



MASSACHUSETTS

Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education

*Release of Spring 2026
MCAS Test Items from the
Grade 3 English Language Arts
Paper-Based Test*

Spring 2026

**Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education**



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Overview of Grade 3 English Language Arts Test

The spring 2026 grade 3 English Language Arts (ELA) test was administered in two formats: a computer-based version and a paper-based version. Most students took the computer-based test. The paper-based test was offered as an accommodation for eligible students who were unable to use a computer. More information can be found on the MCAS Test Administration Resources page at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/admin.html.

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.onlinehelp.cognia.org/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.

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.

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 authorized bilingual word-to-word dictionaries and glossaries was allowed for students who are currently or were ever reported as English learners. No other reference materials were allowed during any ELA test session.

Grade 3 English Language Arts

This session contains 19 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 passage about a boy named Ray who lives with his grandfather in the city. Then answer the questions that follow.

The Accident

by Cynthia Leitich Smith

- 1 Grampa Halfmoon's hand felt sure on Ray's shoulder, guiding him down the cracked sidewalk from school toward their redbrick bungalow. That afternoon the bus stop looked run down, the trash-can band banged *rat-a-rat-a-ka-plop*, and Annie's Children's Bookstore was closed for remodeling. But Ray didn't mind. He was too excited.
- 2 "It's an art contest," he told Grampa. "For all the kids in the city. The three big winners' pictures are gonna be hung up in the window of a store on State Street."
- 3 Grampa grinned. "I guess that means you'll be entering."
- 4 "Maybe I'll win a blue ribbon," Ray said. "We could take the El train¹ to see my picture and . . . we could grab some hot dogs." . . .
- 5 Ray held out his hand to seal the deal, and Grampa shook it.
- 6 After finishing up his math homework, Ray decided it was time to paint.
- 7 Bandit the ferret² perched on Ray's shoulder, watching him dip the paintbrush in a [paper] cup of clear water. Ray had placed one of Grampa Halfmoon's moccasins³ on the bookshelf beside his antique desk. He stared at it a few minutes and then moved the brush wand to cover the bristles with brown paint.
- 8 Before long Ray had created a blob on his paper.
- 9 He squinted at it this way and that, wondering if the blob could pass for a shoe.
- 10 Just then Grampa shuffled into the room in his slippers and plaid pajamas. Not noticing his own moccasin, he remarked, "My, that's sure a fine potato."

¹ El train—a train with tracks above street level

² ferret—a small animal with a long tail

³ moccasins—soft shoes

English Language Arts

- 11 Ray turned off his brass desk lamp, scrambled under his woolly blanket, and tried not to show his hurt feelings. He knew Grampa would've never said anything to make him feel bad on purpose. . . .
- 12 After Grampa had kissed his forehead and shuffled out, Ray listened to the rain whisper against his stained-glass window.
- 13 It's okay, he thought. I've got until Friday.
- 14 The next day after supper, Bandit hid a stinky sock behind the bookshelves as Ray sharpened his pencil, set out a cup of water, and placed a fresh sheet of paper on his antique desk.
- 15 Searching for inspiration, Ray spotted a book titled *Dinosaur*. He flipped through until finding a photo he liked and then carefully sketched a fierce *T. rex*. It didn't quite look like the skeleton shown in the book, but Ray could tell what it was.
- 16 That's no potato, he thought, dipping the bristles of the paintbrush into the water.
- 17 Ray's book said that scientists thought dinosaurs came in bright colors, like the lizards of today. The idea struck Ray as a good one, and he traced the pencil outline in bright orange paint.
- 18 Better, Ray thought. I'm getting better at this.
- 19 Excited, Ray plopped the brush back in the [paper] cup, turning the water bright orange. Then he rolled the bristles in red paint to fill in the *T. rex's* form. The second his brush hit the paper, Ray knew he'd made a mistake—too much water.
- 20 Red paint puddled in the middle of the dino body, then streamed off in all directions. Using his brush, Ray tried to direct the flow, but it was no use. His fierce *T. rex* had bloomed into a sunny marigold. He studied the flower as it dried.
- 21 Kind of pretty, Ray thought, but not what I was going for.
- 22 On Wednesday night, Ray set up another [paper] cup of water and another fresh sheet of paper. Then he sketched a fiery sun, a towering oak, and a redbrick bungalow with a stained-glass window on one side and smoke coming out of the chimney.
- 23 When he dipped his paintbrush into the cup, Ray carefully used just the right amount of water. He cleaned the bristles between colors, stopping to change the water in his cup twice. Finally satisfied, Ray let the masterpiece dry under his brass desk lamp.

