

2022 MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guide

Grade 8 English Language Arts

Question 12: Essay

Reporting Categories: Language and Writing

Standard: L.PK-12.1 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Standard: L.PK-12.2 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Standard: L.PK-12.3 - Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Standard: W.PK-12.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Standard: W.PK-12.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Item Description: Write an essay that analyzes characters in two passages on similar topics; use information from both passages to support the analysis.

[View item in MCAS Digital Item Library](#)

Essay Prompt

For this question, you will write an essay based on the passage(s). Your writing should:

- Present and develop a central idea.
- Provide evidence and/or details from the passage(s).
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Based on *Starfish* and *The Poet X*, write an essay that compares the importance of art in Kiko's and Xiomara's lives. Be sure to use information from **both** passages to develop your essay.

Continue to the following page to see the scoring guides for this question. Sample student responses begin on page 3. The annotations that appear above each sample response describe elements of the response that contributed to its score for Idea Development and Standard English Conventions.

Scoring Guide for Idea Development

Select a score point in the table below to view the sample student response.

| Score* | Description |
|--------------------|--|
| 5A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is insightful and fully developed Skillful selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Skillful and/or subtle organization Rich expression of ideas Full awareness of the task and mode |
| 5B | |
| 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is clear and well-developed Effective selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Effective organization Clear expression of ideas Full awareness of the task and mode |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is general and moderately developed Appropriate selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Moderate organization Adequate expression of ideas Sufficient awareness of the task and mode |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea may be present and is somewhat developed Limited selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Limited organization Basic expression of ideas Partial awareness of the task and mode |
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is not developed Insufficient evidence and/or details Minimal organization Poor expression of ideas Minimal awareness of the task and mode |
| 0 | The response shows evidence the student has read the text, but does not address the question or incorrectly responds to the question. |

Scoring Guide for Standard English Conventions

Select a score point in the table below to view the sample student response.

| Score* | Description |
|--------------------|--|
| 3A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent control of a variety of sentence structures relative to length of essay Consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay |
| 3B | |
| 3C | |
| 3D | |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly consistent control of sentence structures relative to length of essay Mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay |
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little control and/or no variety in sentence structure and/or Little control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or insufficient length |
| 0 | Sentences are formed incorrectly with no control of grammar, usage, and mechanics and/or insufficient length. |

*In both Scoring Guides, letters are used to distinguish between sample student responses that earned the same score (e.g., 5A and 5B).

Idea Development—Score Point 5A

This fully developed essay begins with a brief introduction mentioning that both the painter and poet are talented but “nervous about showing their work to other people,” and are “worried that they won’t like it.” The central idea presented in the essay seems to be limited at first, but develops into an insightful understanding of the passages, expressed with skill in the body paragraphs: the artists’ anxiety relates to their deep commitment to and love of art. In the first body paragraph, the importance of art in the life of *Starfish*’s Kiko is revealed by her paralyzing anxiety, which prompts her friend to show Kiko’s work to a prominent artist. The writer of the essay clearly understands that Kiko’s emotions go beyond mere shyness: “If only she stood up for herself, . . . she would’ve felt more confident. . . . she needs to stand up for herself.” The second body paragraph develops the idea that the character of Xiomara from *The Poet X* shares Kiko’s distinct kind of anxiety. Xiomara “knows that she is good” yet fears “another person sizing her up and judging her.” To Xiomara, her poetry is private, and the fear of sharing something so loved has its dangers: “she needs to stand up for herself, or else she will live her whole life in a state of self-doubt and regret.” The depth of the characters’ fears is developed in the third body paragraph: their self-deprecation is a result of their respect for and love of art. They are inspired by and in awe of other artists, but “in order to become like their idols,” they must overcome their personal fears before they can fully realize their own “growth and opportunities.” The essay develops an insightful central idea supported by skillful selection and explanation of evidence from the passages. Ideas are richly expressed, and full awareness of the task and mode is clear.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3A

Sentences are varied and show consistent control of sentence form: “Her teacher tries to be understanding, but Xiomara perc[ei]ves it as another person sizing her up and judging her, which only leads to her delaying her decision even more.” The clarity and coherence of this complex essay are supported by consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics.

In the novel *Starfish* by Akemi Dawn Bowman, and the novel in verse *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, both characters have talent, but are nervous about showing their work to other people, worried that they won't like it, and fretting over minor things, when they really should be proud of their skills.

