



MASSACHUSETTS

Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education

*Release of Spring 2026
MCAS Test Items from the
Grade 8 English Language Arts
Paper-Based Test*

**Spring 2026
Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education**



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This document was prepared by the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Pedro Martinez
Commissioner

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Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
135 Santilli Highway, Everett, MA 02149-1950
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370
www.doe.mass.edu



Overview of Grade 8 English Language Arts Test

The spring 2026 grade 8 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 8 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 8 ELA test was made up of two separate test sessions. Each session included reading passages, followed by selected-response questions 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 8 ELA test was based on grades 6–12 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 8 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.

The novel *Shane* takes place in the American West in 1889 during a time when cattle drivers wanted to expand their herds across ranch land. In this excerpt, the narrator, a boy named Bob who lives on land claimed by his family, sees a stranger coming to the ranch. Read the excerpt and then answer the questions that follow.

from *Shane*

by Jack Schaefer

- 1 He rode into our valley in the summer of '89. I was a kid then, barely topping the backboard of father's old chuck-wagon. I was on the upper rail of our small corral,¹ soaking in the late afternoon sun, when I saw him far down the road where it swung into the valley from the open plain beyond.
- 2 In that clear Wyoming air I could see him plainly, though he was still several miles away. There seemed nothing remarkable about him, just another stray horseman riding up the road toward the cluster of frame buildings that was our town. Then I saw a pair of cowhands, loping past him, stop and stare after him with a curious intentness.
- 3 He came steadily on, straight through the town without slackening pace, until he reached the fork a half-mile below our place. One branch turned left across the river ford and on to Luke Fletcher's big spread. The other bore ahead along the right bank where we homesteaders had pegged our claims in a row up the valley. He hesitated briefly, studying the choice, and moved again steadily on our side.
- 4 As he came near, what impressed me first was his clothes. He wore dark trousers of some serge² material tucked into tall boots and held at the waist by a wide belt, both of a soft black leather tooled in intricate design. A coat of the same dark material as the trousers was neatly folded and strapped to his saddle-roll. His shirt was finespun linen, rich brown in color. The handkerchief knotted loosely around his throat was black silk. His hat was not the familiar Stetson, not the familiar gray or muddy tan. It was a plain black, soft in texture, unlike any hat I had ever seen, with a creased crown and a wide curling brim swept down in front to shield the face.

¹ corral—a pen or holding area for livestock, such as cows or horses

² serge—a sturdy, woven fabric

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- 5 All trace of newness was long since gone from these things. The dust of distance was beaten into them. They were worn and stained and several neat patches showed on the shirt. Yet a kind of magnificence remained and with it a hint of men and manners alien³ to my limited boy's experience.
- 6 Then I forgot the clothes in the impact of the man himself. He was not much above medium height, almost slight in build. He would have looked frail alongside father's square, solid bulk. But even I could read the endurance in the lines of that dark figure and the quiet power in its effortless, unthinking adjustment to every movement of the tired horse.
- 7 He was clean-shaven and his face was lean and hard and burned from high forehead to firm, tapering chin. His eyes seemed hooded in the shadow of the hat's brim. He came closer, and I could see that this was because the brows were drawn in a frown of fixed and habitual alertness. Beneath them the eyes were endlessly searching from side to side and forward, checking off every item in view, missing nothing. As I noticed this, a sudden chill, I could not have told why, struck through me there in the warm and open sun.
- 8 He rode easily, relaxed in the saddle, leaning his weight lazily into the stirrups. Yet even in this easiness was a suggestion of tension. It was the easiness of a coiled spring, of a trap set.
- 9 He drew rein⁴ not twenty feet from me. His glance hit me, dismissed me, flicked over our place. This was not much, if you were thinking in terms of size and scope. But what there was was good. You could trust father for that. The corral, big enough for about thirty head if you crowded them in, was railed right to true sunk posts. The pasture behind, taking in nearly half of our claim, was fenced tight. The barn was small, but it was solid. . . .
- 10 The stranger took it all in, sitting there easily in the saddle. I saw his eyes slow on the flowers mother had planted by the porch steps, then come to rest on our shiny new pump and the trough beside it. They shifted back to me, and again, without knowing why, I felt that sudden chill. But his voice was gentle and he spoke like a man schooled in patience.

