
VI. English Language Arts, Grade 7

A. Composition

B. Reading Comprehension

Grade 7 English Language Arts Test

Test Structure

The grade 7 English Language Arts test was presented in the following two parts:

- the ELA Composition test, which used a writing prompt to assess learning standards from the Massachusetts *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework's* **Composition** strand
- the ELA Reading Comprehension test, which used multiple-choice and open-response questions (items) to assess learning standards from the *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework's* **Language** and **Reading and Literature** strands

A. Composition

The spring 2012 grade 7 English Language Arts (ELA) Composition test and Composition Make-Up test were based on learning standards in the Composition strand of the Massachusetts *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* (2001). The learning standards for the Composition strand appear on pages 72–83 of the *Framework*, which is available on the Department website at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html.

ELA Composition test results are reported under the reporting categories **Composition: Topic Development** and **Composition: Standard English Conventions**.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The ELA Composition test included two separate test sessions, administered on the same day with a short break between sessions. During the first session, each student wrote an initial draft of a composition in response to the appropriate writing prompt on the next page. During the second session, each student revised his or her draft and submitted a final composition, which was scored in the areas of Topic Development and Standard English Conventions. The Scoring Guides for the MCAS English Language Arts Composition are available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/student/elacomp_scoreguide.html.

Reference Materials

At least one English-language dictionary per classroom was provided for student use during ELA Composition test sessions. The use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries was allowed for current and former English language learner students only. No other reference materials were allowed during either ELA Composition test session.

Cross-Reference Information

Framework general standards 19–22 are assessed by the ELA Composition.

English Language Arts Test

Grade 7 Writing Prompt

WRITING PROMPT

Imagine that for one day you could trade places with anyone you choose. The person could be real or imaginary, from the past or from the present.

In a well-developed composition, identify the person you would want to trade places with, explain why you would like to trade places with this person, and describe how your day would be different as this person.

Grade 7 Make-Up Writing Prompt

WRITING PROMPT

Think about a trend that has influenced young people, such as texting or wearing certain types of clothing.

In a well-developed composition, identify a trend, explain why it is popular, and describe how it influences young people.

B. Reading Comprehension

The spring 2012 grade 7 English Language Arts Reading Comprehension test was based on learning standards in the two content strands of the Massachusetts *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* (2001) listed below. Specific learning standards for grade 7 are found in the *Supplement to the Massachusetts English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* (2004). Page numbers for the learning standards appear in parentheses.

- Language (*Framework*, pages 19–26; *Supplement*, page 14)
- Reading and Literature (*Framework*, pages 35–64; *Supplement*, pages 15–17)

The *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* and *Supplement* are available on the Department website at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html.

ELA Reading Comprehension test results are reported under two MCAS reporting categories, **Language** and **Reading and Literature**, which are identical to the two framework content strands listed above.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The grade 7 ELA Reading Comprehension test included two separate test sessions. Each session included reading passages, followed by multiple-choice and open-response questions. Selected common reading passages and approximately half of the common test items are shown on the following pages as they appeared in test booklets.

Reference Materials

The use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries was allowed for current and former English language learner students only, during both ELA Reading Comprehension test sessions. No other reference materials were allowed during any ELA Reading Comprehension test session.

Cross-Reference Information

The tables at the conclusion of this chapter indicate each released and unreleased common item's reporting category and the framework general standard it assesses. The correct answers for released multiple-choice questions are also displayed in the released item table.

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION

DIRECTIONS

This session contains two reading selections with seventeen multiple-choice questions and two open-response questions. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

The Panama Canal, which enables boats to travel through the country of Panama instead of sailing around South America, is one of the most famous structures in the world. Read the article about how it was built and answer the questions that follow.

PANAMA CANAL

1 **A** jungle, an untamed river and disease — a formidable trio that made building a canal across the country of Panama an almost impossible dream.