English Language Arts

- 24 Grampa shuffled in, whistling long and low. "You sure outdid yourself there. If those judges don't put a blue ribbon on that one, they don't know nothing. But you're running late for bedtime. So you get yourself into bed, and I'll be your cleanup crew."
- 25 As Grampa tucked Ray beneath his woolly blanket, Bandit climbed up on the antique desk to see the masterpiece for himself. As he scurried toward the lamp, Bandit's tail brushed against the [paper] cup.
- 26 It toppled, rolling, spilling, splashing, plummeting off the desk and onto the hardwood floor below.
- 27 Murky water flooded Ray's newly finished painting. Colors swirled and darkened. The paper was soaked through. The fiery sun, the redbrick house, and the towering oak tree vanished into a big, wet, splotchy, ugly mess.
- 28 "Bandit!" Ray exclaimed as the culprit escaped to the bookshelves.
- 29 Grampa Halfmoon took off to the kitchen for paper towels, but Ray just sat up in bed and shook his head. When Grampa got back, Ray said, "Now I'll never win."
- 30 "What's that?" Grampa Halfmoon asked, wiping up the water that had spilled onto Ray's desktop.
- 31 Ray pulled his blanket up to his chin. "I've got only one day left. I give up."
- 32 Ray half expected Grampa Halfmoon to give him a pep talk.
- 33 Instead Grampa answered, "Too bad. I sure was looking forward to that hot dog, win or lose. But I guess we won't be going downtown at all then."
- 34 On Thursday night, Ray carried Bandit into the family room, filled a [paper] cup with water, returned to his own bedroom, and locked the door behind him.
- 35 I've come this far, Ray thought. I might as well see it through. He wanted that hot dog, and he didn't want to disappoint Grampa.
- 36 As he set the cup down on his antique desk, rain began to whisper against the stained-glass window. The *shhhing* sound made Ray settle down a bit and rethink how he wanted to go about putting together his contest entry.
- 37 He stared at his ruined masterpiece, still sitting in the middle of his desk.
- 38 The night before, Grampa just hadn't had the heart to throw it out.

English Language Arts

- 39 Amid the dried brown puddle, Ray could see a bit of the gold of the sun, the red of the brick, and the green of the leaves. He set the painting to one side, then got out a fresh piece of paper. He glanced around the room and noticed that Grampa's moccasin was still perched on his bookshelf.
- 40 For a long time, his gaze shifted between the blank page and the ruined picture.
- 41 Ray thought back to how he'd wanted to do a painting of one of Grampa's moccasins. That way, he figured, it'd kind of be like the picture belonged to both of us.
- 42 Then he took a sip of water from his [paper] cup and began digging through his desk drawer for the rounded scissors and a bottle of glue.
- 43 I'm not going to show Grampa when I'm done, Ray thought. I'll let it be a surprise.

* * *

- 44 Two weeks later, Ray and Grampa took the rattling El train to State Street, stopped by a hot dog stand for lunch, and then joined the sidewalk crowd gawking at the city's best kids' art, proudly displayed in a fancy-schmancy department store window.
- 45 Ray's entry wasn't a painting. It was a collage.⁴
- 46 That last night before the deadline, Ray had turned his ruined painting into something else. He'd used his scissors to cut the painting into geometric shapes. With his pencil, he'd outlined the shape of one of Grampa Halfmoon's moccasins. Then he'd filled in the outline with multicolored shapes to create shadows and textures, to show how warm and strong the moccasin was, how it could make Grampa feel like home. A dab of glue here and there, and suddenly, Ray had created his entry.
- 47 But that's not what made Ray smile. It was the way Grampa pointed and yelled to the crowd, "That's my shoe! That's my shoe!"
- 48 Everybody in the crowd looked down at Grampa's boots, and they didn't know what he was yelling about. But Ray did. Even though his ribbon read "third place," he felt like a first-place winner.