³ alien—unfamiliar

⁴ drew rein—slowed the horse

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- 11 "I'd appreciate a chance at the pump for myself and the horse."
- 12 I was trying to frame a reply and choking on it, when I realized that he was not speaking to me but past me. Father had come up behind me and was leaning against the gate to the corral.
- 13 "Use all the water you want, stranger."
- 14 Father and I watched him dismount in a single flowing tilt of his body and lead the horse over to the trough. He pumped it almost full and let the horse sink its nose in the cool water before he picked up the dipper for himself.
- 15 He took off his hat and slapped the dust out of it and hung it on a corner of the trough. With his hands he brushed the dust from his clothes. With a piece of rag pulled from his saddle-roll he carefully wiped his boots. He untied the handkerchief from around his neck and rolled his sleeves and dipped his arms in the trough, rubbing thoroughly and splashing water over his face. He shook his hands dry and used the handkerchief to remove the last drops from his face. Taking a comb from his shirt pocket, he smoothed back his long dark hair. All his movements were deft and sure, and with a quick precision he flipped down his sleeves, reknotted the handkerchief, and picked up his hat.
- 16 Then, holding it in his hand, he spun about and strode directly toward the house. He bent low and snapped the stem of one of mother's petunias and tucked this into the hatband. In another moment the hat was on his head, brim swept down in swift, unconscious gesture, and he was swinging gracefully into the saddle and starting toward the road.
- 17 I was fascinated. None of the men I knew were proud like that about their appearance. In that short time the kind of magnificence I had noticed had emerged into plainer view. It was in the very air of him. Everything about him showed the effects of long use and hard use, but showed too the strength of quality and competence. There was no chill on me now. Already I was imagining myself in hat and belt and boots like those.
- 18 He stopped the horse and looked down at us. He was refreshed and I would have sworn the tiny wrinkles around his eyes were what with him would be a smile. His eyes were not restless when he looked at you like this. They were still and steady and you knew the man's whole attention was concentrated on you even in the casual glance.
- 19 "Thank you," he said in his gentle voice and was turning into the road, back to us, before father spoke in his slow, deliberate way.

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- 20 "Don't be in such a hurry, stranger."
- 21 I had to hold tight to the rail or I would have fallen backwards into the corral. At the first sound of father's voice, the man and the horse, like a single being, had wheeled to face us, the man's eyes boring at father, bright and deep in the shadow of the hat's brim. I was shivering, struck through once more. Something intangible and cold and terrifying was there in the air between us.
- 22 I stared in wonder as father and the stranger looked at each other a long moment, measuring each other in an unspoken fraternity of adult knowledge beyond my reach. Then the warm sunlight was flooding over us, for father was smiling and he was speaking with the drawling emphasis that meant he had made up his mind.
- 23 "I said don't be in such a hurry, stranger. Food will be on the table soon and you can bed down here tonight."
- 24 The stranger nodded quietly as if he too had made up his mind. "That's mighty thoughtful of you," he said and swung down and came toward us, leading his horse. Father slipped into step beside him and we all headed for the barn.
- 25 "My name's Starrett," said father. "Joe Starrett. This here," waving at me, "is Robert MacPherson Starrett. Too much name for a boy. I make it Bob."
- 26 The stranger nodded again. "Call me Shane," he said. Then to me: "Bob it is. You were watching me for quite a spell coming up the road."
- 27 It was not a question. It was a simple statement. "Yes . . ." I stammered. "Yes. I was."
- 28 "Right," he said. "I like that. A man who watches what's going on around him will make his mark."
- 29 A man who watches . . . The glow of it held me as he took care of his horse, and I fussed around, hanging up his saddle, forking over some hay, getting in his way and my own in my eagerness. He let me slip the bridle off and the horse, bigger and more powerful than I had thought now that I was close beside it, put its head down patiently for me and stood quietly while I helped him curry away the caked dust. . . .
- 30 We sat down to supper and a good one. Mother's eyes sparkled as our visitor kept pace with father and me. Then we all leaned back and while I listened the talk ran on almost like old friends around a familiar table. But I could sense that it was following a pattern. Father was trying, with mother helping and both of them avoiding direct questions, to get hold
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of facts about this Shane and he was dodging at every turn. He was aware of their purpose and not in the least annoyed by it. He was mild and courteous and spoke readily enough. But always he put them off with words that gave no real information.

