

2026 MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guide

Grade 5 English Language Arts

Question 11: 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 the traits of a character; 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 Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise*, write an essay that explains how Coyote's thoughts and actions show her character traits. 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 essay includes a fully developed central idea demonstrating how Coyote's actions and thoughts show her character traits. It identifies Coyote's character traits and includes relevant quotations and explanations to support the central idea. Each body paragraph effectively explains with evidence and commentary how Coyote's traits and attributes are revealed in the passage. The essay is well organized, using an introduction to provide insight into the character traits followed by three body paragraphs that explain each trait. A brief conclusion restating the character traits is also included. Transitions, such as "Firstly" and "Also," move the essay from one idea to the next. The essay includes a clear expression of ideas and demonstrates a full awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3A

The essay demonstrates consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics. Sentences show variety and correct structure: "Firstly, Coyote is very wise and insightful." There are few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. Based on length and complexity, the essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Coyote's many thoughts and actions give insight into her character traits. Firstly, Coyote is very wise and insightful. Also, she is quite kind and caring. Finally, she can be daring and courageous. These actions and thoughts that Coyote performs and thinks reveal her character traits and attributes.

Firstly, Coyote is wise and has a lot of insight in some areas. For example, when she saw a boy who was going to get a watermelon flavored slushy, she warned them about anything that is labeled to taste like watermelon. She said not to get those, but instead to get another flavor of slushy. Paragraph twelve says ""Watermelon. That's a no-go. Never waste your time with anything that claims to be watermelon or banana flavored. It's a scam every time."" This excerpt from the text shows Coyote's warning, and paragraph 28 shows the outcome of the watermelon slushy. It says ""Sweet," he said. "Weird. Not really like watermelon at all."" Therefore, Coyote can be very wise and has a lot of insight in different categories of information.

Also, when the boy still got the watermelon-flavored slushy, Coyote offered to share her slushy with the child, and he seemed to like it better, which shows how caring and kind Coyote can be. Paragraph 32 shows Coyote feeling bad for the boy, and in paragraph 34, Coyote cracks. She offers to trade slushies with him, and in paragraph 38, the trade happens. The boy even tells his older brother about it in paragraph 46. These acts of care and kindness from Coyote reveals one of her many character traits/attributes and her overall personality.

Finally, the daring attribute of Coyote sticks out when she agreed to take a kitten from the boys. She understood the risk of getting a kitten: her dad would say no to her. After pondering one of the major life choices she would face, she accepted it and followed her heart. According to paragraphs 67 and 69, Coyote accepted to purchase a cat from the children. She knew she would get a 'no' to keeping the little kitten she obtained. More specifically, the text said ""Yeah," I answered through a little smile that was just growing on my face. "Yeah, I want him."" and paragraph 69 stated "Now, I knew I'd never get permission to keep the warm little ball of perfection I was holding in my hands. It was a "no" without a doubt, and I knew it."

Therefore, Coyote's many actions and thought reveal her character traits. One trait she has is her insight. Another is kind/caring. Finally, she can be daring/courageous.

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Idea Development—Score Point 4B

The essay is fully developed and focuses on how Coyote's actions and thoughts show her character traits of strong, defiant, wise, generous, and kind. The essay provides effectively selected details with explanation from the passage to support the character traits of getting along with people animals: "Also, Coyote claims there was a 'love-at-first-yawn-eye lock,' indicating that they liked each other." Organization is effective and flows logically from one idea to the next. The first paragraph begins with an introductory sentence and moves right into the first trait. It is followed by four additional body paragraphs that explain the rest of the traits. A brief conclusion restating the character traits is also included. The essay demonstrates a full awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3B

The essay includes a variety of sentence structures and features both quotation and explanation: "Coyote did this because she claims 'It's tough, seeing a kid get a bad break,' with the kid looking very glum." Minor errors in punctuation and spelling such as "addititon" do not detract from the overall understanding of the essay. The essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Based on the *Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise*, I think Coyote has many different traits. I think Coyote is physically strong because according to the passage, Coyote thinks "most barefoot people would've been hooting and hopping with that sizzling asphalt burning the bottoms of their feet," but her soles were used to it and she walked very easily.

I think Coyote is also very defiant because even though she knew the tyrannical "No Shoes, No Shirt, No Service" rule, she waved at the man at the counter, cut him off while he was saying "Miss, you can't---," and kept walking.

Coyote is also wise and gives advice, like when she told the kid that was coveting the "Wild Watermelon" slushy to "Never waste your time with anything that claims to be watermelon or banana flavored. It's a scam every time." Yet the kid didn't heed her advice and was pulling the knob and squirting glistening pink slush in a flash after Coyote held a cup out to him. Also, after the kid agrees that the flavor tastes weird, Coyote says "Lesson learned, kid. Now you know." In addition, she says the kid should take some slushy because the boy is probably going to get in at some point today and he might as well get a slushy out of it, even though the boy's mom said no.

In addition, Coyote is generous and kind because even if the kid did not listen to her advice, she still chooses to trade with her Funky Fruit Punch with the boy's phosphorescent pinkness (Wild Watermelon) in his cup. Coyote did this because she claims "It's tough, seeing a kid get a bad break," with the kid looking very glum. After offering to trade, the boy's eyebrows shot high and he clarified if Coyote was doing this for real. Although she gave it because the kid was going to get in trouble and it was worth it, she lied that she didn't mind trading. However, she still traded, and brought a smile on the kid's face.

