

2026 MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guide

Grade 3 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’s feelings change throughout the passage; use details from the passage to develop the essay.

This item can be found in the released item sets on the [MCAS Resource Center](#).

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 “The Accident,” write an essay that explains how Ray’s feelings change throughout the passage. Be sure to use details from the passage to develop your essay.

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
4A 4B	- Central idea is clear and fully developed - Effective selection and explanation of evidence and/or details - Effective organization - Clear expression of ideas - Full awareness of the purpose for writing
3	- 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 purpose for writing
2	- 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 purpose for writing
1	- Central idea is not present and/or not developed - Insufficient evidence and/or details - Minimal or no organization - Poor expression of ideas - Minimal awareness of the purpose for writing
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 3B 3C	- 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
2	- 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	- 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., 4A and 4B).

Idea Development—Score Point 4A

The central idea is fully developed addressing how Ray's feelings change throughout the passage. Details are effectively selected and explained throughout the essay. The essay identifies Ray's feelings, cites evidence and provides an explanation of those feelings: "This is important because it shows Ray being proud of his painting and even though he won the third [p]lace he was still proud of his work." The essay is effectively organized with a brief introduction, four body paragraphs addressing various feelings throughout, and a brief conclusion. There is a clear expression of ideas: "In the middle of the story Ray is feeling mad because his ferret had knocked over his dirty cup of water on to this favorite painting that he painted." There is a full awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3A

Conventions are consistently controlled relative to the length and complexity of the essay. There are very few errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics. Some missing commas before direct quotes do not affect overall readability. Based on length and complexity, the writing demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

In the story "The Accident" Ray's feelings change many times.

In the beginning of the story Ray feels excited because there is a art contest for the kids in the city. I know this because in the story it says "Annie's Childrens Bookstore was closed for remodeling. But Ray didn't mind. He was to excited. "It's an art contest," he told Grampa. "For all the kids in the city. The three winners' pictures are gonna be hung up in the window of a store on State Street." This is important because it shows Ray being really excited about the art contest and it even says he is excited. It also shows Ray being excited in the beginning of the story.

Later Ray is hurt because his grampa thinks his blob that he painted is a potato. I know this because in the story it says "Just then Grampa shuffled into the room in his slippers and plaid pajamas. Not noticing his own moccasin, he remarked, "My, that's sure is a fine potato." Ray turned off his brass desk lamp, scrambled under his woolly blanket, and tried not to show his hurt feelings." This is important because it shows Ray trying not to show his hurt feelings and it also says Ray felt hurt. It also shows Rays feelings changing from excited to hurt.

In the middle of the story Ray is feeling mad because his ferret had knocked over his dirty cup of water on to his favorite painting that he painted. I know this because it says "Murky water flooded Ray's newly finished painting. Colors swirled and darkened. The paper was soaked thorough. The fiery sun, the redbrick house, and the towering oak tree vanished into a big, wet, splotchy, ugly mess. "Bandit!" Ray exclaimed." This is important because it shows Ray being mad because Bandit, his ferret, knocked a dirty cup of water onto Ray's painting. It also shows Rays feelings change from excited to hurt to mad.

At the end of the story Ray is feeling proud because his painting of Grampas moccasins work out and win third place. I know this because in the story it says "Everybody in the crowd looked down at Grampa's boots, and they didn't know what he was yelling about. But Ray did. Even though his ribbon read "third place," he felt like a firt place winner." This is important because it shows Ray being proud of his painting and even though he won third lace he was still proud of his work.

In the story "The Accident" Ray's feelings change four different times. Ray learns to never give up.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 4B

The central idea of how Ray's feelings change throughout the passage is fully developed in the essay. Details are effectively selected to show how Ray's feelings change through the passage. The essay includes quotes and paraphrased details to support the central idea: "One piece of evidence is, On paragraph 41 Ray problem solves and figures he can do a painting of one of grampa's moccasins." The essay is effectively organized with a clear introduction, three body paragraphs that each address a feeling, and a conclusion that restates the feelings explained throughout the essay. Ideas are clearly expressed and there is a full awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3B

Conventions are consistently controlled relative to the length of the essay. Occasional errors, such as misplaced capital letters, do not affect readability: "My second piece of evidence is, On paragraph 29, Ray gives up." Based on length and complexity, the writing demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions.

In the passage *The Accident* written by Cynthia Leitich Smith. The main character Ray wants to sign up for an art competition Grampa has already let him participate. But all his paintings don't turn out as he wanted them to. In this essay I will prove how Ray's feelings change throughout the passage.

In the beginning Ray feels confident. My first piece of evidence is, In paragraph 4 Ray says "Maybe I'll win a blue ribbon" that is saying something because a blue ribbon means you win first place. This proves that Ray is confident. Another piece of evidence is, On paragraph 18 he thought he made a really good outline his dinosaur painting. He thought he was getting better at painting. He was beginning his steps for painting. This proves that Ray is confident.