Firstly, in *Starfish*, Kikko is a talented painter trying to get into art school, but she is too nervous and paranoid about people seeing and judging her work that she has to unwillingly rely on her friend to share her work for her. Hiroshi Matsumoto is a skilled painter who Kikko looks up to, and when she got the chance to meet him, she siezed up and didnt show him her work, which could have cost her her chance at entering art school, over a minor thing like nervousness. Luckily her friend Jamie recognized this and spoke out for her, which in the moment she didn't like, but in the long run she will learn to appreciate what he did for her. Jaime ends up showing Hiroshi her work: "Jamie pulls his phone out. 'She's *really* good. She just doesn't realize it. Here, look.' ... *What are you doing?* I manage to mouth. Seriously, Jamie, *what are you doing?*" (33, 35). This shows that when an opportuniy arose for her work to be shared, she still backed down, and had to rely unwillingly on her friend to help share her work. If only she stood up for herself, and showed Hiroshi her work herself, then she would've felt more confident, and Hiroshi would appreciate her talent more. So, in order for Kikko to succeed, she needs to stand up for herself, and not let others do the work for her.

Next, in *The Poet X*, Xiomara has talent as a poet, and she gets the opportunity to share her work in a poem club, but she's scared that people in her life won't like her work, or won't want her to be doing what she does, and so her nervousness gets in the way of her seizing this opportunity and accepting what she's good at. Her teacher tries to be understanding, but Xiomara perceives it as another person sizing her up and judging her, which only leads to her delaying her decision even more. She knows that she is good, she just doesn't show anyone else: "Tonight after my shower instead of staring at the parts of myself I want to puzzle-piece into something else, watch my mouth memorize one of my poems. Even though I don't plan on letting anyone hear it," (116-120). This quote shows how she even tells herself that she won't let anyone see her work, which is only dragging her down further away from letting herself come out, and share her work with other people. In order to succeed, she needs to rely on other people, not just keep her work to herself. So, if Xiomara truly wants to write inspiring poetry and be a successful artist and poet, she needs to stand up for herself, or else she will live her whole life in a state of self-doubt and regret.

Lastly, in both stories, the characters let their petty feelings of nervousness and insecurity overpower their skill, which leads to them almost losing opportunities to share and improve their work. Both Kikko and Xiomara are heavily inspired by other artists and poets, but when it comes to sharing what they themselves do, they seize up and don't. Later in life, no one will care whether they were nervous, they will just remember their work and talent, so it is important that they look past their petty feelings and move on with their lives. Kikko is inspired by Hiroshi's work, but doesn't accept that she has talent, and that the only way to improve her skills is to share them with people: "And what's your flavor?" Hiroshi presses his lips together in a tight smile. 'Acrylics,' I saw meekly. 'But not like this. I mean, I'm not as good. As you, I mean. I'm not as good as you. At all'" (28-29). This shows that she doesn't accept who she is, and that will lead to lost opportunities and hinderances in the future. Xiomara feels the same way, and is heavily inspired by other poets, but she tries to hide that she herself is any good at poetry: "And then Mami knocks on the door, and asks me what I'm here reciting, that it better not be more rap lyrics, and I respond, 'Verses. I'm memorizing verses.' I know she thinks I mean Bible ones" (130-134). This shows that she hides her skills even from her own mother, worrying that if she comes out, she will be mocked and judged, even in her own family. Both characters are inspired by other artists, but don't realize that in order to become like their idols, they need to embrace their skills, and not hold back. So, both characters need to open up, and then the opportunities will come flooding in.

In conclusion, Kikko and Xiomara are too nervous to show their work and talent to their peers, which just ends up hindering their growth and opportunities. They should just accept their skills, and take what life gives them, instead of wallowing in nervousness over minor things that don't matter in the long run.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 5B

The introduction provides a general view of the importance of art to Kiko and Xiomara: art helps them express their emotions, “even though those [expressions] are so personal they must be private.” The deep meaning of art in both lives is skillfully expressed by the writer. Kiko’s “deepest emotions, as well as heart and soul have been put into these pieces, and she is very private about this, only sharing with a select few.” Like Kiko, Xiomara is self-critical and does not want others to judge her work. Both characters lack confidence in their art and fear that “insult may prevent them from looking at their work the same way again.” In spite of both characters’ internal resistance, “[t]hey may want to eventually [pursue] a career in their art forms, and are ta[k]ing the next steps to do so.” In looking at art schools, Kiko shows that she considers art “a serious career path,” and “she feels so proud” when an accomplished artist is willing to recommend her. The essay also notes that Xiomara’s immediate actions affirm her love for the art form: “Xiomara is trying to do poetry outside of the club, to express themselves, and to be who they are, even without organized practice.” And as the writer notes—they will pursue their futures in art seemingly without the support of their parents. The brief conclusion emphasizes the characters’ determination and ends by expressing a belief they must share their talents: “earth without art is just ‘eh,’ and eh isn’t very expressive or inspiring.”