Lastly, I think Coyote gets along with people and animals very well. For example, she gets along with the kid very well because she gives him good advice on what flavors to drink and what flavors not to. Not only did she make friends with the boy, but also got along with the kitten very well. According to Coyote her "heart got a little bigger with each beat," which means she is getting attached to the kitten. Also, Coyote claims that there was a "love-at-first-yawn eye lock," indicating that they liked each other.

To sum it up, Coyote was physically strong, defiant, wise, generous, and is great at getting along.

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Idea Development—Score Point 3

The essay offers a moderately developed explanation of how Coyote's actions and thoughts show her character traits. The introduction states that Coyote "really shows her personality traits" which is the general central idea. The body paragraphs each contain appropriate evidence through quotations and examples from the passage to support the idea that Coyote is tough, brave, kind, and caring. The essay is moderately organized with a brief introduction that mentions the central idea, two body paragraphs, and a brief conclusion. Overall, the ideas presented are adequately expressed, and there is sufficient awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3C

The essay demonstrates consistent control of a variety of sentence structures, such as "First off, Coyote is super tough and brave" and "In the end, the essay I wrote proves that Coyote is a very kind, caring, tough and brave person who puts other people before her self." Although there are minor spelling errors such as "counrty" and "exited," they do not detract from the overall understanding of the essay. Given its length and complexity, the essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

In the book The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise, the main character, Coyote, is traveling across the counrty in a school bus with her dad, nicknamed Rodeo. During the story Coyote really shows her personality traits.

First off, Coyote is super tough and brave. My first example of this is in the middle of paragraph 3, "The blacktop of the gas station parking lot radiated the heat right back up at you so it felt like you were getting cooked from both sides. I suppose most barefoot people would've been hooting and hopping with that sizzling asphalt burning the bottoms of my feet, but my soles were so used to it and I walked along easy as you please." She was also brave/tough when she decided that she would keep the kitten even though if her father found out she would probaly would of had to desert it.

Secondly, she is one hundred percent a super kind and caring person because when another kid was getting a slushy, she told him that the flavor didn't really taste like watermelon and the kid didnt even listen. But when he tried it, he wished he listened to her. Then Coyote told him that they could switch even though she didnt like "Wild Watermelon" anymore than he did. As it says in paragrgraph 34-37 "Here." I said. "Trade." His eyebrows shot high. "For reals?" "Sure. I dont mind it all that much," I lied. "And your the one getting in trouble. Better make it worth it." Even though she was super exited for "Funky Fruit Punch" she put the other kids feelings first. Turns out the kid owns kittens and they are trying to give them away, and she gets offered one and ends up with a kitten!

In the end, the essay I wrote proves that Coyote is a very kind, caring, tough and brave person who puts other people before her self. In other words, she is a very nice person.

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Idea Development—Score Point 2

The essay includes a somewhat developed central idea that Coyote's actions and thoughts show her character traits of being thoughtful and sneaky: "I think Coyote is sneaky because she wasn't supposed to get a kitten, but she fell in love with them, so she asked the boys who were selling the kittens for the quietest one." There are limited details with a basic expression of ideas to support the central idea. As a single paragraph, the essay shows limited organization and a partial awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 2

The essay demonstrates mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics. The essay includes run-on sentences: "To hide it from her dad she put the kitten by her belly so he couldn't see it, also she asked the little boy to sneak it around to the back of the bus and give to her there so her father wouldn't see the kitten." There is a mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to length. The essay demonstrates some control of basic and complex sentence structures.

I think Coyote's character traits are thoughtful and sneaky. I think Coyote is thoughtful because she saw a little boy staring at the slushie machine and she offered to buy it for him. She also warned the boy what flavors not to get but he didn't listen to her, so she switched slushies with the boy so he was happy, even though she didn't like the flavor he got. That shows how Coyote was thinking of others instead of being selfish. Another character trait for Coyote is sneaky. I think Coyote is sneaky because she wasn't supposed to get a kitten, but she fell in love with them, so she asked the boys who were selling the kittens for the quietest one. To hide it from her dad she put the kitten by her belly so he couldn't see it, also she asked the little boy to sneak it around to the back of the bus and give it to her there so her father wouldn't see the kitten. Those are the many reasons I believe Coyote is thoughtful and sneaky.

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Idea Development—Score Point 1

The response minimally develops the central idea of how Coyote's actions and thoughts show her character traits. The central idea is presented with very few details about Coyote's action of trading the slushies as an act of kindness. The single quote provided is insufficient and demonstrates a poor expression of ideas. The response is minimally organized and shows a minimal awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 1

The response demonstrates little variety in sentence structure and lacks the complexity and length to demonstrate more than minimal control of standard English conventions for this grade level. Although there is correct usage of some punctuation, there is no sustained evidence of other mechanics, such as capitalization. The response demonstrates minimal control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Based on the passage "The Remarkable Journey Of Coyote Sunrise" by Dan Gemeinhart Coyote's thoughts and actions show her character traits because when she traded slushies with the kid she was being kind. I held mine out to him. "Here," I said. "Trade." this shows that she was being kind to the kid.

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Idea Development—Score Point 0

The response does not address the central idea of how Coyote's actions and thoughts show her character traits. No central idea is stated, and there are no relevant examples from the passage to show Coyote's character traits. The response mentions "they have develop by adomping a kitty" which is enough to demonstrate that the student has read part of the passage. The response demonstrates no understanding of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 0

The response is brief and contains many errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The response is of insufficient length and complexity to demonstrate control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

They have develop by adomping a kitty and i found ou that they like slushys and they have face their fers

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