

2023 MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guide

Grade 6 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 explains how a character changes over the course of a passage; use information from the passage to support the explanation.

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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 “Your Question for Author Here,” write an essay that explains how exchanging letters with Maureen changes Joe. Be sure to use information from the story 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

The essay provides full and insightful development of how Joe changes and comes to “reveal his true self.” Evidence is skillfully organized across multiple paragraphs, and explanations demonstrate that Joe changes by finding “a connection with his belongings,” by being able “to relate himself and his interests to [Maureen’s] stories,” and by discovering “about himself something he did not know was a part of him.” Perceptive analyses demonstrate full awareness of the task, including the following, “She [Maureen] is guiding him to the key that will open up the door [to] his imagination.” Overall, the writing makes connections between ideas and the task and provides meaningful evidence from the passage to explore and develop the central idea.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3A

The essay demonstrates consistent control of a variety of sentence structures. Quotations are correctly integrated into the essay, and grammar, usage, and mechanics are consistent. Although occasional errors are noted, such as in the spelling of the word “psychic,” they do not detract from the essay’s ideas.

The story "Your Question for Author Here" by Kate DiCamillo and Jon Scieszka shows how Joe's personality and opinions change after writing to Maureen O'Toole, an author, for his school assignment. First, she helps him find a connection with his belongings. Also, he relates to her books and connects the stories with himself. Lastly, his personal question to the author helps him develop who he is as a writer. Maureen's way of answering Joe's questions changes Joe and helps him reveal his true self.

To begin, Maureen asks Joe some questions that helps him connect with his belongings in a different view. In "Your Question for Author Here," Maureen says, "That minie ball you have could have hit one of those boys on the battlefield, grazed his cheek, wounded him, left him scarred...What story would he tell about that piece of lead in your sock drawer? (paragraph 60). This quote shows that she is helping Joe open up his thoughts and think of the bullet in a deeper meaning. She is guiding him to the key that will open up the door his imagination. Later on Maureen writes, "You took your sock drawer and its contents and applied your imagination and your heart to them and made a wonderful poem" (paragraph 95). This information illustrates that he has really changed throughout his letters to Maureen. Joe went from not caring and getting the assignment over with, to getting a B on a poem that Maureen helped him, emotionally, write. Clearly, exchanging letters with Maureen helped him find his imagination that changes who he is on the outside and on the inside.

In addition, reading Maureen's books allowed Joe to relate himself and his interests to the stories. In the text, Joe states, "The first part of Fangs for the Duchess is pretty good. Most people don't know that spiders squirt venom into their prey that dissolves their innards so they can suck it down. I'm glad you had that in there" (paragraph 57). This quote reveals that Joe is finding interest in her book, since he has spiders in his sock drawer. It changes him in the sense that at first he hasn't even read any of her books, but now she has inspired him to read a book that he enjoys. Then, according to the story, Joe asks, "Are you a crazy, psychic oceanographer like the one in your book Mother Tide? I liked the part about all of the cities being wiped out by the giant waves" (paragraph 83). This quote highlights that he is comparing the psychic oceanographer to Maureen, which shows that he is caring more and is changed from how he was in the beggining. Now, he is curious more and is finding more interest in his assignment. To sum it up, using Maureen's books and comparing them to his situations shows that his opinions have changed.

Furthermore, the last question that he asked Maureen shows that he is curious to find out more about himself, rather than about Maureen. In the passage, Joe writes, "I was just messing around with you before when I wrote that #4 'Your question here' " (paragraph 89). This quote implies that he really has changed throughout the story, because he realizes the meaning of the assignment. He asks Maureen a question that he also has to get the answer to himself. Also, in the story, Maureen answers, "And if you want to tell someone else about your heart and how waiting for the thunder sometimes makes you feel, if you work to find the words to do that, then you are a writer" (paragraph 97). This makes it clear that Maureen is describing Joe in her answer. She is taking what she knows about Joe's imagination and applying it to the question that Joe asks. She wants to make Joe realize that if he find the words to describe his imagination, then he is a writer. In summary, at the end he discovers something about himself that he was not looking for at the beginning, so he has changed.

In conclusion, Maureen's advice and answers have changed Joe throughout the story. He found a connection with something that he did not know could have a story. Also, he related to her books and compared them to his life. And, he finds out something about himself that he did not know was a part of him. He truly has unleashed his imagination that was hiding in him.