⁴ collage—a type of artwork made by pasting pieces of paper together to make an image

English Language Arts

- 1** Where does the passage **mainly** take place?
- Ⓐ on the El train
 - Ⓑ in Ray's home
 - Ⓒ on State Street
 - Ⓓ at Ray's school
- 2** In paragraph 1, what is the meaning of the prefix **re-** in the word **remodeling**?
- Ⓐ after
 - Ⓑ again
 - Ⓒ under
 - Ⓓ without
- 3** What do paragraphs 2 and 3 **mainly** show about Grampa?
- Ⓐ He likes going for walks with Ray.
 - Ⓑ He likes visiting the bookstore with Ray.
 - Ⓒ He knows that Ray needs an idea for his drawing.
 - Ⓓ He knows that Ray wants to participate in the contest.

English Language Arts

4 What do paragraphs 8 and 9 **mainly** show about the painting?

- Ⓐ It is slow to dry.
- Ⓑ Its colors are bright.
- Ⓒ It is difficult to recognize.
- Ⓓ Its patterns are interesting.

5 Determine whether **each** detail from the passage is an example of literal language or figurative language.

“. . . listened to the rain whisper against his stained-glass window.”
(paragraph 12)

- Ⓐ literal language
- Ⓑ figurative language

“. . . paper on his antique desk.” (paragraph 14)

- Ⓐ literal language
- Ⓑ figurative language

“. . . bristles of the paintbrush into the water.” (paragraph 16)

- Ⓐ literal language
- Ⓑ figurative language

English Language Arts

- 6 What is the **most likely** reason the author includes paragraph 26 in the passage?
- Ⓐ to state the theme
 - Ⓑ to introduce a problem
 - Ⓒ to show the conclusion
 - Ⓓ to describe a character
- 7 Based on the passage, what lesson does Ray **most likely** learn in paragraphs 34 and 35?
- Ⓐ It is important to treat others fairly.
 - Ⓑ It is important to be honest with others.
 - Ⓒ It is important to keep trying to reach your goal.
 - Ⓓ It is important to spend time listening to your friends.
- 8 Read the sentence from paragraph 39 in the box.

He glanced around the room and noticed that Grampa’s moccasin was still perched on his bookshelf.

Based on the sentence, what is the purpose of the punctuation used in **Grampa’s**?

- Ⓐ to show ownership
- Ⓑ to show excitement
- Ⓒ to ask a simple question
- Ⓓ to indicate a missing word

English Language Arts

- 9 Based on the passage, what is the **main** purpose of paragraph 40?
- Ⓐ to show how Ray is getting better at his artwork
 - Ⓑ to explain that Ray is planning to enter another art contest
 - Ⓒ to show that Ray is thinking about next steps for his artwork
 - Ⓓ to describe how Ray is gathering materials for another art contest
- 10 Based on paragraph 44, what is the **most likely** meaning of the word ***gawking*** as it is used in the paragraph?
- Ⓐ staring
 - Ⓑ playing
 - Ⓒ moving
 - Ⓓ laughing

English Language Arts

- 11** Determine whether **each** sentence is a main idea or supporting detail in the passage.

Ray prepares artwork for a city contest.

- Ⓐ main idea
- Ⓑ supporting detail

Ray plans to get hot dogs for lunch with Grampa.

- Ⓐ main idea
- Ⓑ supporting detail

Ray looks through a dinosaur book for new ideas.

- Ⓐ main idea
- Ⓑ supporting detail

English Language Arts

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

- **Present and develop a central idea.**
 - **Provide evidence and/or details from the passage(s).**
 - **Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.**
- 12** Based on “The Accident,” write an essay that explains how Ray’s feelings change throughout the passage. Be sure to use details from the passage to develop your essay.

Write your answer on the the next page.

Read the passage about Hannah and her move to a new town. Then answer the questions that follow.