In the middle Ray feels hopeless. One piece of evidence is, On paragraph 25 Ray's ferret knocks over a water cup and it ruins Ray's masterpiece now Ray thinks he can never make another masterpiece or painting in time. This proves Ray feels hopeless. My second piece of evidence is, On paragraph 29 Ray gives up. He thinks he will not go to the competition. He doesn't have a positive attitude because he doesn't realize he can make a different type of painting that will make his grampa proud.

In the end Ray is proud. One piece of evidence is, On paragraph 41 Ray problem solves and figures he can do a painting of one of grampa's moccasins. He thought that would be like if the painting belonged to both of them. He was so proud of his work that Ray thought he would surprise his grandfather. My next piece of evidence is, On paragraph 48 after the presentation of his work. He was so proud he thought even though it was third place it felt like a winner.

All this evidence proves that Ray changes from confident, to hopeless, to proud. The central idea is to have pride and be proud in your hard work. No matter how many times you mess up.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 3

The essay includes a moderately developed central idea. The essay identifies Ray's feelings throughout the passage and includes brief explanations of how they change. The details are appropriate and paraphrased from the passage to support the central idea. The essay is moderately organized and uses phrases such as "First," "Next," "After that," "At the end," and "In conclusion" to connect the ideas. The essay shows an adequate expression of ideas and a sufficient awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3C

Conventions are controlled relative to the length and complexity of the essay. The essay includes both simple and complex sentences: "He was happy." and "Next, Ray felt disappointed in himself because on his first try, all he made was a big blob of brown paint that looked like a potato." There are occasional errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, but they do not affect readability.

Ray's feelings changed a lot throughout the passage.

First, Ray felt excited because he was entering a art contest and the three big winners' pictures were going to be hung up in the window of a store on State Street.

Next, Ray felt disappointed in himself because on his first try, all he made was a big blob of brown paint that looked like a potato.

After that, Ray felt ready to try again. He copied the outline of a T. rex. but put to much water on the paper with the paint. That made the paper to soggy. By that time, Ray felt very sad.

At the end, Ray made a masterpiece with a fiery sun, a towering oak, and a redbrick bungalow with a stained-glass window on one side and smoke coming out of the chimney. He was happy. Then his ferret knocked over a cup of water that spilled on his masterpiece. He felt very frustrated. He made a last try that was a collage that did not get ruined and he was happy with.

In conclusion, Ray's feelings changed throughout the passage.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 2

The essay includes a somewhat developed central idea of how Ray's feelings change throughout the passage. Ray's feelings are stated, but there are limited details to support the central idea: "He feels excited to enter the art contest." Organization of the essay is limited and includes a basic expression of ideas: "He doesn't believe in himself." The brief conclusion restates the many feelings that show how Ray changed in the passage. There is a partial awareness for the purpose of writing.

Standard English Conventions 2

The essay demonstrates mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics. There are occasional spelling and grammar errors: "He added to much water, and then he became sad again." Given its length and complexity, the writing demonstrates a mostly consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Ray's feelings change throughout the story. He feels excited to enter the art contest. He makes a moccasin, but his grandfather thinks it's a potato. Ray then becomes sad at his grandfather's remark. The next day, he makes a T. rex. He added to much water, and then he became sad again.

The next day, he made his house absolutely perfectly. But when his pet ferret, Bandit, trips over the paper cup of paint water all over Ray's painting, he feels terribly miserable. He doesn't believe in himself. The next day, he looks at the moccasin and has an idea. He turns his failed artwork into a beautiful collage.

At the end of the story, even though he comes in 3rd place, he feels amazing as if he won first prize. So in conclusion, that is how Ray's feelings change throughout the story. He feels excited, sad, confident, miserable, and finally amazed by his artwork.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 1

The central idea is not developed. The response lists Ray's changing feelings of excitement, anger, and pride, but there is insufficient evidence to illustrate those feelings: "But when Ray started to mess up again and again that really got to him." Organization is minimal and there is a minimal awareness for the purpose of writing.

Standard English Conventions 1

The response demonstrates little control of sentence structure, as many run-on sentences impede the readability of the essay: "But then when Ray had the idea to do a colage he felt proud of his idea and that is the most important thing to beleive in your self." The writing lacks the complexity and length to demonstrate more than minimal control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

At the start of the story Ray was feeling excited about entering the art contest .But when Ray started to mess up again and again that really got to him and his feelings started to change and Ray started to feel angry .But then when Ray had the idea to do a colage he felt proud of his idea and that is the most important thing to beleive in your self.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 0

The response does not address how Ray's feelings change. The response demonstrates that the student has read the passage by including details such as the paint cups.

Standard English Conventions 0

The response includes a sentence that lacks capitalization and punctuation. The response is of insufficient length and complexity to demonstrate control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

he wanted to sign up for something and he started to paint the next day then he started to paint cups

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)