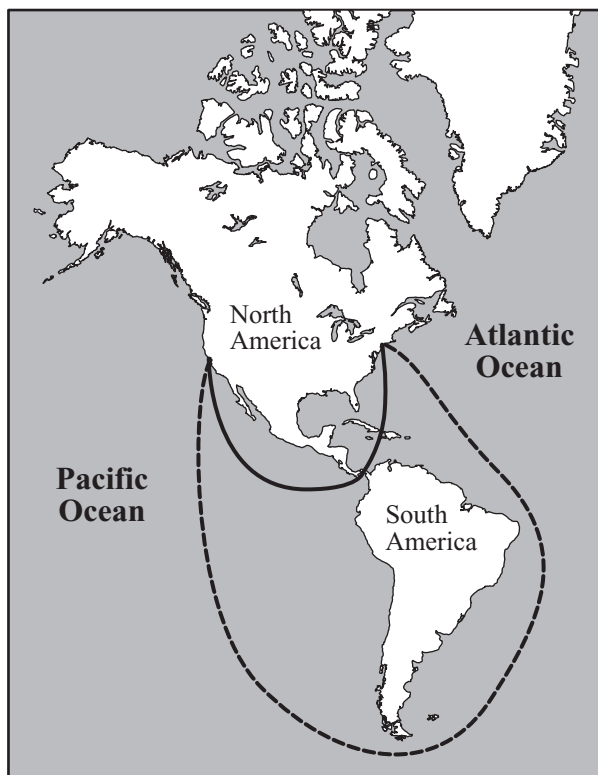
2 Construction was impossible for a French company already famous for building the Suez Canal in Egypt. They had tried it and failed in the late 1880s. The Americans took over in 1904, and it took ten years to complete the 82 km (51 mi.) long canal through Panama. For ships, it was a huge improvement — instead of traveling around the tip of South America, they could travel across Panama and shave 14,400 km (9000 mi.) from trips between New York and San Francisco.

3 How did engineers pull off this amazing feat? Window screens, for starters.

Little Insects, Big Problems

4 During the French canal effort, yellow fever and malaria killed thousands of workers. There's definitely a problem with a building project when three out of four workers die from disease.

5 When the Americans took over, they ran into the same problem. In fact, most of the American workers booked passage home. That's where the window screens came in. The canal's Chief Sanitary Officer, Dr. William Gorgas, believed in a new theory — mosquitoes spread the diseases.



The dotted line shows the route ships had to take before the Panama Canal was built. The solid line shows the new, faster route.

6 His team first attacked the mosquito that carries yellow fever. It likes to live near humans, so Dr. Gorgas targeted Panama City. All standing water — a great place for mosquitoes to lay eggs — was eradicated, and mosquito netting and running water were provided to workers. Windows and doors were screened, and in

Reading Comprehension

a matter of months yellow fever was wiped out in the city.

7 Attacking malaria-carrying mosquitoes, however, was like going after a jungle of beasts, Dr. Gorgas said. They live just about everywhere, and the malaria they carry kills more people than yellow fever. After researching the mosquito's habits, the team drained swamps, cleared vegetation, sprayed oil on standing water, released minnows to eat mosquito larvae and bred spiders, ants and lizards to feed on the adult insects. Malaria cases dropped.

8 With disease under control, Chief Engineer John Stevens turned to keeping the workers happy. While half of the 24,000 laborers were digging a giant "ditch" across Panama, the other half were constructing towns complete with houses, dining halls, hospitals, hotels, churches and schools for workers and their families. They even started a baseball league.

The Big Ditch

9 Some canals are literally big ditches. Ships sail in one end and out the other. But a different solution was needed in Panama. A "lake and lock" design was adopted. Panama's Chagres River would be dammed to create a new lake, called Gatún Lake, in the interior. A series of locks would raise ships from the Atlantic Ocean to the lake

level. Ships would cross Gatún Lake, then descend another set of locks to the Pacific Ocean. It would be a bit like climbing steps, crossing a field and going down another set of steps on the other side.