- 31 He must have been riding many days, for he was full of news from towns along his back trail as far as Cheyenne and even Dodge City and others beyond I had never heard of before. But he had no news about himself. His past was fenced as tightly as our pasture. All they could learn was that he was riding through, taking each day as it came, with nothing particular in mind except maybe seeing a part of the country he had not been in before.
- 32 Afterwards mother washed the dishes and I dried and the two men sat on the porch, their voices carrying through the open door. . . .
- 33 "Yes, Shane, the boys I used to ride with don't see it yet. They will some day. The open range can't last forever. The fence lines are closing in. Running cattle in big lots is good business only for the top ranchers and it's really a poor business at that. Poor in terms of the resources going into it. Too much space for too little results. It's certain to be crowded out."
- 34 "Well, now," said Shane, "that's mighty interesting. I've been hearing the same quite a lot lately and from men with pretty clear heads. Maybe there's something to it."
- 35 "By Godfrey, there's plenty to it. Listen to me, Shane. The thing to do is pick your spot, get your land, your own land. Put in enough crops to carry you and make your money play with a small herd, not all horns and bone, but bred for meat and fenced in and fed right. I haven't been at it long, but already I've raised stock that averages three hundred pounds more than that long-legged stuff Fletcher runs on the other side of the river and it's better beef, and that's only a beginning.
- 36 "Sure, his outfit sprawls over most of this valley and it looks big. But he's got range rights on a lot more acres than he has cows and he won't even have those acres as more homesteaders move in. His way is wasteful. Too much land for what he gets out of it. He can't see that. He thinks we small fellows are nothing but nuisances."
- 37 "You are," said Shane mildly. "From his point of view, you are."
- 38 "Yes, I guess you're right. I'll have to admit that. Those of us here now would make it tough for him if he wanted to use the range behind us on this side of the river as he used to. Altogether we cut some pretty good
-

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slices out of it. Worse still, we block off part of the river, shut the range off from the water. He's been grumbling about that off and on ever since we've been here. He's worried that more of us will keep coming and settle on the other side too, and then he will be in a fix."

- 39 The dishes were done and I was edging to the door. Mother . . . shunted me off to bed. After she had left me in my little back room and went to join the men on the porch, I tried to catch more of the words. The voices were too low. Then I must have dozed, for with a start I realized that father and mother were again in the kitchen. By now, I gathered, our visitor was out in the barn in the bunk father had built there for the hired man who had been with us for a few weeks in the spring.
- 40 "Wasn't it peculiar," I heard mother say, "how he wouldn't talk about himself?"
- 41 "Peculiar?" said father. "Well, yes. In a way."
- 42 "Everything about him is peculiar." Mother sounded as if she was stirred up and interested. "I never saw a man quite like him before."
- 43 "You wouldn't have. Not where you come from. He's a special brand we sometimes get out here in the grass country. I've come across a few. A bad one's poison. A good one's straight grain clear through."
- 44 "How can you be so sure about him? Why, he wouldn't even tell where he was raised."
- 45 "Born back east a ways would be my guess. And pretty far south. Tennessee maybe. But he's been around plenty."
- 46 "I like him." Mother's voice was serious. "He's so nice and polite and sort of gentle. Not like most men I've met out here. But there's something about him. Something underneath the gentleness . . . Something . . . Dangerous."
- 47 "He's dangerous all right." Father said it in a musing way. Then he chuckled. "But not to us, my dear." And then he said what seemed to me a curious thing. "In fact, I don't think you ever had a safer man in your house."