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3B

The essay is complex and demonstrates consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics. Sentence forms are varied and complex, supporting an effective flow of ideas: “Her deepest emotions, as well as heart and soul have been put into these pieces, and she is very private about this, only sharing with a select few.”

Art is a beautiful thing, makes one think about life, and grabs our attention. Without art, the world would be a dry and uninteresting place, which may make it easier to understand why the Kiko and Xiomara find it so fascinating. The importance of art effects Kiko and Xiomara's lives by showing them new ways to express their emotions through art, even though those experessions are so personal they must be private, and that their future paths may be influenced by art as well.

Kiko and Xiomara both express their emotions through art, whether it's visual acrylic paintings, or the reading/writing of poetry, and they prefer to keep that expression private. In *Starfish*, Jamie says "you're so private about your art- you panic if you think anyone is watching you draw in your sketchbook" when Kiko asks why he had picture of her portfolio. She's still deeply embarrassed, even though she earned the approval of a well-known, talented artist, and sees this as a huge violation of her privacy when Jamie shows it to Hiroshi. Her deepest emotions, as well as heart and soul have been put into these pieces, and she is very private about this, only sharing with a select few. She couldn't handle someone seeing her art, and insulting it, as it's her expression of emotions. Imagine if someone came up to you and said that your expression of emotions was terrible. The same idea goes along withg Xiomara, as she says "Not a chance I want anyone hearing my work." Although they would love to be able to express it, they couldn't show their deepest emotions in a speech, just because they joined something that inspires them. The two of them are already very self critical, and a further insult may prevent them from looking at their work the same way again. They may have to learn how to do this though, because the see themselves having a future in their art forms.

They may want to eventually pursue a career in their art forms, and are taking the next steps to do so. In *Starfish*, Kiko is "actually here looking at art schools in the fall" as Jamie tells Hiroshi. Although she hasn't expressed her love for art and the idea of pursuing it to her parents, she obviously isn't just doing it for fun. She sees it as a serious career path, which is why she feels so proud when Hiroshi is going to help her pursue art school, and write recommendations for her. There is no doubt in his mind that she can make it, so he is helping another young artist that's daring to dream, while Kiko takes a leap of faith. Xiomara is also seriously considering poetry, even though it's a highschool club rather than art school as a whole. Xiomara says "I think about that poetry video from class... I let the words shape themselves hard on my tongue. I let my hands pretend to be punctuation marks that slash, and point, and press in on each other." showing the passion she feels when they think about the poetry and the inspiration that they feel when thinking about Poetry. Xiomara even asks the teacher about the club when they show up to class, constantly thinking of ways that they can go, despite the confirmation class that happens at the same time. Xiomara is trying to do poetry outside of the club, to express herself, and to be who they are, even without organized practice. Both the characters see themselves pursuing in futures that their parents don't approve, or that shouldn't be first priority according to their families.

They both want to be who they are, nobody stopping them. They want to express their emotions and pursue careers that they can do that in, free of non-constructive criticism. Although there are factors stopping this, they take comfort in just doing their art whenever possible. After all, earth without art is just "eh", and eh isn't very expressive or inspiring.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 4

The central idea in this essay is well-developed. The introduction presents both the artists' strong connection to their work and the barrier that their shyness creates: "They both are very passionate about their art, and they both have people who have seen their potential, but can't see it themselves." The body paragraphs explore each artist's commitment to art and need for encouragement. In the first body paragraph, Xiomara "almost feels connected" to a poster announcing a poetry event at her school; Kiko "really notices the small aspects of art" as she analyzes works displayed at an exhibition. Both artists' need for support is developed in the second body paragraph, as the encouragement offered by Xiomara's "Twin" is seen to equal the help Kiko receives from her friend Jamie. The essay is effectively organized by ideas, and presents a coherent view of the artists' relationship with their work. There is clear awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3C

This essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions. Sentences are correct and varied in form: "Xiomara finds this poster and almost feels connected to it. Also, in *Starfish* Kiko is very passionate about her art and she really notices the small aspects of art." Some errors in usage and spelling, typos, and missing commas do not detract from the overall demonstration of control: "Then in *The Poet X* we meet Xiomara who loves to express herself through her art of poems but also is very shy and to herself."

