills there are
  - Ⓓ to show how beautiful the forest is

**6** Which sentence **best** states the main idea of the story?

- Ⓐ A mother bear searches for food for her cubs.
- Ⓑ Two cubs begin to explore the outside world.
- Ⓒ A mother bear protects her cubs.
- Ⓓ Two cubs become better friends.

**7** Read paragraph 26 in the box.

“You’ll see,” said Mother, and we had to be content with that.

Based on the story, what does the paragraph show about the cubs?

- Ⓐ The cubs are upset about what else they might experience.
- Ⓑ The cubs feel disappointed about what they have seen so far.
- Ⓒ The cubs know Mother is not going to answer them right away.
- Ⓓ The cubs are afraid Mother is not pleased with all their questions.

**8** Based on paragraph 27, how do the cubs **most likely** feel as they walk through the forest?

- Ⓐ exhausted
- Ⓑ confused
- Ⓒ surprised
- Ⓓ angered

**9 Part A**

How do the cubs **most likely** feel when they first get to the stream?

- Ⓐ cheerful
- Ⓑ nervous
- Ⓒ hopeful
- Ⓓ bored

**Part B**

Which sentence from the story **best** supports the answer to Part A?

- Ⓐ "Soon I could hear a new sound." (paragraph 31)
- Ⓑ "Would the strange stream gobble her up?" (paragraph 34)
- Ⓒ "At last, she stopped and looked at us." (paragraph 36)
- Ⓓ "Kimwa lowered her black nose, and I put my first paw in." (paragraph 37)

- 10 Which sentence from the story **best** describes how the narrator first reacts to the water?
- Ⓐ "Kimwa was still shaking her head and giving little grunting coughs."  
(paragraph 39)
  - Ⓑ "She lowered her head again to show us how it was done." (paragraph 40)
  - Ⓒ "It was cold and didn't really have a taste, but it felt good in my mouth."  
(paragraph 41)
  - Ⓓ "Suddenly, Kimwa came up from behind and gave me a hard push."  
(paragraph 42)

- 11 Which paragraph **best** retells the events of the story in the correct order?
- Ⓐ The bear cubs play in the stream. The bears leave their den to explore the woods. The mother bear takes a long drink of water. The mother bear creates a way out of the den.
  - Ⓑ The mother bear creates a way out of the den. The bears leave their den to explore the woods. The mother bear takes a long drink of water. The bear cubs play in the stream.
  - Ⓒ The bear cubs play in the stream. The mother bear creates a way out of the den. The mother bear takes a long drink of water. The bears leave their den to explore the woods.
  - Ⓓ The bears leave their den to explore the woods. The mother bear creates a way out of the den. The mother bear takes a long drink of water. The bear cubs play in the stream.
  - Ⓔ The mother bear takes a long drink of water. The mother bear creates a way out of the den. The bear cubs play in the stream. The bears leave their den to explore the woods.

## English Language Arts

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For this question, you will write a story based on the passage(s). Write your story in the space provided on the next page. Your writing should:

- Use characters, settings, events, and other details from the passage(s).
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

- 12** Based on *Trouble in a Fur Coat*, write a story that tells what will **most likely** happen next to the mother bear and her cubs. Use what you know about the characters, settings, and events to write your story.

Write your answer on the next page.



*You have a total of one page on which to write your response.*

12

Lined area for writing response.

Read the poem and answer the questions that follow.

### Forgiven

by A. A. Milne

Due to copyright restrictions, the poem "Forgiven" cannot be released to the public over the Internet. The copyright citation is presented below. For further information, contact Student Assessment Services at [mcas@doe.mass.edu](mailto:mcas@doe.mass.edu).

"Forgiven" by A. A. Milne, from *Now We Are Six*. Illustrated by E. H. Shepard. Text copyright © 1927 by E. P. Dutton, renewed copyright © 1955 by A. A. Milne. Illustrations copyright © 1927 by E. H. Shepard. Reprinted by permission of Dutton Children's Books, a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

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## English Language Arts

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- 13** Read line 13 in the box.

As there's lots and lots of beetles which she's certain we could find,

In the line, which two words make up the contraction ***she's***?

- Ⓐ she is
- Ⓑ she sees
- Ⓒ she seems
- Ⓓ she thinks

- 14** Read line 19 in the box.

"A beetle-house and Alexander Beetle coming out!"

Why is the line in quotation marks?