Shane by Jack Schaefer. Copyright © 1949, renewed 1976 by Jack Schaefer. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

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- 1 Read the sentence from paragraph 2 in the box.

Then I saw a pair of cowhands, loping past him, stop and stare after him with a curious intentness.

How does the sentence **mainly** contribute to the plot of the excerpt?

- Ⓐ by presenting key details about minor characters
- Ⓑ by revealing background information about the narrator
- Ⓒ by building anticipation about Shane's arrival at the ranch
- Ⓓ by providing a clue about Shane's connection to the ranch

- 2 Read the sentences in the box.

- As I noticed this, a sudden chill, I could not have told why, struck through me there in the warm and open sun. (paragraph 7)
- They shifted back to me, and again, without knowing why, I felt that sudden chill. (paragraph 10)

Which word **best** describes the tone of the sentences?

- Ⓐ critical
- Ⓑ sarcastic
- Ⓒ insincere
- Ⓓ unsettled

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- 3 Read the sentences from paragraph 8 in the box.

He rode easily, relaxed in the saddle, leaning his weight lazily into the stirrups. Yet even in this easiness was a suggestion of tension.

Based on the excerpt, which of the following ideas is **best** supported by the sentences?

- Ⓐ Change is an unavoidable part of life.
- Ⓑ Opportunity comes to those who wait.
- Ⓒ People often value silence over communication.
- Ⓓ People may be more complicated than they seem.

- 4 Read the sentences in the box.

- It was the easiness of a coiled spring, of a trap set. (paragraph 8)
- His past was fenced as tightly as our pasture. (paragraph 31)

Based on the excerpt, what does the figurative language **most clearly** suggest about Shane?

- Ⓐ He may be hiding something.
- Ⓑ He is used to being in control.
- Ⓒ He is trying to impress others.
- Ⓓ He may be looking for someone.

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- 5** What does paragraph 9 **mainly** emphasize about the narrator?
- Ⓐ He respects his family’s modest living.
 - Ⓑ He wants to learn from his father’s experience.
 - Ⓒ He shares his father’s dream of expanding the herd.
 - Ⓓ He worries about the effort needed to maintain his family’s property.
- 6** What does paragraph 16 **mainly** emphasize about Shane?
- Ⓐ his honesty
 - Ⓑ his ambition
 - Ⓒ his confidence
 - Ⓓ his friendliness
- 7** Read the dictionary entry in the box.

fix: *n.* **1.** a difficult situation **2.** a determination of one’s position, such as by visual or radio bearings **3.** an accurate understanding, such as by observation **4.** a solution or remedy

Which definition of *fix* is used in paragraph 38 of the excerpt?

- Ⓐ definition 1
- Ⓑ definition 2
- Ⓒ definition 3
- Ⓓ definition 4

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- 8 Based on the excerpt, which quotation **best** supports the idea that Shane makes an impression on the narrator?
- Ⓐ "He hesitated briefly, studying the choice, and moved again steadily on our side." (paragraph 3)
 - Ⓑ "He was not much above medium height, almost slight in build." (paragraph 6)
 - Ⓒ "Already I was imagining myself in hat and belt and boots like those." (paragraph 17)
 - Ⓓ "By now, I gathered, our visitor was out in the barn in the bunk father had built there for the hired man who had been with us for a few weeks in the spring." (paragraph 39)
- 9 How does the use of chronological structure **mainly** contribute to the excerpt?
- Ⓐ It reveals how the narrator's perception of Shane develops over time.
 - Ⓑ It illustrates the powerful impact the narrator's actions have on Shane.
 - Ⓒ It emphasizes the contrast in Shane's behavior before and after his visit.
 - Ⓓ It suggests how Shane's previous choices influence his decisions in the present.

10 Part A

Which statement **best** expresses a central idea of the excerpt?

