

2026 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 compares and contrasts how characters in two passages respond to a specific event; use evidence from both passages to support the explanation.

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 passages. The essay should be about four to five paragraphs in length. Be sure to:

- Include a central idea.
- Use evidence from the passages to support the central idea.
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Based on *Hope Springs* and *Across the Pond*, write an essay that compares and contrasts Jubilee’s and Callie’s feelings about going to live in a new place. Use evidence 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 4. 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
<u>5A</u> <u>5B</u>	• 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
<u>4</u>	• 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
<u>3</u>	• 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
<u>2</u>	• 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
<u>1</u>	• Central idea is not developed • Insufficient evidence and/or details • Minimal organization • Poor expression of ideas • Minimal awareness of the task and mode
<u>0</u>	• 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 3D	• 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., 5A and 5B).

Idea Development 5A

The essay is fully developed and insightfully compares and contrasts Jubilee's and Callie's feelings about going to live in a new place: "Callie and Jubilee share some of the same feeling but they also have different opinions about moving...." Organization is skillful as it highlights the differences between the two characters in separate body paragraphs and then analyzes their similarities in a third body paragraph. Well-chosen details are skillfully explained to support the analysis: "In the passage *Hope Springs* it states 'I'd made sure the maps were out and organized on the table....' This shows that Jubilee was excited to move and she got everything ready for the move...." The essay demonstrates a rich expression of ideas and full awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions 3A

The essay demonstrates consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics. Minor errors in spelling and some missing punctuation do not impede understanding. Sentence structure is controlled across a variety of sentence structures: "This shows that Jubilee is nervous about her plan because she somehow needs to convince her Nan to choose Hope Springs out of all the other towns that they were going to visit." The length and complexity of the essay provide an opportunity to demonstrate consistent control of standard English conventions.

In the passages *Hope Springs* and *Across the Pond* Jubilee's and Callie's feelings about moving have some similarities and differences. One way they are different is that Jubilee is feeling very anxious about the move even though she was prepared for it but on the other hand Callie feels excited for the move. Callie and Jubilee share some of the same feeling but they also have different opinions about moving in the passages *Hope Springs* and *Across the Pond*.

First, in the passage *Hope Springs* Jubilee hopes that the home she will be moving to she will stay there for a long time. Jubilee has never stayed in one spot for very long so that is why she is hoping that her new home will be her home for a while. In the text it states "Maybe this time, we'll find the perfect place," I said as I ran my fingers over the folded edges of the maps I've got a good feeling." (paragraph 10) This shows that Jubilee has a good feeling about the place they are moving too. Jubilee is also feeling anxious about the move. She feels anxious because it is a whole new place with different people. In the text it states "Only this time, I had a plan-an Aretta Paisley inspired plan. Even though I was prepared for another move, I felt a little like a squirrel on the inside, all jitters." (paragraph 13) This shows that Jubilee was feeling anxious about the move even though she was prepared for it. Lastly Jubilee is also feeling nervous about her plan and if it was going to work. She needed her Nan to like Hope Springs out of all the other places they visited. In the text it states "So, Texas was easy. The tricky part was getting Nan to pick Hope Springs out of all those other towns." (paragraph 20) This shows that Jubilee is nervous about her plan because she somehow needs to convince her Nan to choose Hope Springs out of all the other towns that they were going to visit. In the passage *Hope Springs* Jubilee has many different emotions regarding her and her Nan moving.

In the passage *Across the Pond* Callie also has many different feelings involving the move. Unlike Jubilee, Callie is filled with a sense of possibility for what's going to come. Once she saw the landscape she was filled with possibility. In the passage it states "She wanted to drink everything at once- the infinite shades of green, the mossy stone walls along winding paths, the sheep grazing in far-off fields. A draft danced across the back of her neck, but the chill was quickly replaced by a flicker of something Callie hadn't felt in ages. Maybe ever. Possibility." (paragraphs 1 and 2) This shows that Callie was thinking of all the possibilities about moving to a new place. Another emotion Callie was feeling was like she can not believe that they are actually living there. Callie had moved to a castle in Scotland so she found it hard to believe that she was actually living in a castle. In the text it states "Callie nodded. She was more than okay. 'I guess I can't quite believe this is really happening. I mean... we live here now'" (paragraph 24) This shows that Callie was having a hard time believing that her and her family were actually living there. In the passage *Across the Pond* Callie has many different emotions when it comes to her and her family moving.

