

2026 MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guide

Grade 4 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 a key concept in the passage; use information 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 *Kangaroos: Amazing Jumpers*, write an essay that explains how kangaroos survive in the wild. Be sure to use information 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 essay is fully developed and explains how kangaroos survive in the wild. There is an effective selection of evidence about how they move, find food, and keep themselves cool. There is a clear expression of ideas: “This shows that cooling down helps them survive because, it prevents them from overheating and getting heat stroke.” The essay is effectively organized using clear transitions, such as “One way,” “Another way,” and “One last way” to support the central idea. The introduction, which states how kangaroos survive, is followed by three body paragraphs that each address a method of survival and a brief conclusion that restates the question. There is a full awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3A

The essay includes a variety of sentences that demonstrate consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics: “They jump to get away from predators, find food and cool themselves off.” “As you can see, one way kangaroos survive in the wild is finding food.” There are very few errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics. Based on its length and complexity, this essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Kangaroos survive in the wild. The story is about kangaroos, how they survive in the wild, and cool facts about the daily lives of a kangaroo. Kangaroos live in different places, but they all have similar ways of survival. There are three main ways kangaroos survive in the wild. They jump to get away from predators, find food, and cool themselves off.

One way kangaroos survive in the wild is jumping. Kangaroos jump to get away from predators and they can leap 30ft across the air. Their bodies are specially designed for jumping. In the text it said, “Kangaroos are the only large animals that hop to move and they are among the world’s best jumpers.” This shows how kangaroos survive in the wild because it shows that they are very good at jumping and do it as a part of life. As you can see, one way kangaroos survive in the wild is jumping.

Another way kangaroos survive in the wild is finding food. They eat grasses leaves and flowers depending on the type. In the text it said, “Kangaroos need water, but they can go long stretches without it. They can live on almost as little water as camels do. They get a lot of water from the plants they eat.” This shows that another way kangaroos survive in the wild is finding food because it really shows the importance of finding food to survive. As you can see, one way kangaroos survive in the wild is finding food.

One last way kangaroos survive in the wild is cooling off. They lick their arms to stay cool and also seek refuge when it is hot. In the text it stated, “During the day kangaroos try to rest in shady spots to avoid overheating in open plains and grasslands.” In the text it also said, “Licking their forearms is another way they keep cool. They have less hair on this part of their body.” This shows that cooling down helps them survive because, it prevents them from overheating and getting heat stroke. As you can see one way kangaroos survive in the wild is keeping cool.

In conclusion, these are three ways a kangaroo survives in the wild.

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Idea Development—Score Point 4B

The essay is fully developed and includes information supporting the central idea of how kangaroos survive in the wild. The first paragraph mentions details from the passage: “They survive in the wild by nibbling on some grass.” The essay is effectively organized with an introduction to support the central idea, three body paragraphs that explain how kangaroos survive, and a brief concluding statement that restates the central idea. There is a full awareness of the purpose for writing and clear expression of ideas.

Standard English Conventions 3B

The essay demonstrates consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics as evidenced in the following sentence: “Kangaroos try to rest in shady spots to keep themselves from overheating.” Minor errors in spelling are present but do not detract from understanding of the essay. Based on its length and complexity, the essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Amazing Jumpers by Lisa M. Herrington. Kangaroos survive in the wild. They survive in the wild by nibbling on some grass. If they hear a strange noise they will perk up their ears the sound could be from anywhere. They will hop into action and hop faster and faster in different directions. They leave the danger in their dust.

Kangaroos are herbivores. So they mainly feed on different kinds of grasses, leaves, and flowers. Kangaroos need water but they can do long stretches without it. They get a lot of water from the plants they eat. Kangaroos try to rest in shady spots to keep themselves from overheating.