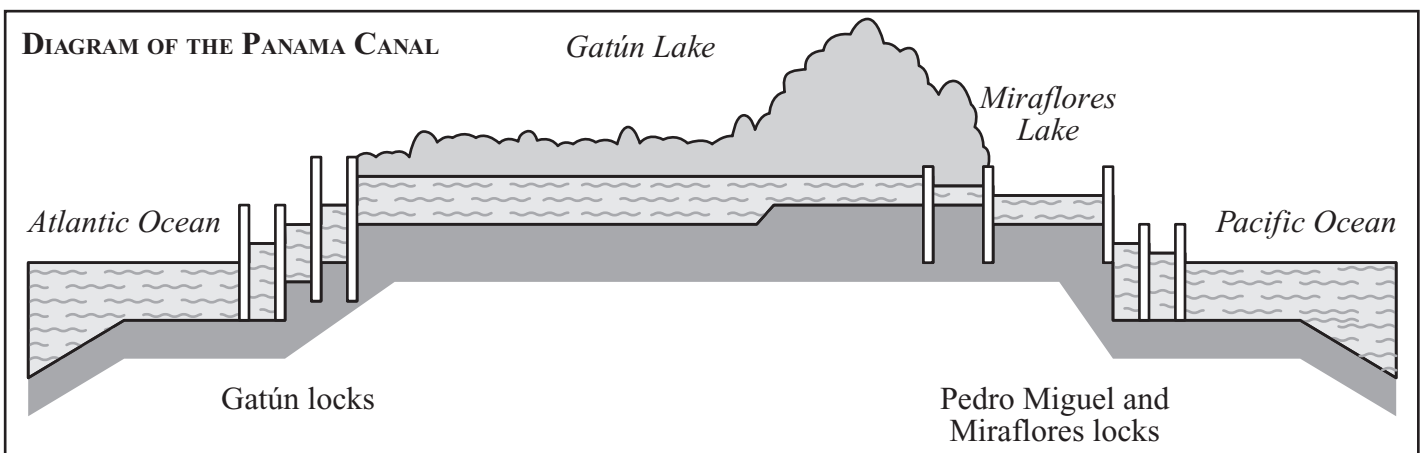
10 The digging began. Dynamite was used to clear rock and loosen the rock-hard clay of the canal. Then rock and soil (called "spoil") were dug out and loaded onto trains for removal.

11 The biggest challenge was the steep, landslide-prone Culebra Cut. There, spoil trains traveled to different levels to haul out about 76 million m³ (100 million cu. yd.) of rock and soil. That's enough to fill the Empire State Building almost 76 times. When the digging was done, the 14 km (8.75 mi.) long Culebra Cut looked like the Grand Canyon. At places its sides were as high as a 25-story building. Some of its spoil was used to build dams, a breakwater in Panama Bay, a townsite and a military base.

Layin' the Locks

12 The locks — all twelve of them — are considered an engineering triumph. They were the first to be operated by electricity and the first made of a relatively new material: concrete.

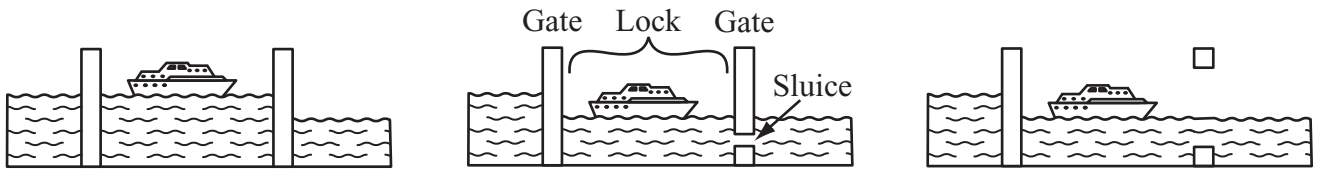
13 The canal actually has two "traffic lanes" — six locks for ships going from



Reading Comprehension

HOW A LOCK WORKS

A lock is just two sets of doors with room big enough for a ship between them. Here's how a ship goes down through a lock.