- Ⓐ to show what the beetle is doing
- Ⓑ to show what the speaker is thinking
- Ⓒ to show that the words are part of a title
- Ⓓ to show that the words are being spoken

- 15** Based on lines 20–24, what is **true** about the speaker?
- Ⓐ The speaker believes the beetle knows him.
  - Ⓑ The speaker thinks that the beetle will not be found.
  - Ⓒ The speaker cannot believe the beetle belongs to him.
  - Ⓓ The speaker thinks that the beetle looks the same as others.
- 16** Based on the poem, why does Nanny write “ALEXANDER” on the match-box lid?
- Ⓐ so the beetle can find his home
  - Ⓑ so the beetle can remember his name
  - Ⓒ so she will not let the beetle out again
  - Ⓓ so she will not put another beetle in the box

**17** What is the **most likely** reason the title of the poem is “Forgiven”?

- Ⓐ Nanny forgives the beetle.
- Ⓑ The beetle forgives Nanny.
- Ⓒ Nanny forgives the speaker.
- Ⓓ The speaker forgives Nanny.

**18** Why is “Nanny” capitalized throughout the poem?

- Ⓐ It is a proper noun.
- Ⓑ It is the title of a story.
- Ⓒ It is a compound word.
- Ⓓ It is the first word of a sentence.

**Grade 3 English Language Arts**  
**Spring 2021 Released Operational Items**

<b>PBT Item No.</b>	<b>Page No.</b>	<b>Reporting Category</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Item Type*</b>	<b>Item Description</b>	<b>Correct Answer (SR)**</b>
1	7	<i>Language</i>	L.3.4	SR	Choose the correct meanings of a multiple-meaning word in context.	D;A
2	8	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.3	SR	Identify a character's actions based on information in the story.	A
3	8	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.4	SR	Identify evidence from the story used to determine the meaning of a word.	C
4	9	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.4	SR	Determine what is being described based on details in the story.	C
5	9	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.4	SR	Determine the meaning of a phrase using context from the story.	C
6	10	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.2	SR	Identify the main idea in the story.	B
7	10	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.3	SR	Identify a description of characters based on details in the story.	C
8	11	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.3	SR	Identify a description of characters' feelings based on details in the story.	A
9	11	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.3	SR	Identify a description of the characters' feelings and choose evidence from the story that best supports the description.	B;B
10	12	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.6	SR	Determine a character's point of view about events in the story.	C
11	13	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.2	SR	Determine the correct order of events in the story.	B
12	14	<i>Language, Writing</i>	L.3.1, L.3.2, L.3.3, W.3.3, W.3.4	ES	Write a narrative that extends the story by describing what might happen next.	
13	18	<i>Language</i>	L.3.2	SR	Identify words that are combined to make a contraction in the poem.	A
14	18	<i>Language</i>	L.3.2	SR	Determine the use of punctuation in the poem.	D
15	19	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.3	SR	Identify the thoughts of the speaker of the poem.	A
16	19	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.1	SR	Determine the reason for a character's action based on details from the poem.	C
17	20	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.2	SR	Identify the meaning of the title of the poem.	D
18	20	<i>Language</i>	L.3.2	SR	Evaluate the use of capitalization in the poem.	A

\* 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.

**Grade 3 English Language Arts**  
**Spring 2021 Unreleased Operational Items**

<b>PBT Item No.</b>	<b>Reporting Category</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Item Type*</b>	<b>Item Description</b>
19	<i>Language</i>	L.3.1	SR	Determine the part of speech of a word used in the story.
20	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.8	SR	Select details from the story to demonstrate understanding of a cause-effect relationship.
21	<i>Language</i>	L.3.3	SR	Determine the effect of figurative language used in the article.
22	<i>Language</i>	L.3.2	SR	Determine the purpose of punctuation used in a word from the article.
23	<i>Language</i>	L.3.3	SR	Analyze the use of punctuation in a heading in the article.
24	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.5	SR	Determine where additional information should be included in the article.
25	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.3	SR	Sequence events based on information from the article.
26	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.3	SR	Identify how an object changes based on information from the article.
27	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.1	SR	Use information from the article to demonstrate understanding.
28	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.1	SR	Identify information and choose supporting evidence from the article.
29	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.9	SR	Compare information about a topic found in the article and in the story.
30	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.9	CR	Write a paragraph that compares the main ideas of the article and the story; include important details from both passages.

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