- Ⓐ Children often feel misunderstood by adults.
- Ⓑ People can affect others in unexpected ways.
- Ⓒ Relatives should support one another when facing challenges.
- Ⓓ People reveal more about themselves to family than to neighbors.

Part B

Select **two** quotations that **best** support the answer to Part A.

- Ⓐ "Father had come up behind me and was leaning against the gate to the corral." (paragraph 12)
- Ⓑ "His eyes were not restless when he looked at you like this. They were still and steady and you knew the man's whole attention was concentrated on you even in the casual glance." (paragraph 18)
- Ⓒ "'Yes, Shane, the boys I used to ride with don't see it yet. They will some day.'" (paragraph 33)
- Ⓓ "'Well, now,' said Shane, 'that's mighty interesting. I've been hearing the same quite a lot lately and from men with pretty clear heads.'" (paragraph 34)
- Ⓔ "'Everything about him is peculiar.' Mother sounded as if she was stirred up and interested." (paragraph 42)

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- 11 For **each** quotation, determine whether the comma in the quotation is used to separate adjectives or to set off an introductory phrase.

As he came near, what impressed me first was his clothes. (paragraph 4)

- Ⓐ comma used to separate adjectives
- Ⓑ comma used to set off an introductory phrase

He would have looked frail alongside father's square, solid bulk. (paragraph 6)

- Ⓐ comma used to separate adjectives
- Ⓑ comma used to set off an introductory phrase

He was clean-shaven and his face was lean and hard and burned from high forehead to firm, tapering chin. (paragraph 7)

- Ⓐ comma used to separate adjectives
- Ⓑ comma used to set off an introductory phrase

Taking a comb from his shirt pocket, he smoothed back his long dark hair. (paragraph 15)

- Ⓐ comma used to separate adjectives
- Ⓑ comma used to set off an introductory phrase

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For this question, you will write an essay based on the passage. The essay should be about four to five paragraphs in length. Be sure to:

- Include a central idea.
- Use evidence from the passage to support the central idea.
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

12 Based on *Shane*, write an essay explaining how the author develops a sense of mystery about Shane. Use evidence from the excerpt to develop your essay.

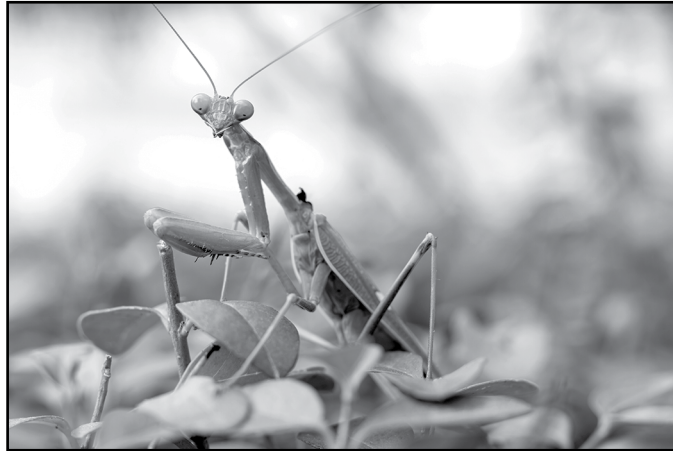
Write your answer on the next two pages.

A large rectangular box containing 25 horizontal lines for writing.

Read the excerpt about a significant moment in the author's life. Then answer the questions that follow.

The Praying Mantis Moment

by Brian Doyle



Praying mantis

- 1 A high school kid asks me this morning, *What's the greatest sports moment you ever saw?* Before my brain can rumble into gear and produce the 1986 Boston Celtics (the best basketball team I ever saw), or the 2004 Boston Red Sox (the greatest comeback in the history of baseball), or the 1969 New York Mets (for sheer shocking unbelievability, not to mention that I got to watch that whole World Series on a television in our grade school classroom—how cool was *that*), or the 1980 Miracle on Ice USA Olympic hockey team, or Doug Flutie's preposterous last-second touchdown pass for Boston College against Miami, or autistic teenager Jason McElwain drilling seven long shots in four minutes when his Athena High coach put the diligent cheerful team manager into uniform for the first time at the very end of the last home game of his senior season and he went bonkers and the whole student body went bonkers and they carried him off the floor and every time I see the film again I am elevated to tears. . . . Before I can recall any of this, I say this instead:
- 2 One time when my twin sons were little, maybe six years old, and they were playing soccer, in the town league in which every single kid I think proudly donned his or her blue uniform with blue socks every Saturday so that anywhere and everywhere you went in our town on Saturdays you would be surrounded by small blue grinning chirping people, not just