In the passages *Hope Springs* and *Across the Pond* Callie and Jubilee have many different emotions about moving but they also share some of the same emotions. For example they are both prepared for the move and excited about the aspect of moving to a new place. In the passage *Hope Springs* it states "I'd made sure the maps were out and organized on the table. They sat in my Arlette Paisley linen expandable snap-top folder next to Nan's kissing squirrels salt and pepper shakers." (paragraph 5) This shows that Jubilee was excited to move and she got everything ready for the move so that she could be prepared for the move. In the passage *Across the Pond* it states "No, Callie had packed light for Scotland, for a new life. The moment she found out they were moving, she was ready. But she'd had to wait for months while legal stuff got sorted out in San Diego and Scotland- stuff about school enrollment and apartment leases, and travel visas, and on and on." (paragraph 34) This shows that Callie was prepared for the move and was also excited to be in a whole new place. Callie and Jubilee may feel differently about moving, they also have some of the same emotions when it comes to moving.

Callie and Jubilee share many different feelings but also the same feelings when it comes to moving in the passages *Hope Springs* and *Across the Pond*.

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Idea Development 5B

The essay is fully developed and effectively compares and contrasts Jubilee's and Callie's feelings about going to live in a new place. Selection and explanation of evidence are skillful, focusing the two first body paragraphs on how the two characters are different because "Callie felt happy about the move while Jubilee felt anxious" and that "for Jubilee the moving is pretty much normal, while for Callie, the news came as a shock...." The third body paragraph explores the similarities between the two characters, noting that both "Callie and Jubilee want to leave their current homes." The organization is skillful with a logical progression of ideas, though transitions are often formulaic ("Firstly," "Next," "Lastly"). The essay demonstrates a rich expression of ideas and full awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions 3B

The essay demonstrates consistent control of a variety of sentence structures and grammar, usage, and mechanics: "This proves that Jubilee and Nan had been moving for years, never settling down and always staying somewhere new." Minor errors do not impede meaning, and the essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for the grade level.

In the passages *Hope Springs* and *Across the Pond*, Jubilee and Callie feel different about moving. Callie is excited to live in a castle, with everything being larger than ever, while Jubilee is prepared for the move, she feels anxious, and since her and her Nan keep moving she is hoping to finally find their perfect place.

Firstly, while Callie is moving somewhere big because her parents inherited it, she feels happy that she's somewhere bigger than the home she had before. Jubilee is hoping to move to a town in Texas and feels anxious about another move rather than excited. "Even though I was prepared for another move, I felt a little like a squirrel inside, all jitters." (Paragraph 13, *Hope Springs*) Here it shows Jubilee's feelings about the move, proving that she feels anxious even though she had moved before. "What do you think? You okay?" Callie nodded. She was more than okay. "I guess I can't quite believe this is really happening. I mean . . . we live here now." (paragraphs 23 and 24, *Across the Pond*) Here it shows how Callie felt to move away, this piece of evidence shows how she feels more than okay in the new environment. To sum it all up, Callie felt happy about the move while Jubilee felt anxious.

Next, Jubilee has moved many times and is looking for her perfect "just right" place, while Callie was very surprised with her unexpected move. Callie feels shocked while for Jubilee the potential move to Texas is just one more on a list, other than the fact that it may be her last. "Callie hadn't believed her parents when they sat her down with Jax and told them their family had inherited a castle, and how would they feel about moving to Scotland? . . ." (Paragraph 25, *Across the Pond*) This piece of text evidence supports the idea that Callie was shocked by this move to a castle in Europe. "For years, Nan and I had searched for substance, but I'd noticed a bit of a pattern. Today it was a smart-mouthed doctor at the nursing home, . . . and the time before that was a traffic cop figuring out Nan's secret to avoiding parking meters. There was always something that led us to getting the maps out." (Paragraph 11, *Hope Springs*) This proves that Jubilee and Nan had been moving for years, never settling down and always staying somewhere new. In conclusion, for Jubilee the moving is pretty much normal, while for Callie, the news came as a shock and she couldn't believe it.

Lastly, Callie and Jubilee both feel good about living in a new place and both have reasons they wanted to leave their old homes. Jubilee's reason was that Nan was in a mood and moving time had come. "She'd been in a mood for weeks, and now my new utensil organization system had pushed her grouchiness into a full-out fluster. Every drawer in the kitchen was open. . . I cringed as she tossed a wooden spatula in the tupperware drawer. 'Nan, if we put things back in the same place we found them, it's easier to find them again,' I said. 'Where's the fun in that?' she asked. If Nan was searching for fun in the silverware drawers, we'd be packing up sooner than I thought. Plus, she never put anything in the same place twice, including us." (Paragraphs 2, 3, and 4, *Hope Springs*) In this piece from the text, it shows that Jubilee is leaving because her Nan is getting in a grouchy mood and she wants to leave for Hope Springs in Texas. "Maybe Hope Springs would be our perfect place. If it was good enough for Arletta Paisley, then surely it could be good enough for us too." (Paragraph 14, *Hope Springs*) This is a place she wants to move to because a woman who inspires her is from there and she thinks it could work. Callie also wants to leave her home in San Diego. "At home her life was small. Small apartment, small people. Making herself smaller and smaller until she almost disappeared." (Paragraph 3, *Across the Pond*) This shows that Callie feels like her life is small but in this big castle she can leave her small former life. Both Callie and Jubilee want to leave their current homes.