1. A ship enters a lock and the gates close behind it.

2. Water drains out through sluices to lower the water level in the lock.

3. The gates in front open and the ship sails out.

the Pacific to the Atlantic and another six locks for ships going from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

- 14 When entering from the Atlantic side, three locks lift ships about 26 m (85 ft.) to Gatún Lake. From Gatún Lake, the ships are lowered 9.5 m (31 ft.) through one lock to Miraflores Lake. Two more locks at Miraflores lower ships to the Pacific Ocean.

A (Very Quiet) Drumroll, Please

- 15 The first trip through the canal by a self-propelled, ocean-going vessel took place on



More than 880,000 vessels have passed through the Panama Canal since it was officially opened in 1914.

January 7, 1914. The *Alexandre La Valley*, an old French crane boat, went from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

- 16 The Panama Canal was officially opened on August 15, 1914. Beginning with the French initiative, it had taken more than half a billion dollars and tens of thousands of workers to build the canal. Many thousands died. Despite all this, the news of its opening was met with little hoopla* — World War I had just erupted.

- **The Panama Canal can handle about fifty ships per day. On average, it takes a ship eight to ten hours to pass completely through the canal.**
- **Ships pay a toll — based on cargo volume and measurements — to use the canal. The highest toll ever was \$165,235.58, paid by the cruise ship *Rhapsody of the Seas* on April 15, 1998. The lowest toll was thirty-six cents, paid by Richard Halliburton who swam the canal in 1928.**

* *hoopla* — public excitement

Reading Comprehension

- 1 What is the **main** purpose of the question in paragraph 3?
- A. to lead in to the next topic
 - B. to reveal the author's opinion
 - C. to highlight the workers' skills
 - D. to explain how the canal was built

- 2 Which of the following statements is **best** supported by the information in the section "Little Insects, Big Problems"?
- A. Yellow fever is a more serious illness than malaria.
 - B. Dr. Gorgas had to convince engineers to prevent illness.
 - C. Dr. Gorgas had previously studied the habits of mosquitoes.
 - D. Yellow fever and malaria are carried by different types of mosquitoes.

- 3 Read the sentence from paragraph 9 in the box below.

It would be a bit like climbing steps, crossing a field and going down another set of steps on the other side.

What is the **main** purpose of the sentence?

- A. to describe how the "lake and lock" design works
- B. to demonstrate a weakness in the "lake and lock" design
- C. to compare the "lake and lock" design to other canal designs
- D. to show how the "lake and lock" design reduces the length of the canal

- 4 What is the **most likely** purpose of the text box at the end of the article?
- A. to explain the history of the canal
 - B. to give interesting facts about the canal
 - C. to show how much it costs to use the canal
 - D. to explain the types of ships that use the canal

Reading Comprehension

- 5 Based on paragraph 1, what does the word *formidable* mean?
- A. wild
 - B. difficult
 - C. unfamiliar
 - D. unexplored

- 6 Read the sentences from paragraph 6 in the box below.

His team first attacked the mosquito that carries yellow fever. It likes to live near humans, so Dr. Gorgas targeted Panama City.

In the sentences, what does the pronoun “it” refer to?

- A. team
- B. mosquito
- C. yellow fever
- D. humans

Question 7 is an open-response question.

- **Read the question carefully.**
- **Explain your answer.**
- **Add supporting details.**
- **Double-check your work.**

Write your answer to question 7 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 7 Based on the article, explain the obstacles to building the Panama Canal **and** how each obstacle was overcome. Support your answer with important and specific details from the article.