on the fields and in parking lots but in burger joints¹ and pizza places and the farmers market and the library and the grocery store, and it was a crisp beautiful golden October afternoon, and I was standing with the other parents along the sideline, half paying attention and half keeping an eye out for hawks, suddenly the tiny intent players on the field all formed a loose circle on the field, and play stopped.

- 3 I remember seeing the ball roll slowly by itself into a corner of the field. I remember that the coach, one of those dads who was really into victory even though the boys and girls were three feet tall and could hardly tie their laces, was yelping and expostulating.² I remember that two of the moms ran out onto the field, worried that a child was hurt. I remember that the referee, a lean long teenager who had been the most desultory³ and unengaged of referees up to that point, sprinted toward the circle, worried that a child was hurt.
- 4 And then the circle devolved⁴ into a sort of procession, with all the players on both teams following a girl in front, and cupped in this girl's hands was a praying mantis, which she and all the other players on both teams were escorting reverently off the field, because, as a child helpfully explained to me afterward, the praying mantis was on the field first, and maybe even lived there, while we were all visitors, and you're supposed to be polite when you visit someone's house.
- 5 I have seen many extraordinary moments in sports—stunning achievements, stunning reversals, terrific teams, teams that, at the exact moment when their absolute best and most meshed play mattered most, played even better than they ever imagined they could. But I don't think I ever saw a more *genuine* moment than the praying mantis moment. All of it was there for us to see—teamwork, decisive collective action, a leader rising to the occasion, humor, generosity, respect, surprise, narrative, drama, tension, release, grace, satisfaction, laughter, and the subtle virtue of being something you see only once in a lifetime.

¹ burger joints—restaurants that serve hamburgers

² expostulating—expressing strong disapproval or disagreement

³ desultory—lacking interest or excitement

⁴ devolved—transformed

“The Praying Mantis Moment” by Brian Doyle, from *One Long River of Song*. Text copyright © 2019 by Mary Miller Doyle. Reprinted by permission of Little, Brown and Company. Photograph copyright © iStockphoto/CESAR MARTINEZ AMOR.

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- 13 How does the long sentence in paragraph 1 **mainly** contribute to the mood?
- Ⓐ It generates a chaotic mood by offering different perspectives.
 - Ⓑ It establishes a sympathetic mood by narrating the thoughts of the participants.
 - Ⓒ It creates an enthusiastic mood by describing a rapid succession of positive events.
 - Ⓓ It builds a calm mood by listing key moments in sports history without interruptions.
- 14 What does paragraph 2 **mainly** reveal about the author's perspective on sports?
- Ⓐ He remembers vividly his time playing sports as a youth.
 - Ⓑ He realizes that his childhood experiences on a team were unique.
 - Ⓒ He appreciates the ways that sports bring the community together.
 - Ⓓ He focuses more on individual strengths than on team performance.

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- 15 Read the detail from paragraph 4 in the box.

. . . which she and all the other players on both teams were escorting reverently off the field . . .

Based on the paragraph, what does the word *reverently* **mainly** suggest about the children?