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Idea Development—Score Point 5B

The essay fully develops the idea that over the course of exchanging letters with Maureen, Joe becomes more observant and develops into a writer. Evidence is skillfully selected to support the central idea that Joe changes through exchanging letters with Maureen. Each paragraph begins by describing these changes in Joe, resulting in a clear organizational pattern, as seen in this example: “Secondly, Joe had now become a writer from exchanging letters with Maureen.” The essay demonstrates full awareness of the task by concluding with the recognition that Joe “has improved and became somebody new.”

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3B

A variety of sentences structures are used in the essay, including seemingly simple sentences for effect, such as “Unquestionably, Joe has become a writer throughout all of this. Maureen thinks he has and I think he has too.” Consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics is evident throughout the essay, despite some minor punctuation errors.

Have you ever gotten a letter from a author? Joe Jones has! His teacher, Mrs. Bund has assigned students to write a friendly letter to a author and ask questions. Joe had written to the author Maureen O' Toople, and she does respond. Although, she doesn't respond the way he wants her to. Joe talks to her in a rather, rude kind of manner. Maureen decides that since Joe wants to get the 'lame assignment' over with, she would ask him questions for him to answer and then she would also answer his question. It went on and on like this for a few letters. They soon began to grow on each other and like each other more. I believe that exchanging letters with Maureen changed Joe because now, he is more observant, and he became a writer.

To begin with, the affect of exchanging letters with Maureen changed Joe, because now he is more observant of his surroundings. For instance, according to *Your Question for Author Here*, it states "Ha! Youare completely not going to believe what I have in my sock drawer besides the socks: Spiders. Or arachnids, as they are scientifically called. One if a wold spider. The three others ones are jumping spiders,.. Because I also have rocks I have collected from all over the country, a red arrowhead I found last summer, and a real Civil War bullet." This explains to me that now he is more observant of what is around him. Additionally, he could probably make a story out of what he finds outside everyday, or inside. In addition, it states "Sorry I was alarming you talking about your books. I went and looked at the spider one in the library. The first part of *Fangs for the Duchess* is pretty good. Most people don't know that spiders squirt venom in their prey that dissolves their innards so they can suck it down. I'm glad you had that in there." This shows me that Joe had actually read the book and understands it. Before, he had made assumptions about Maureen's books that they had horses or princesses in the story. Overall, Joe is now more observant of his surroundings and doesn't make as much assumptions.

Secondly, Joe had now became a writer from exchanging letters with Maureen. Based on *Your Question for Author Here*, it states "For instance, I have read quite a bit about the Civil War, but I did not know about this gentleman Minie and his invention of the minie ball. Many young boys, boys almost as young as you, went off to fight in the Civil War. I bet you know that. But just think: That minie ball you have could have hit one of those boys on the battlefield, grazed his cheek, wounded him, left him scarred. Who was that boy? What was his name? What story would he tell about that piece of lead in your sock drawer?" This shows me that Maureen has potential that Joe can make a story out of anything. Moreover, it states "Anyway, I used your idea of anything and everything for a poem. This is it.

WHAT I HAVE

Civil War bullet

the story of someone's life

hides in my sock drawer.

This shows me that Joe actually knows how to write. Even Mrs. Bund was amazed by this and she looked like she was about to cry. Additionally, it states "You know that you are a writer if you are imaginative. You know that you are a writer if you are curious. You know that you are a writer if you are interested in the things and people of the world. You know that you are a writer if you hold a minie ball in your hand and wonder about its story. You know you are a writer if you like the sound of rain on the roof. And if you want to tell someone else about your heart and how waiting for the thunder sometimes makes you feel. if you work to find the words to do that, then you are a writer. So, guess what, Joe? You're a writer." This explains to me that after all the exchanging letters with Maureen, she believes that Joe has grown to become a writer throughout the letters. All in all, Joe has gradually grown to become a writer.

In conclusion, Joe has improved and became somebody new when he exchanged letters with Maureen. Evidently, he started observing more things around him and started paying close attention to the details in books of Mauree's. Unquestionably, Joe has become a writer throughout all of this. Maureen thinks he has and I think he has too.