Reading Comprehension

The American Indian narrator of this excerpt transferred from his troubled school on an Indian reservation to attend an all-white high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot. In this excerpt, his new school's basketball team clashes with his old school's team, led by his friend, Rowdy. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

from **The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian**

by Sherman Alexie

- 1 I kept glancing over at Wellpinit as they ran their lay-up drills. And I noticed that Rowdy kept glancing over at us.
- 2 At me.
- 3 Rowdy and I pretended that we weren't looking at each other. But, man, oh, man, we were sending some serious hate signals across the gym.
- 4 I mean, you have to love somebody that much to also hate them that much, too.
- 5 Our captains, Roger and Jeff, ran out to the center circle to have the game talk with the refs.
- 6 Then our band played the "Star-Spangled Banner."
- 7 And then our five starters, including me, ran out to the center circle to go to battle against Wellpinit's five.
- 8 Rowdy smirked at me as I took my position next to him.
- 9 "Wow," he said. "You guys must be desperate if you're starting."
- 10 "I'm guarding you," I said.
- 11 "What?"
- 12 "I'm guarding you tonight."
- 13 "You can't stop me. I've been kicking your butt for fourteen years."
- 14 "Not tonight," I said. "Tonight's my night."
- 15 Rowdy just laughed.
- 16 The ref threw up the opening jump ball.
- 17 Our big guy, Roger, tipped it back toward our point guard, but Rowdy was quicker. He intercepted the pass and raced toward his basket. I ran right behind him. I knew that he wanted to dunk it. I knew that he wanted to send a message to us.
- 18 I knew he wanted to humiliate us on the opening play.
- 19 And for a second, I wondered if I should just intentionally foul him and prevent him from dunking. He'd get two free throws but those wouldn't be nearly as exciting as a dunk.
- 20 But, no, I couldn't do that. I couldn't foul him. That would be like giving up. So I just sped up and got ready to jump with Rowdy.
- 21 I knew he'd fly into the air about five feet from the hoop. I knew he'd jump about two feet higher than I could. So I needed to jump quicker.
- 22 And Rowdy rose into the air. And I rose with him.
- 23 AND THEN I ROSE ABOVE HIM!
- 24 Yep, if I believed in magic, in ghosts, then I think maybe I was rising on the shoulders of my dead grandmother and Eugene, my dad's best friend. Or maybe I was rising on my mother and father's hopes for me.
- 25 I don't know what happened.

Reading Comprehension

26 But for once, and for the only time in my life, I jumped higher than Rowdy.
27 I rose above him as he tried to dunk it.
28 I TOOK THE BALL RIGHT OUT OF HIS HANDS!
29 Yep, we were, like, ten feet off the ground, but I was still able to reach out and steal the ball from Rowdy.
30 Even in midair, I could see the absolute shock on Rowdy's face. He couldn't believe I was flying with him.
31 He thought he was the only Indian Superman.
32 I came down with the ball, spun, and dribbled back toward our hoop. Rowdy, screaming with rage, was close behind me.
33 Our crowd was insanely loud.
34 They couldn't believe what I'd just done.
35 I mean, sure, that kind of thing happens in the NBA and in college and in the big high schools. But nobody jumped like that in a small school basketball gym. Nobody blocked a shot like that.
36 NOBODY TOOK A BALL OUT OF A GUY'S HANDS AS HE WAS JUST ABOUT TO DUNK!
37 But I wasn't done. Not by a long shot. I wanted to score. I'd taken the ball from Rowdy and now I wanted to score in his face. I wanted to absolutely demoralize him.
38 I raced for our hoop.
39 Rowdy was screaming behind me.
40 My teammates told me later that I was grinning like an idiot as I flew down the court.
41 I didn't know that.
42 I just knew I wanted to hit a jumper in Rowdy's face.
43 Well, I wanted to dunk on him. And I figured, with the crazy adrenaline coursing through my body, I might be able to jump over the rim again. But I think part of me knew that I'd never jump like that again. I only had that one epic jump in me.
44 I wasn't a dunker; I was a shooter.
45 So I screeched to a stop at the three-point line and head-faked. And Rowdy completely fell for it. He jumped high over me, wanting to block my shot, but I just waited for the sky to clear. As Rowdy hovered above me, as he floated away, he looked at me. I looked at him.
46 He knew he'd blown it. He knew he'd fallen for a little head-fake. He knew he could do nothing to stop my jumper.
47 He was sad, man.
48 Way sad.
49 So guess what I did?
50 I stuck my tongue out at him. Like I was Michael Jordan.
51 I mocked him.
52 And then I took my three-pointer and buried it. Just swished that sucker.
53 AND THE GYM EXPLODED!
54 People wept.
55 Really.