It can be hard for them to find shade with not many trees. Red kangaroos dig holes to find cool places where they can rest and seek for a place to hide. Licking their arms is also another way to keep cool. As the saliva dries on their arms it cools the kangaroos blood and lowers their body temp. The mother kangaroo gives birth to a very tiny baby.

Despite its miniature size, the newborn kangaroo grips its mother's fur with its short front limbs and crawls its way into her pouch. The pouch offers food, shelter, and protection for the baby so it can grow and finish developing. As it grows, the baby kangaroo spends more time outside its mother's pouch. Before long it becomes too big for the pouch. At 9 to 12 months, depending on the species, the joey leaves the pouch for good. That is how kangaroos survive in the wild!

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Idea Development—Score Point 3

The essay is moderately developed and includes a general explanation of how kangaroos survive in the wild. Appropriate information is included to support the central idea: “First, when the day becomes hot, kangaroos dig holes to keep cool, they dig holes because they might overheat if they stay on land.” Organization is moderate and includes transitional phrases such as “Second” and “Third.” The essay demonstrates an adequate expression of ideas and a sufficient awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3C

The essay includes a variety of sentence structures, such as “Here are some ways they can survive” and “They will keep jumping until the predator has left and it is safe to go back.” Minor errors in spelling such as “predater” do not detract from understanding the essay. Based on its length and complexity, the essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Kangaroos can survive the wild in many ways. Here are some ways that they can survive. First, when the day becomes hot, kangaroos dig holes to keep cool, they dig holes because they might overheat if they stay on land. the kangaroos stay into there holes until the land becomes cool enough to come out.

Second, kangaroos can jump over more than 30 feet in a single jump! This is very useful to them because if they spot a predator, they can escape easily by jumping long distances. They will keep jumping until the predator has left and it is safe to go back.

Third, kangaroos don't need much water. This can help them because if they take a single drink of water, they can survive without it for hours. If a predator is nearby and the kangaroo is drinking water, all they need to do is take a quick drink and they can run away. That is how the kangaroos can survive.

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Idea Development—Score Point 2

The essay includes a somewhat developed central idea that explains how kangaroos survive in the wild. The central idea is stated and is supported by limited information from the passage: “One reason is if kangaroos need to escape danger, they hop at 40 miles per hour.” The organization is limited, with a brief introduction that establishes the central idea and three paragraphs that each address a method of survival. The essay includes a basic expression of ideas and a partial awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 2

The essay demonstrates a mostly consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level relative to its length and complexity. Sentences are mostly correct with some minor errors in capitalization, but these errors do not detract from the overall understanding of the essay. The writing demonstrates mostly consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

How kangaroos survive in the wild.

One reason is if kangaroos need to escape danger, they hop at 40 miles per hour. This helps them escape danger before the danger reaches them. This is a reason how kangaroos survive in the wild.

Another reason is mother kangaroos practice boxing with their young. This can help kangaroos fight danger, now giving them the option of fight or flight. this is a second reason how kangaroos survive in the wild

The final reason is kangaroos make noises to communicate. this can help kangaroos alert other kangaroos from danger. This is the final reason how kangaroos survive in the wild.

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Idea Development—Score Point 1

The response includes a central idea that kangaroos survive which is stated but not developed. The response remains on task, but information is insufficient, leading to poor expression of ideas. The response provides examples such as “jumping long stretches” and “going long periods of time without water or food,” but these examples are not further developed to support the central idea effectively. The response is minimally organized and demonstrates a basic expression of ideas. There is minimal awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 1

The response includes one sentence and does not demonstrate variety in sentence structure. Although there is correct usage of punctuation, the response lacks the length and complexity to demonstrate more than minimal control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Kangaroos survive by keeping joeys safe in pouches, jumping long stretches, and going long periods of time without water or food.

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Idea Development—Score Point 0

This response shows that the student has read the passage but does not answer how the kangaroos survive in the wild.

Standard English Conventions 0

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

kangaroo are so smert and they love there baby and the baby is love mom kangaroo

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