In *Starfish* by Akemi Dawn Bowman and *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo both of the main characters have a love of art. They both are very passionate about their art, and they both have people who have seen their potential, but can't see it themselves. In *Starfish* we meet Kiko who is a very shy girl that is very passionate about art but, is very shy. Then in *The Poet X* we meet Xiomara who loves to express herself through her art of poems but also is very shy and to herself.

In *The Poet X* and *Starfish* both main characters are very passionate about their art. In *The Poet X* Xiomara loves poems and writing. Xiomara expresses herself and she states, "But i'm rooted to the spot, a new awarness buzzing over the noise. This poster feels personal, like an engraved invitation mailed directly to me." Xiomara finds this poster and almost feels connected to it. Also, in *Starfish* Kiko is very passionate about her art and she really notices the small aspects of art. As she internalizes a peice of artwork she describes, "These paintings are hilariously random," Jamie notes. 'They're amazing, '...'did you see the frog one?' Jamie asks with a grin. 'its just a giant green frog -- i'm not kidding -- wearing a top hat.' 'But they're so good,' I gush dizzily." Kiki is so exasperated and in awe by these peices of art. While Jamie doesnt look at the true meaning, Kiko really looks at every detail. Kiko and Xiomara are both very inspired by art and it makes them so excited when they see new opportunities of art.

In *The Poet X* and *Starfish* both main characters have someone who supports their art and sees the full potential that they don't see. In *The Poet X* Xiomara has her twin who understands her and sees her true potential when nobody else does. Xiomara's twin shares, "Without looking up from the computer screen, Twin says in barely a whisper, 'This world's been waiting for your genius a long time.'" After her twin sees the poster he encourages her by saying basically that the world is missing out on seeing her artwork. Then, in *Starfish*, Kiko's friend Jamie shows Kiko's idol her artwork because he sees her true potential in her artwork. When Jamie shows Hiroshi the photos he says, "Jamie shakes his head at me like he doesn't want me to ruin whatever moment they're having. I make the mistake of leaning forward and looking at his phone. They're pictures of my paintings. Pictures of my portfolio. On *Jamie's phone*..." Jamie shows Hiroshi the photos of her paintings because he wants to show off how good Kiko is and make sure she knows it. Both main characters have a true love for art and they have little supporters who help show them their true potential in their artwork.

In conclusion, In *Starfish* by Akemi Dawn Bowman and *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo both of the main characters have a love of art. They both are very passionate about their art, and they both have people who have seen their potential, but can't see it themselves. Although the main characters are very shy they both start to see their true artwork and how truly amazing it is.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 3

This moderately developed essay provides a general view of the importance of art in the characters' lives. The brief introduction states that art "affects them differently," and this idea is developed for each character in the body paragraphs. The first body paragraph presents the idea that Kiko "doesn't take any pride in her work" and is self-conscious about it; yet her self-consciousness turns to self-approval after being affirmed by a prominent artist: "After getting approval from Hiroshi, she feels so good about herself." Art and recognition of her talent are both important to Kiko. The second body paragraph presents Xiomara's passion for poetry: the poster for the Spoken Word Poetry Club "stops time for her and she thinks that it is the best thing ever." Although the writer states in the introduction that "Xiomara is just doing [her poetry] as a hobby," the essay still emphasizes her passion for the art form. Overall, details from the texts support the central idea and there is sufficient awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3D

The essay is somewhat brief but sufficiently complex to allow demonstration of consistent control of standard English conventions. Sentences are correct and varied in form and convey significant ideas: "This one flyer on bare white paper with not much writing on it stops time for her and she thinks that it is the best thing ever." Minor spelling errors, such as "writing," and a few awkward sentences do not detract from overall control.

In the Novel *Starfish* by Akemi Dawn Bowman, and the passage from *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, Art plays a big role and is important in both Kiko's and Xiomara's lives but it affects them differently because Kiko goes to art school and Xiomara is just doing it as a hobby.