Reading Comprehension

- 56 My dad hugged the white guy next to him. Didn't even know him. But hugged and kissed him like they were brothers, you know?
- 57 My mom fainted. Really. She just leaned over a bit, bumped against the white woman next to her, and was gone.
- 58 She woke up five seconds later.
- 59 People were up on their feet. They were high-fiving and hugging and dancing and singing.
- 60 The school band played a song. Well, the band members were all confused and excited, so they played a song, sure, but each member of the band played a different song.
- 61 My coach was jumping up and down and spinning in circles.
- 62 My teammates were screaming my name.
- 63 Yep, all of that fuss and the score was only 3 to 0.
- 64 But, trust me, the game was over.
- 65 It only took, like, ten seconds to happen. But the game was already over. Really. It can happen that way. One play can determine the course of a game. One play can change your momentum forever.
- 66 We beat Wellpinit by forty points.
- 67 Absolutely destroyed them.
- 68 That three-pointer was the only shot I took that night. The only shot I made.
- 69 Yep, I only scored three points, my lowest point total of the season.
- 70 But Rowdy only scored four points.
- 71 I stopped him.
- 72 I held him to four points.
- 73 Only two baskets.
- 74 He scored on a layup in the first quarter when I tripped over my teammate's foot and fell.
- 75 And he scored in the fourth quarter, with only five seconds left in the game, when he stole the ball from me and raced down for a layup.
- 76 But I didn't even chase him down because we were ahead by forty-two points.
- 77 The buzzer sounded. The game was over. . . . Yep, we had humiliated them.
- 78 We were dancing around the gym, laughing and screaming and chanting.
- 79 My teammates mobbed me. They lifted me up on their shoulders and carried me around the gym.
- 80 I looked for my mom, but she'd fainted again, so they'd taken her outside to get some fresh air.
- 81 I looked for my dad.
- 82 I thought he'd be cheering. But he wasn't. He wasn't even looking at me. He was all quiet-faced as he looked at something else.
- 83 So I looked at what he was looking at.
- 84 It was the Wellpinit Redskins, lined up at their end of the court, as they watched us celebrate our victory.
- 85 I whooped.

Reading Comprehension

- 86 We had defeated the enemy! We had defeated the champions! We were David who'd thrown a stone into the brain of Goliath!*
- 87 And then I realized something.
- 88 I realized that my team, the Reardan Indians, was Goliath.
- 89 I mean, jeez, all of the seniors on our team were going to college. All of the guys on our team had their own cars. All of the guys on our team had iPods and cell phones and PSPs and three pairs of blue jeans and ten shirts and mothers and fathers who went to church and had good jobs.
- 90 Okay, so maybe my white teammates had problems, serious problems, but none of their problems was life threatening.
- 91 But I looked over at the Wellpinit Redskins, at Rowdy.

* *David and Goliath* — referring to the biblical story where the weaker man, David, kills the stronger Goliath in battle

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie. Copyright © 2007 by Sherman Alexie. Reprinted by permission of Little, Brown & Company.

- 8 Based on paragraphs 8–15, what is Rowdy's attitude toward competing against the narrator?
- A. He is glad to see the narrator again.
 - B. He is worried that the narrator has improved.
 - C. He is confident he will embarrass the narrator.
 - D. He is angry that the narrator has chosen to play.

- 9 In the excerpt, what is the **most likely** purpose of putting certain sentences in capital letters?
- A. to emphasize the narrator's amazement
 - B. to emphasize the confusion of the crowd
 - C. to emphasize the main idea of the excerpt
 - D. to emphasize the unfairness of the narrator's actions

Reading Comprehension

10 Based on paragraph 19, why does the narrator consider fouling Rowdy?

- A. He wants to show Rowdy that he is a better player.
- B. He wants to show Rowdy that he is unafraid of him.
- C. He wants to prevent Rowdy from taking control of the game.
- D. He wants to prevent Rowdy from playing the rest of the game.

