

Grade Eleven Sample Test Item—Reading

Achievement Level: Standard Exceeded

Read the text and answer the questions.

“Mane Objective” by Andrea Sachs

At Assateague, the horses run free.

But is that the same as wild?

Whenever I hear about the wild horses of Assateague Island, I immediately start to picture free-spirited ponies dashing through the marshes and over the dunes, their manes flowing in the wind like super-model hair. I imagine their thunderous hooves kicking up the sand, spooking the fiddler crabs from their mud bunkers. I envision the Wild West, if the horses were the only sheriffs in this beach town.

And yet when I finally saw the fabled animals, they were lazily chomping grass along the side of the road like more attractive goats. To glimpse them, I simply rolled down my car window. To snap a photo, I had to steer my lens around strangers standing in the equines' personal space and flashing bunny ears over the indifferent horses' heads. Had the wild horses of Assateague devolved into My Little Ponies?

This reality pinch hurt, but I was not ready to let go of my fantasy montage. The evidence was too strong in my favor: The main photo on a National Park Service brochure of Assateague Island National Seashore features two stallions sparring on their hind legs. Wild! And a warning reads, “Assateague horses DO bite and kick, and can carry rabies.” You don't exactly find such alarming signage at the local petting zoo.

Perhaps I needed to adjust my concept of “wild.” The animals on either side of the Maryland-Virginia fence share the same origins: All descended from livestock that early settlers and farmers openly grazed on the isle more than 300 years ago. Today, both herds still feel the caring touch of humans, to varying degrees.

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“If we have a harsh winter or a bad nor’easter,” said Denise Bowden, a spokeswoman with the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company, which privately owns Virginia’s 150 horses, “our pony committee goes over and fills up water troughs and also takes bales of hay for them until conditions improve.”

The park service, which oversees the Maryland contingent, acts more like a grounded helicopter mom, limiting its meddling to about once a year.

“We’re not running a horse farm here,” said Allison Turner, a biological technician with the park service. “It needs to be a balanced ecosystem.”

This year’s head count is 103, and once over the bridge connecting the mainland to the island, I immediately checked off nine. I discovered the four-legged residents idling along the two-lane road leading to the state park and the national seashore. I hopped out of the car to watch other people watch the horses eat. I was so distracted by a large family’s disruptive behavior—snapping their fingers, uttering bad neighing impressions—that I neglected to observe the animals.

At the entry gate, I spotted three horses galloping through the North Ocean Beach lot, weaving around parked automobiles and beachgoers hauling their gear like pack mules. The ponies crossed the road without looking both ways. A Pony Patrol volunteer regarded the scene from his golf cart, poised to intercede if the cars veered too close.

I skipped North Ocean Beach, where lifeguards shoo the creatures away from the sunbathers, and headed south. Near the campsites, I noticed a white horse with coffee-bean-brown patches grazing in solitude. I quickly drove around the loop, parked the car and raced over, excited for this moment of discovery and reflection. But four large vehicles had already disgorged 18 people who swarmed the horse like flies.

I landed on a new strategy: To find the animals without a flash mob, I would head to the less-accessible Over Sand Vehicle zone. I started walking along the beach, ducking under fishing poles and dodging dogs. I threaded my way through an obstacle course of parked cars,

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desperately seeking a patch of coastline free of vehicles. But the line of trucks and SUVs nearly bumped into the horizon.

I returned to my car at South Beach, the hangout of a band of seven ponies, including a naughty mare intent on sipping water from the fountain. A volunteer was simultaneously warning people to keep their distance (at least 10 feet, but officials recommend a bus length) and dispersing the ponies with the shake of her backpack.

The horses were scattered around the lot and dunes, but suddenly, as if compelled by a secret chime, they started to gather and slowly march toward the water's edge. I joined a group of people in a parallel parade line.

The horses stopped by a multi-tower sand castle and huddled. Their heads slightly drooped into napping position. Their tails flicked back and forth, swatting away the bugs. A cool ocean breeze rustled their manes. One pony dropped to the sand and rolled, legs kicking upward. Another went down and wiggled.

The crowds' coolers and vibrant sun umbrellas fell away as the animals exhibited their natural behavior. This was their moment—and mine—and it was wild.

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This question has two parts. First, answer part A. Then, answer part B.

Part A

What inference can be made about the author’s opinion of her visit to Assateague Island?

- A. She thinks too many people are allowed on the island.
- B. She thinks a trip to the island is worth the time and effort.
- C. She thinks the horses should be better managed and cared for.
- D. She thinks the idea of the island as a wild horse preserve should be abandoned.

Part B

Which sentence from the text **best** illustrates the inference made in part A?

- A. “The park service, which oversees the Maryland contingent, acts more like a grounded helicopter mom, limiting its meddling to about once a year.”
- B. “I discovered the four-legged residents idling along the two-lane road leading to the state park and the national seashore.”
- C. “At the entry gate, I spotted three horses galloping through the North Ocean Beach lot, weaving around parked automobiles and beachgoers hauling their gear like pack mules.”
- D. “The crowds’ coolers and vibrant sun umbrellas fell away as the animals exhibited their natural behavior.”

Area	Reading Demonstrating understanding of literary and nonfiction texts
Standard(s)	Determine an author’s point of view in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.
Answer	Part A: Answer A Part B: Answer C