- Ⓐ They treated the praying mantis with care and honor.
 - Ⓑ They viewed the praying mantis with fear and confusion.
 - Ⓒ They observed the praying mantis with excitement and joy.
 - Ⓓ They approached the praying mantis with doubt and uncertainty.
- 16 As described in paragraph 5, what is the **main** effect on readers of the author choosing the anecdote in the excerpt as the greatest sports moment he ever saw?
- Ⓐ a feeling of regret, since readers are unsure if the past sports event can be repeated again
 - Ⓑ a feeling of surprise, since readers most likely expect the chosen episode to involve playing sports
 - Ⓒ a feeling of optimism, since readers are inspired by the descriptions of historical sports comebacks
 - Ⓓ a feeling of humor, since readers most likely find young people who play sports more amusing than adult athletes

Read the poem published in 1893. Then answer the questions that follow.

The Rock and the Sea

by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

THE ROCK

I am the Rock, presumptuous¹ Sea!
I am set to encounter thee.
Angry and loud or gentle and still,
I am set here to limit thy power, and I will!
5 I am the Rock!

I am the Rock. From age to age
I scorn thy fury and dare thy rage.
Scarred by frost and worn by time,
Brown with weed and green with slime,
10 Thou may'st drench and defile me and spit in my face,
But while I am here thou keep'st thy place!
I am the Rock!

I am the Rock, beguiling² Sea!
I know thou art fair as fair can be,
15 With golden glitter and silver sheen,
And bosom of blue and garments of green.
Thou may'st pat my cheek with baby hands,
And lap my feet in diamond sands,
And play before me as children play;
20 But plead as thou wilt, I bar the way!
I am the Rock!

I am the Rock. Black midnight falls;
The terrible breakers rise like walls;
With curling lips and gleaming teeth
25 They plunge and tear at my bones beneath.
Year upon year they grind and beat
In storms of thunder and storms of sleet,—

¹ presumptuous—doing something without the right or authority to do so

² beguiling—charmingly attractive or pleasing

Grind and beat and wrestle and tear,
But the rock they beat on is always there
30 I am the Rock!

THE SEA

I am the Sea. I hold the land
As one holds an apple in his hand,
Hold it fast with sleepless eyes,
Watching the continents sink and rise.
35 Out of my bosom the mountains grow,
Back to its depths they crumble slow;
The earth is a helpless child to me.
I am the Sea!

I am the Sea. When I draw back
40 Blossom and verdure³ follow my track,
And the land I leave grows proud and fair,
For the wonderful race of man is there;
And the winds of heaven wail and cry
While the nations rise and reign and die,
45 Living and dying in folly and pain,
While the laws of the universe thunder in vain.
What is the folly of man to me?
I am the Sea.

I am the Sea. The earth I sway;
50 Granite to me is potter's clay;
Under the touch of my careless waves
It rises in turrets and sinks in caves;
The iron cliffs that edge the land
I grind to pebbles and sift to sand,
55 And beach-grass bloweth and children play
In what were the rocks of yesterday.
It is but a moment of sport to me.
I am the Sea!

I am the Sea. In my bosom deep
60 Wealth and Wonder and Beauty sleep;
Wealth and Wonder and Beauty rise

³ verdure—lush green vegetation

English Language Arts

In changing splendor of sunset skies,
And comfort the earth with rains and snows
Till waves the harvest and laughs the rose.
65 Flower and forest and child of breath
With me have life—without me, death.
What if the ships go down in me?
I am the Sea!

“The Rock and the Sea” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, from *In This Our World*. In the public domain.

English Language Arts

- 17 How is the poem **mainly** structured?
- Ⓐ as a dialogue between two strong natural forces
 - Ⓑ as a sequence of events that resolves a conflict in nature
 - Ⓒ as a flashback portraying the origins of two natural forces
 - Ⓓ as a series of observations about the role of nature in human life

- 18 Read the lines from the poem in the box.

- . . . From age to age / I scorn thy fury and dare thy rage. (lines 6 and 7)
- While the nations rise and reign and die, (line 44)

What idea in the poem do the lines **mainly** suggest?

- Ⓐ Both the Rock and the Sea are ancient and long-lasting.
- Ⓑ Both the Rock and the Sea are ambitious and successful.
- Ⓒ Both the Rock and the Sea are competitive and insecure.
- Ⓓ Both the Rock and the Sea are resourceful and self-reliant.