Bitter and Sweet

by Sandra V. Feder

- 1 Hannah didn't want to move.
- 2 She loved her house with the wide porch, her neighborhood with the flat streets that were perfect for bike riding, and her school with all her friends.
- 3 But her father had a job in a new town.
- 4 "Almost every change has some hard parts and some nice parts," her grandmother said when Hannah called to tell her the news. "I was scared when my family left the old country, but we made a new life and I made new friends. Definitely some bitter but even more sweet."
- 5 Hannah tried to think about the good things that the move might bring. She tried, like her grandmother, to think of sweetness. But as her family prepared to leave, she could only feel the bitter.
- 6 She cried salty tears when she hugged her friends goodbye and when her teacher took all her artwork down from the classroom walls.
- 7 Her tummy felt tight as she helped her parents pack up her room and as she saw the boxes put onto the big truck.
- 8 "Some bitter but even more sweet," she heard her grandmother saying.
- 9 "Grandma must be wrong," Hannah thought as she watched the town where she was born disappear from sight. "There's nothing sweet about leaving everything I know."
- 10 Soon the family was in their new home in their new town.
- 11 Hannah's bed didn't fit neatly by the window. Her artwork looked lonely on the walls.
- 12 The new house was on a hill, which was not easy for bike riding, and the porch was smaller.
- 13 "Only the bitter," Hannah said.

English Language Arts

- 14 When their first week neared its end, Hannah watched her mother light the Shabbat¹ candles. She was surprised by how nice the new house looked in the soft light.
- 15 As she tasted the sweet grape juice, she remembered her grandmother's words—some bitter and some sweet.
- 16 But still Hannah wondered whether she would ever feel the sweet the same way that she had before.
- 17 The next morning, there was a knock on the door. A girl who appeared to be about Hannah's age stood on the narrow porch holding a small bag.
- 18 "Hi, I'm Maya," she said, handing Hannah the bag. "I live down the street."
- 19 Hannah looked inside and saw cocoa powder.
- 20 "It makes the best hot chocolate," Maya promised as she waved goodbye.
- 21 "Thank you," Hannah called, feeling better than she had in a long time as she watched Maya head home.
- 22 Hannah went inside to heat up some milk.
- 23 She carefully added a tablespoon of cocoa powder and stirred until the mixture was silky smooth.
- 24 Then she took a big, rich sip.
- 25 "Ptooy!" The brown liquid flew out of her mouth. "It's bitter!" Hannah cried. "Just like everything else."
- 26 The next day at school, Hannah tried to avoid Maya. But at recess, Maya ran right up to her.
- 27 "I forgot to tell you," Maya said. "You have to add sugar to the cocoa otherwise it's—"
- 28 "—bitter," Hannah said, finishing Maya's sentence.
- 29 Hannah raced home after school to try again. She heated the milk and added the cocoa, but this time she also put in a big, heaping tablespoon of sugar.

¹ Shabbat—a weekly day of rest and celebration in the Jewish faith

English Language Arts

- 30 "Mmm," she said, taking a sip. It wasn't bitter anymore, but still something was missing. Hannah looked out the window.
- 31 She ran out the door, biked down the hill and knocked on Maya's door.
- 32 "Want to come over for hot cocoa?"² she asked.
- 33 "Sure," Maya replied. "Let's drink it on your porch. You have such a nice one."
- 34 That night Hannah called her grandmother.
- 35 "I thought it was only bitter here," Hannah said.
- 36 "And did you find the sweet?" her grandmother asked.
- 37 "Oh, Grandma," Hannah said. "You can't just find it. You have to add it yourself."

² hot cocoa—hot chocolate

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English Language Arts

- 13** What does paragraph 4 suggest about Hannah’s grandmother?
- Ⓐ She wants to ask Hannah questions about her day.
 - Ⓑ She wants to comfort Hannah by describing her past.
 - Ⓒ She believes Hannah would enjoy playing with friends.
 - Ⓓ She believes Hannah would prefer to live near family members.

- 14** Read the sentence from paragraph 5 in the box.

Hannah tried to think about the good things that the move might bring.

Which word in the sentence is an **adjective**?

- Ⓐ about
 - Ⓑ good
 - Ⓒ that
 - Ⓓ bring
- 15** Which paragraph from the passage **best** shows a change in Hannah’s thoughts about the move?
- Ⓐ paragraph 11
 - Ⓑ paragraph 12
 - Ⓒ paragraph 13
 - Ⓓ paragraph 14

English Language Arts

16 Based on paragraphs 17–21, which word **best** describes Maya?

- Ⓐ quiet
- Ⓑ funny
- Ⓒ clever
- Ⓓ friendly

17 Read the sentence from paragraph 29 in the box.

She heated the milk and added the cocoa, but this time she also put in a big, heaping tablespoon of sugar.