First in *Starfish*, Kiko is an artist that doesn't take any pride in her work. She gets self conscious when even someone looks at her sketch pad. Kiko and her friends Jamie go to see an artist called Hiroshi. Jamie shows Hiroshi Kiko's art and approves of her work. He even says that she should bring her portfolio to his studio and that he could try to get her a recommendation. After this conversation the text states, "Well, that was super embarrassing. And a huge violation of my privacy, I want to add, but I don't because my tongue is fighting with my brain and really I'm just hearing Hiroshi's words on a continuous loop." (51) This proves that art plays a big role in Kiko's life. After getting approval from Hiroshi, she feels so good about herself. She only feels this was because of how much art influences her.

Next in *The Poet X*, Xiomara is also an artist. After she sees a flyer in the school stairway she crumples it up into her backpack. The was about spoken word poetry club, it was a club for all artists like poets, rappers, and writers. She takes this as an opportunity to learn more about art. We hear, "The poster feels personal, like an engraved invitation mailed directly to me." (18-20) This demonstrates that art is very important in Xiomara's life. This one flyer on bare white paper with not much writing on it stops time for her and she thinks that it is the best thing ever. She feels like it is a personal message sent just for her even though it is clearly not. However, this is different from the way that Kiko likes art because she goes to art school and Xiomara is just doing it as a hobby. Art boosts Kiko's self confidence and art opens new opportunities for Xiomara.

As you can see, Art plays a big role and is important in both Kiko's and Xiomara's lives. Not only do both of them cherish art, they like it so much that it affects their daily lives. However, art touches every person differently than the next person including Kiko and Xiomara.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 2

This limited essay focuses on the characters' "insecurities about their works and about themselves." The first body paragraph presents *Starfish*'s Kiko responding to Hiroshi as evidence that "Kiko is insecure about her work, and thinks that it is no good compared to [the work of] a famous artist." In the second body paragraph, the writer quotes *The Poet X* to show that Xiomara is equally insecure about her work, and concludes "Xiomara is too scared to go onstage and show a wide group of people what she has written." Though a central idea is present, details from the texts are not significantly developed. Organization is limited, with a simple, formulaic structure: a central idea in the introduction and brief discussions of the characters in two body paragraphs. Expression is basic and there is partial awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 2

The essay shows mostly consistent control of standard English conventions in relation to the length and complexity of the text. However, the writing is too brief to give evidence of consistent control, and errors are noticeable.

Both texts, *Starfish* and *The Poet X*, both explore the theme of having insecurities about their works and about themselves. Both of the stories have evidence that prove this theme.

For example, in the story *Starfish*, Kiko talks to the famous artist, Hiroshi Matsumoto, and he asks her what her "flavor" of art is, and Kiko responds with "Acrylics, but not like this, im not as good. As you, I mean. I'm not as good as you. At all." This conversation shows that Kiko is insecure about her work, and thinks that it is no good compared to a famous artist.

Another peice of evidence from the story *The Poet X*, is when Xiomara thinks to herself this, *She can't think that I, who sits silently in her classroom, who only speaks to get someone off my back, will ever get onstage and say any of the things I've written, out loud, to anybody else.* This shows that Xiomara is too scared to go onstage and show a wide group of people what she has written, and thinks that Ms. Galiano is out of her mind.

These 2 examples from both stories show that both characters have to overcome struggles and challenges if they ever hope to overcome the challenges, like being too insecure about their work, that are standing in their ways to acheive their dreams.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 1

The central idea of this response is not developed, and ideas are not clearly expressed. The vague statement that the importance of art in the characters' lives "shows what's also part of them and what they're good at using their skills" is followed by a minimal summary of incidents that reveal more about the characters' self-doubts than about how art is important in their lives. Organization is minimal and coherence is weak. There is minimal awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 1

Despite relatively few errors, the response is overly brief and shows little range in sentence structures, as well as little control of grammar, usage, or mechanics.

Based on *Starfish* and *The Poet X*, the importance of art in Kiko's and Xiomara's lives shows what's also part of them and what they're good at using their skills. In *Starfish* Kiko doubts herself thinking that her art skills in painting aren't good at all, and thinking that Hiroshi Matsumoto would judge at her art when really he looked impressed. In *The Poet X*, Xiomara was doubting herself when Ms. Galiano asked her if she was joining the poetry club, so when she was memorizing one on her poems she felt free.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 0

The response shows minimal evidence that the student read the passages. The main characters are named but the response does not address the question.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 0

This single run-on sentence shows no control of standard English conventions.

In both stories Kiko and Xiomara are in very diferent roles but have the same situation they both have someone (could be them could be someone else) holding them back from being the greatest version of themselves.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)