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Idea Development—Score Point 4

The central idea that Joe is changed for the better when exchanging letters with Maureen is well-developed in the essay. Explanations are clear and effective, describing how in the beginning of the passage Maureen teaches Joe “not to make assumptions,” then “he grows to like her,” and finally “he learns to write haikus.” Quotations are effectively integrated and demonstrate full awareness of the task, as evidenced in this example: “At first, Joe ends his letters in a rude manner, saying, ‘I’m Not Kidding,/Joe Jones.’ However, later in the story, he ends his letters with, ‘Your kid-in-school pal,/Joe,’ proving that he changes his view.”

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3C

The essay shows consistent control of a variety of sentence structures and standard English conventions relative to the length and complexity of the writing. A few errors in spelling are present, such as “assumptions,” but the writer’s control is evident, including correctly punctuated quotations. Overall, the writing shows grade-level control of mechanics.

In *Your Question For Author Here* by Kate DiCamillo and Jon Scieszka, Joe is changed for the better when he exchanges letters with Maureen O'Toople, an author of children's books.

First, exchanging letters with Maureen teaches Joe not to make assumptions. When Joe first sends his letter to Mrs. O'Toople, he assumes that because she is a successful author, she hasn't made any mistakes. Soon, Maureen confesses to Joe that she has been in jail. We do not find out why or for what she has been in jail, but we do find out that she promised to change after her experience in prison. This shows to Joe that nobody is perfect, and it also shows him that even successful authors like Maureen O'Toople can make mistakes. Also, Joe assumes that Maureen writes like any other author of children's books, only to be proven wrong by reading the start of one of her books. Joe, in addition, assumes that he is not a writer, but Maureen shows him that he can be one.

Another reason why Joe is changed for the better by exchanging letters with the author Maureen O'Toople is because he grows to like her. At first, Joe ends his letters in a rude manner, saying, "I'm Not Kidding,/Joe Jones"(¶ 21-22). However, later in the story, he ends his letters with, "Your kid-in-school pal,/Joe"(¶ 91-92), proving that he changes his view about Mrs. O'Toople. Joe continues to become more mature as the story goes on as well. He starts off by demanding answers to his question, explaining the project, and complaining to Maureen that he needs something above a C- for his mom to be happy. However, as the story progresses, he starts being more polite to Maureen, telling her that they are pals, and then she also becomes more polite to Joe. She helps him, and by the end of the story, the two are good friends.

Finally, Joe is changed for the better by exchanging letters with Maureen because Joe learns to write haikus from Maureen. Mrs. O'Toople sends Joe an example of one and also gives instructions on how to formulate a good haiku. This proves that Maureen cares a lot about Joe learning to write and about his grade. When Joe turns in his project, he earned a B for it, which is definitely higher than a C-, which in turn is exactly what he wanted. Then, Maureen says, "Personally, I would have given you an A." The bond between them is certainly much stronger than what it was before.

Exchanging letters with Maureen O'Toole changes Joe for the better by teaching him not to make assumptions, by making them friends, and by teaching Joe how to write a haiku.

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Idea Development—Score Point 3

The central idea that exchanging letters with Maureen changes Joe is moderately developed in the essay, which establishes that at the beginning of the passage Joe is ungrateful and by the end he is thankful. Appropriate evidence is selected to support the central idea, but the expression of ideas regarding how Joe's attitude changes over the course of his interaction with Maureen is only adequately expressed. The essay includes a long quotation and a somewhat general explanation that "Maureen asked him all these questions to prove to him that he was a writer." While there is sufficient awareness of the task, the essay contains more details about Maureen's response to Joe than an explanation of how Joe changes through the experience.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3D

The essay demonstrates consistent control of sentence structures. Relative to the length of the essay, errors with mechanics are present but do not affect meaning. Some minor errors in spelling appear as well, such as "ungreatful" and "bizzar," but the essay uses quotation marks and apostrophes effectively. The essay demonstrates grade-level control of standard English conventions.

Has someone ever done something that impacts your life? In a story from "Your Questions for Author here" Maureen O'Toople makes a impact on Joe's life. At the begginging of the story Joe is ungreatful, at the end of the story Joe is thankful.

At the begging of the story Joe is ungreatful. Joe is assigned a project where he has to ask an author questions through a series of letters. Joe thinks "Oh I won't have to do anything, the author can do it all for me.", but Maureen the author he chose, thinks otherwise. She says "So lets make a deal, Joe. I'll ask you a question and you answer it. And then, if I feel like it, I'll answer one of your questions.". Joe gets frusterated by this by this because she is making extra work for him and he thought it would be easy. Joe is ungreatful for Maureens actions, though they may help him out.