Callie and Jubilee feel differently about moving, with the biggest difference being that Callie being excited to move and Jubilee is anxious even though she has moved many times before. Both girls have strong feelings about their moves, positive and negative.

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Idea Development 4

The essay provides a clear and well-developed central idea comparing and contrasting Jubilee's and Callie's feelings about going to live in a new place. Evidence is effectively selected to explain the similarity between the two characters: Jubilee is excited to move "so she can learn more about crafting" and Callie is similarly excited "so she can start fresh and learn new things." The essay focuses on more literal differences between the two characters, noting that "in the first story Jubilee moved often but in the second story Callie's family did not move very often." The essay is organized effectively with purposeful transitions, and expression of ideas is clear throughout. The essay demonstrates a full awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions 3C

The essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions. Sentence structures are consistently controlled across a variety of forms: "In *Hope Springs*, the main character Jubilee lives with her Nan and is moving so she tries to convince Nan to pick the place she wants." Given the length and complexity of the essay, minor errors in grammar, punctuation, and phrasing do not impact the overall score.

In *Hope Springs* by Jaime Berry and *Across the Pond* by Joy McCullough they can be compared and contrasted. In *Hope Springs*, the main character Jubilee lives with her Nan and is moving so she tries to convince Nan to pick the place she wants. In *Across the Pond*, Callie and her family, got a castle in Scotland that they move into. Both of the stories can be compared and contrasted by them being excited to learn and the difference of the time they move.

They can be compared because they both are excited to live in a new place. In *Hope springs*, Jubilee tries to convince her Nan that they should move to Hope Springs, Texas so she can learn more about crafting. Jubilee says, "I liked the idea that I could take my messy life and make something else of it with my own two hands and a little effort. Arletta Paisley was from Hope Springs, Texas and every word she said came out coated in a thick texas drawl, sweet but with a little edge, like salted caramel." This helps us understand that due to the main person in the show, Arletta, Jubilee thinks that it would be a good idea to move to where she is from. She wants to do this so she can learn more about crafting. With this information we can infer that she is excited to move because she can learn new stuff. In *Across the Pond*, the main character Callie is also is excited to move so she can start fresh and learn new things. The author exclaimed, "Callie could barely breathe. These stone walls had witnessed everything. They'd witnessed girls like her, probably, who'd been crushed and betrayed, but who'd gotten back up and marched out those massive doors to meet what was next." This helps us realize that when Callie goes walking through the castle that there had been people just like her. She is excited to learn more about the history of the castle and walls. The author gives us an example of little girls getting betrayed but then getting up and going to meet what is next. In both stories they are excited to learn more about the new place they move too.

The two stories can be contrasted because in the first story Jubilee moved often but in the second story Callie's family did not move very often. In *Hope Springs*, Jubilee and her Nan had to move but it was not to much of a surprise to her because they move every once in while. Jubilee said, "I new this day was coming. The final week of sixth grade and the start of summer break creeping up meant prime relocation time. I'd lived with Nan long enough to know the signs." This shows that Jubilee knew that they were bound to move some time soon. She felt that she had been living with her Nan long enough. Whereas in *Across the Pond*, Callie's family did not move often. The author said, "He hadn't wanted to leave all his friends and his teams and his school. He'd lived all seven years of his life in San Diego and didn't even want to imagine something different." This helps us understand that Callie and her family had not moved often. We can use Callie's brother as a example to help show that Jax had lived in the same spot for his whole life. This tells us that they have not moved in the last seven years so it was a big change for all of them. Both of the stories can be contrasted because in the first story they moved often but in the second story they did not.

In conclusion both of these stories can be compared because they both are excited and can be contrasted because the first story they move often and the second one they do not.

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Idea Development 3

The essay is moderately developed with a general central idea comparing and contrasting Jubilee's and Callie's feelings about moving: "Jubilee's and Callie's feelings about moving to a new place can be compared and contrasted in many ways."

Selection and explanation of evidence from both passages are appropriate, though the analysis is general and somewhat repetitive: "This shows that Callie is excited for a new life in Scotland." Organization is moderate, with one body paragraph comparing the two characters and one body paragraph contrasting them. The conclusion repeats the introduction and does not include additional details to support the central idea. There is adequate expression of ideas and sufficient awareness of the task and mode for the grade level.

Standard English Conventions 3D

The essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions. Minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present but do not impede understanding. Sentence structures are consistently controlled across a variety of forms: "While Callie is excited to move to Scotland because she wanted to start a new life with new possibilities, Jubilee wanted to move to Hope Springs because she was inspired by Arletta Paisley."