Which word from the sentence **best** helps the reader understand the meaning of the word **heaping**?

- Ⓐ time
- Ⓑ put
- Ⓒ big
- Ⓓ sugar

English Language Arts

- 18** Based on the passage, determine whether Hannah thinks **each** event is bitter or sweet.

telling her friends at school goodbye

- Ⓐ bitter
- Ⓑ sweet

seeing her new house in the candlelight

- Ⓐ bitter
- Ⓑ sweet

watching her teacher take down her artwork

- Ⓐ bitter
- Ⓑ sweet

- 19** Based on paragraphs 30–33, what does Hannah think is missing?

- Ⓐ a friend to drink the hot cocoa with
- Ⓑ a larger container to keep the hot cocoa in
- Ⓒ a spoonful of sugar to make the hot cocoa sweet
- Ⓓ a phone call to tell her grandmother about the hot cocoa

Grade 3 English Language Arts Spring 2026 Released Operational Items

PBT Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Item Type*	Item Description	Correct Answer (SR)**
1	7	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.1	SR	Identify the setting of the passage.	B
2	7	<i>Language</i>	L.3.4	SR	Identify the meaning of a prefix as used in a word from the passage.	B
3	7	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.3	SR	Identify a description of a character based on details from the passage.	D
4	8	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.1	SR	Determine how specific paragraphs support details from the passage.	C
5	8	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.4	SR	Distinguish between literal and figurative language in the passage.	B;A;A
6	9	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.5	SR	Identify the purpose of a paragraph in the passage.	B
7	9	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.2	SR	Identify the lesson a character learns in the passage.	C
8	9	<i>Language</i>	L.3.2	SR	Determine the purpose of punctuation used in a sentence from the passage.	A
9	10	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.5	SR	Identify the purpose of a paragraph in the passage.	C
10	10	<i>Language</i>	L.3.4	SR	Determine the meaning of a word in context.	A
11	11	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.2	SR	Distinguish between main idea and supporting details from the passage.	A;B;B
12	12	<i>Language, Writing</i>	L.3.1, L.3.2, L.3.3, W.3.2, W.3.4	ES	Write an essay that explains how a character's feelings change throughout the passage; use details from the passage to develop the essay.	
13	17	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.3	SR	Determine a character's thoughts based on details from the passage.	B
14	17	<i>Language</i>	L.3.1	SR	Determine the part of speech of a word used in the passage.	B
15	17	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.3	SR	Identify the paragraph from the passage that shows a change in a character's thoughts.	D
16	18	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.3	SR	Identify the word that best describes the character based on details from the passage.	D
17	18	<i>Language</i>	L.3.4	SR	Identify the word that best helps to determine the meaning of a word in context.	C
18	19	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.3	SR	Determine what a character thinks based on events from the passage.	A;B;A
19	19	<i>Reading</i>	RL.3.1	SR	Determine what is suggested about characters using details from the passage.	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 2026 Unreleased Operational Items

PBT Item No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Item Type*	Item Description
20	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.6	SR	Determine the reason the author includes information in a section of the passage.
21	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.6	SR	Determine the reason the author includes a particular sentence in the passage.
22	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.4	SR	Determine the meaning of a word in context.
23	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.4	SR	Determine the meaning of a word in a paragraph.
24	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.1	SR	Use information from the passage to support a particular idea.
25	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.7	SR	Identify how a text feature supports information from the passage.
26	<i>Language</i>	L.3.5	SR	Distinguish between figurative and literal language in the passage.
27	<i>Language</i>	L.3.1	SR	Determine the part of speech of a word used in the passage.
28	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.3	SR	Determine the correct sequence of steps in a process described in the passage.
29	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.3	SR	Determine the reason for an individual's action in the passage.
30	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.8	SR	Identify how a particular section of the passage is organized.
31	<i>Reading</i>	RI.3.5	CR	Write a paragraph that explains how the title connects to the ideas from the passage; use important information from the passage to support the response.

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