At the end of the of the story Joe is thankful. After answering Maureen's bizzar questions, Joe finally has a question for himself. Joe asks "How do you know if you might be a writer?". She answers by saying " You know that you are a writer if you are imaginative. You know that you are a writer if you are curious. You know that you are a writer is you are interested in the things and people of the world. You know that you are a writer if you hold a minié ball in your hand and wonder about it's story. Your know that you are a writer if you like the sound of rain on the roof. And if you want to tell someoneelse about your heart and how waiting for the thunder sometimes makes you feel, if you work to find the words to do that, then you are a writer. So, guess what Joe? You're a writer." Maureen asked him all these questions to prove to him that he was a writer. Maureen also helped him write a poem and get a B on it. Joe is thankful for what Maureen has done for him.

At the begging of the story Joe is ungreatful, at the end of the story Joe is thankful. Maureen made an impact on Joe's life, at the begging he was annoyed at the work he had to do, at the end he realized the talent he had. One person can affect your whole life, you just have to choose how to react to it. 10% of life is what happens to you the other 90% is how you choose to react to it.

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Idea Development—Score Point 2

The central idea that exchanging letters with Maureen changes Joe is somewhat developed in the essay. The essay demonstrates a basic understanding of how Joe “went from being annoyed and having an attitude with Maureen, to listening to her and taking her advice.” Organization is limited in the essay, though the writing utilizes transitions, such as, “In the beginning of the passage” and “Later on in the story” to signal changes in Joe. The essay demonstrates the changes in Joe mainly by referring to events in the passage with limited explanation, such as in these examples: “Joe shows and tells Maureen this” and “Maureen then replies back.”

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 2

Mostly consistent control of standard English conventions is apparent, relative to the length and complexity of the essay. A few minor spelling errors (e.g., “recieved” or “advise”) are present, and sentence variety is limited.

Based on the passage "Your Question for Author Here", exchanging letters with Maureen changes Joe. Throughout all of the letters being sent and received, Maureen has learned a lot about Joe and Joe has learned lessons that will stick with him for the rest of his life.

In the beginning of the passage, Joe only wrote a letter to Maureen O'Toole because he had to for a school assignment. Joe shows and tells Maureen this because of his attitude shown in his writing. Maureen then replies back using the same tone that Joe used. This showed Joe that he was not going to get the easy way out on the writing assignment. Later on in the story, Maureen started to answer Joe's questions but not directly. She would always answer them by saying her opinion or answer to the question that she previously asked. This really confused and annoyed Joe but made him think deeper and understand her writing. Maureen started realizing this when reading Joe's letter. He started to change his attitude and the tone of the letter. He started listening to Maureen, being nicer to her, taking her advice, and read her books. Joe had a better understanding of writing now, and why authors write the books that they do.

Overall, Joe had went from being annoyed and having an attitude with Maureen, to listening to her and taking her advice. This is how Joe changed by exchanging letters to Maureen.

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Idea Development—Score Point 1

The central idea that Joe changes is minimally developed in the response. The essay demonstrates a poor expression of ideas. Details are insufficient to explain how Joe changes, as shown in examples like “Joe learned to express himself better and made a friend,” and “Joe was changed and was less impulsive and more thoughtful.” The response has minimal organization and lacks transitions between ideas.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 1

There are few noticeable errors in standard English conventions in this response, but the simplicity and repetition of sentence structures, such as “Joe just wanted,” “Joe wrote,” “Joe learned,” and “Joe was changed,” prevents the response from demonstrating grade-level control. The response is comprehensible but too brief to demonstrate more than minimal control of standard English conventions.

Exchanging letters with Maureen changes Joe. Joe just wanted to get a good grade but he learned to think about why authors write what they do. Joe wrote letters to the author Maureen O'Toople. He asked for the answers to get an A but wrote his own poem and got a B on his poem. Joe learned to express himself better and made a friend. Joe was changed and was less impulsive and more thoughtful.

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Idea Development—Score Point 0

The response provides no development of the central idea that exchanging letters with Maureen changes Joe. There is evidence that the student has read the passage, with reference to sending “letters back and forth,” but the response does not address the task.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 0

There is no evidence of control of standard English conventions. Capitalization and punctuation are missing, and there is no demonstration of grade-level sentence complexity.

they sent letters back and forth

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