Based on Hope Springs and Across the Pond, Jubilee's and Callie's feelings about going to live in a new place can be compared and contrasted in many ways.

First of all, Jubilee and Callie both look at going to live in a new place as a good thing. In Hope Springs, Jubilee thinks that moving to Hope Springs will be a good place for her and her family to live. "Maybe Hope Springs would be our perfect place. If it was good enough for Arletta Paisley, then surely it could be good enough for us too." (paragraph 14) This evidence shows that Jubilee believes that Hope Springs will be her and her grandmother's perfect place. In Across the Pond, Callie also thinks that Scotland will be a great place to start a new life and will be good for her family. In paragraph 34, the author writes, "No, Callie had packed light for Scotland, for a new life. The moment she found out they were moving, she was ready." These sentences show that she is excited for a new life and was prepared to move to Scotland for new opportunities.

Jubilee's and Callie's feelings can also be contrasted. While Callie is excited to move to Scotland because she wanted to start a new life with new possibilities, Jubilee wanted to move to Hope Springs because she was inspired by Arletta Paisley. In Hope Springs, the author writes in paragraph 13, "Only this time I had a plan—an Arletta Paisley inspired plan." This evidence shows that she wanted to move to Hope Springs because of Arletta Paisley and paragraph 4 in Across the Pond, "But here, in an actual castle where everything was larger than any life she'd ever known, where the grassy fields beyond the window stretched out like an ocean of green, she already felt her world expanding." This shows that Callie is excited for a new life in Scotland.

Based on Hope Springs and Across the Pond, Jubilee's and Callie's feelings about going to live in a new place can be compared and contrasted in many ways.

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Idea Development 2

The central idea of the essay is somewhat developed, showing how Jubilee and Callie "share positive feelings and emotions about their new homes but in different ways." Some textual evidence is included from both passages, but it is only briefly explained and does not fully clarify how the feelings are similar or different. Explanations are limited and repetitive, and they mostly restate ideas from the passage: "The paragraph shows Callie's excitement toward her new home, the castle." Organization is limited, and there is a partial awareness demonstrated of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions 2

The essay demonstrates mostly consistent control of standard English conventions. Frequent grammar and punctuation errors are present throughout, though overall meaning remains clear. Sentences lack complexity but show mostly consistent control: "In the passage *Hope Springs* Jubilee has positive feeling about living in a new place."

The passages *Hope Springs* and *Across the Pond* can be compared and contrasted in various ways.

In the passage *Hope Springs* Jubilee has positive feeling about living in a new place. The last sentence of chapter 14 says, "If it was good enough for Arletta Paisley, then surely it could be good enough for us too." This sentence is showing hopefulness for the new place to live being good. The text explains that she colored Texas on a map in yellow since it was Nan's favorite color to get her to choose closer to Hope Springs.

In the passage *Across the Pond* Callie has feeling of relief and curiosity of her new home. In paragraph 10 it states, "Of course she was. Callie wanted to turn over every stone in this fortress of a place, from the [workers'] quarters to the castle's keep, an enormous tower at the castle's center. For hundreds of years, the keep had been a lookout to watch for enemies and take refuge if the worst would happen." The paragraph shows Callie's excitement toward her new home, the castle.

The two both share positive feelings and emotions about their new homes but in different ways. They are both same and different in the ways they feel of their new homes.

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Idea Development 1

The response contains a central idea that is only minimally developed. There is a single quote from the first passage and a brief statement referencing the second passage to support the idea that Jubilee and Callie “both feel different emotion on their situation.” The explanation is minimal, describing how “Julibee isn’t too excited on it” while “Callie feels excited and looking forward to her new life in a castle....” Organization is minimal with just three brief sentences, and there is a minimal awareness of task and mode.

Standard English Conventions 1

The response demonstrates little control of standard English conventions relative to its length and complexity. Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation impede understanding, and the response is too brief to demonstrate control of a variety of sentence structures.

Hope Springs and Across the Pond both include characters that are in a situation of moving out of their homes, but they both feel different emotion on their situation. Julibee isn’t too excited on it in paragraph 13 it says, “Even though I was prepared for another move I felt like a squirrel on the inside, all jitters.” In Across The Pond, Callie feels excited and looking forward to her new life in a castle compared to her old life in the cottage with her family.

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Idea Development 0

The response shows some evidence the student read the passages; however, it does not address the question. The brief statement “they are sad they miss their friends” is not enough to demonstrate understanding of the task or mode.

Standard English Conventions 0

The brief phrase contains errors in capitalization and spelling and is insufficient in length to demonstrate control of standard English conventions.

they are sad they miss their friends.

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