11 In paragraph 24, what does the narrator credit his “rising” to?

- A. his transfer to Reardan
- B. the adrenaline in his body
- C. his friendship with Rowdy
- D. the inspiration of his loved ones

12 Read paragraph 46 in the box below.

He knew he'd blown it. He knew he'd fallen for a little head-fake. He knew he could do nothing to stop my jumper.

What does the repetition of “He knew” **mainly** emphasize?

- A. Rowdy's skill
- B. Rowdy's courage
- C. Rowdy's exhaustion
- D. Rowdy's helplessness

13 According to the excerpt, how do the narrator's steal and three-point basket affect the people in the gym?

- A. The people are unable to contain their joy.
- B. The people are relieved that the game is over.
- C. The people are upset that the narrator outplayed his opponent.
- D. The people are disappointed the narrator did not dunk the ball.

Reading Comprehension

- 14 Read the sentences from paragraph 65 in the box below.

One play can determine the course of a game. One play can change your momentum forever.

What does the narrator imply in the sentences?

- A. He will decide to stop playing basketball.
- B. His happiness about the game would not last long.
- C. His parents will be disappointed with his performance.
- D. The experience would have a strong impact on his life.

- 15 What do the short sentences in paragraphs 65–73 emphasize?

- A. the sadness of the Wellpinit players
- B. the connection the narrator has to Wellpinit
- C. the significance of the narrator's achievements
- D. the narrator's desire to return to his former school

- 16 In the excerpt, what is the **most important** effect of using a first-person narrator?

- A. It allows the reader to understand the author's opinion.
- B. It allows the reader to understand the theme of the excerpt.
- C. It allows the reader to understand the emotions of the crowd.
- D. It allows the reader to understand the main character's emotions.

Reading Comprehension

- 17** Which of the following sentences represents an important change in the mood of the excerpt?
- A. “The ref threw up the opening jump ball.” (paragraph 16)
 - B. “Our crowd was insanely loud.” (paragraph 33)
 - C. “The buzzer sounded. The game was over.” (paragraph 77)
 - D. “I thought he’d be cheering. But he wasn’t.” (paragraph 82)
- 18** Based on paragraph 43, what does the word *coursing* mean?
- A. spreading pain
 - B. moving rapidly
 - C. creating numbness
 - D. disappearing slowly

Question 19 is an open-response question.

- **Read the question carefully.**
- **Explain your answer.**
- **Add supporting details.**
- **Double-check your work.**

Write your answer to question 19 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 19** Describe the narrator’s changing feelings throughout the excerpt. Support your answer with important and specific information from the excerpt.

**Grade 7 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2012 Released Items:
Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers***

Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Correct Answer (MC)*
1	76	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	A
2	76	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
3	76	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	A
4	76	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	B
5	77	<i>Language</i>	4	B
6	77	<i>Language</i>	5	B
7	77	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	
8	81	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	C
9	81	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	A
10	82	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	C
11	82	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	D
12	82	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	D
13	82	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	A
14	83	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	D
15	83	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	C
16	83	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	D
17	84	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	D
18	84	<i>Language</i>	4	B
19	84	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	

* Answers are provided here for multiple-choice items only. Sample responses and scoring guidelines for open-response items, which are indicated by the shaded cells, will be posted to the Department's website later this year.

**Grade 7 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2012 Unreleased Common Items:
Reporting Categories and Standards**

Item No.	Reporting Category	Standard
20	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
21	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15
22	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
23	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15
24	<i>Language</i>	4
25	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
26	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
27	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
28	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
29	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
30	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15
31	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
32	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
33	<i>Language</i>	4
34	<i>Language</i>	4
35	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
36	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8
37	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	14
38	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	14
39	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	11
40	<i>Language</i>	4