English Language Arts

- 19 Based on the poem, select the phrase that **best** completes **each** sentence.

The Rock believes the Sea is **mainly**

- Ⓐ a pest to be ignored.
- Ⓑ an enemy to be restrained.
- Ⓒ a danger to human exploration.
- Ⓓ an obstacle to human cooperation.

The Sea believes itself to be **mainly**

- Ⓐ timid and harmless.
- Ⓑ mighty but generous.
- Ⓒ friendly and amusing.
- Ⓓ threatening but fascinating.

Grade 8 English Language Arts

Spring 2026 Released Operational Items

PBT Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Item Type*	Item Description	Correct Answer (SR)**
1	9	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.5	SR	Analyze how a specific sentence contributes to the plot in an excerpt.	C
2	9	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.4	SR	Determine the tone suggested by specific sentences in an excerpt.	D
3	10	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.2	SR	Determine a central idea of an excerpt based on specific sentences.	D
4	10	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.4	SR	Analyze what figurative language in an excerpt suggests about a character.	A
5	11	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.1	SR	Make an inference about the narrator based on a specific paragraph of an excerpt.	A
6	11	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.3	SR	Determine what a specific paragraph in an excerpt emphasizes about a character.	C
7	11	<i>Language</i>	L.8.4	SR	Use a dictionary entry to determine the correct meaning of a word with multiple definitions.	A
8	12	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.1	SR	Identify a quotation from an excerpt that best supports an inference about a character.	C
9	12	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.5	SR	Analyze how the author's choice of a specific structure contributes to an excerpt.	A
10	13	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.2	SR	Determine a central idea of an excerpt and identify two quotations from the excerpt that support the central idea.	B;B,E
11	14	<i>Language</i>	L.8.2	SR	Identify sentences in an excerpt that use specific punctuation for a given purpose.	B;A;A;B
12	15	<i>Language, Writing</i>	L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.3, W.8.2, W.8.4	ES	Write an essay that explains how the author develops a specific character trait in an excerpt; use evidence from the excerpt to support the essay.	
13	20	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.4	SR	Determine how a sentence contributes to the mood established in an excerpt.	C
14	20	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.6	SR	Analyze what a specific paragraph reveals about the author's perspective.	C
15	21	<i>Language</i>	L.8.4	SR	Determine how the use of a word clarifies meaning in an excerpt.	A
16	21	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.6	SR	Analyze how the author's inclusion of specific details affects the reader.	B
17	25	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.5	SR	Determine the structure of a poem.	A
18	25	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.2	SR	Determine a central idea based on specific lines from a poem.	A
19	26	<i>Reading</i>	RL.8.6	SR	Analyze the points of view of two speakers in a poem.	B;B

* ELA item types are: selected-response (SR) 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 8 English Language Arts Spring 2026 Unreleased Operational Items

PBT Item No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Item Type*	Item Description
20	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.5	SR	Analyze the author's purpose for including a specific text element in an article.
21	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.8	SR	Determine how a specific sentence contributes to a central idea in an article.
22	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.6	SR	Determine the purpose of a specific sentence in an article.
23	<i>Language</i>	L.8.4	SR	Identify a word that would best replace a word in context.
24	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.5	SR	Identify the purpose of a specific section in an article.
25	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.1	SR	Identify a sentence from an article that has a specific effect on the reader.
26	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.3	SR	Determine the relationship between information described in different paragraphs of an article.
27	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.1	SR	Select a detail from one article that supports an inference from another article on a similar topic.
28	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.1	SR	Select a detail from one article that develops an idea similar to an idea from another article on a similar topic.
29	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.5	SR	Select details in one article that best illustrate a key concept described in another article on a similar topic.
30	<i>Reading</i>	RI.8.4	SR	Identify quotations from two articles on similar topics that show a particular tone.
31	<i>Language, Writing</i>	L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.3, W.8.1, W.8.4	ES	Write an essay that makes an argument supporting a specific action related to the topic of two articles; use evidence from both articles to support the essay.

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