

Grade Eight Sample Test Item—Reading

Achievement Level: Standard Exceeded

Read the text and answer the questions.

Christopher Columbus

by Eva March Tappan

One man who was thinking most earnestly about India was named Christopher Columbus. He was born in Genoa and had been at sea most of his life since he was fourteen. He had read and studied and thought until he was convinced that the world was round and that the best way to reach China and Japan was not to make the wearisome overland journey through Asia, but to sail directly west across the Atlantic.

He had asked the city of Genoa to provide money for the expedition; and he had also asked the king of Portugal; but to no purpose. Finally he appealed to Ferdinand and Isabella, king and queen of Spain.

This was why, toward the end of the fifteenth century, a company of learned Spaniards met together at Salamanca to listen to the schemes of a simple, unknown Italian sailor. Columbus told them what he believed. Then they brought forward their objections. "A ship might possibly reach India in that way," said one gravely, "but she could never sail uphill and come home again." "If the world is round and people are on the opposite side, they must hang by their feet with their heads down," declared another scornfully.

Another objection was that such an expedition as Columbus proposed would be expensive. Moreover, he demanded the title of admiral of whatever lands he might discover and one tenth of all precious stones, gold, silver, spices, and other merchandise that should be found in these lands. This was not because he was greedy for money, but he had conceived the notion of winning the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem from the Turks and to do this would require an enormous fortune.

Columbus had formed a noble scheme, but there seemed small hope that it would be carried out by Spanish aid, for the Spaniards were waging an important war with the Moors, or Mohammedans. The Moors had a kingdom in the south of Spain containing a number of cities. In the capital, Granada, was the palace and fortress of the Alhambra, a wonderfully beautiful structure, even in ruins as it is today. Granada was captured, but even then the Spaniards seemed to have no time to listen to Columbus.

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At length he made up his mind to leave Spain and go for aid to the king of France. With his little son Diego he started out on foot. The child was hungry, and so they stopped at the gate of the convent of La Rabida, near the town of Palos, Spain, to beg for the food that was never refused to wayfarers. The prior was a student of geography. He heard the ideas of Columbus, put faith in them, and invited some of his learned friends to meet the stranger. "Spain must not lose the honour of such an enterprise," the prior declared, and he even went himself to the queen. He had once been her confessor, and she greeted him kindly. King Ferdinand did not believe in the undertaking, but the queen became thoroughly interested in it. She was Queen of Aragon by her marriage to Ferdinand, but she was Queen of Castile in her own right, and she exclaimed, "I undertake the enterprise for my own crown of Castile and will pledge my jewels to raise the necessary funds."

Thus, after eighteen years' delay, the way opened for Columbus, and he set sail from Palos with three small vessels; however, even after they were at sea Columbus must have felt as if his troubles were just beginning, for his sailors were full of fears. They were not cowards, but no one, they thought, had ever crossed the Atlantic, and there were legends that in one place it was swarming with monsters, and that in another the water boiled with intense heat. There was real danger, also, from the jealous Portuguese, for it was rumored that they had sent out vessels to capture Columbus's little fleet. It is small wonder that the sailors were dismayed by the fires of the volcanic peak of Teneriffe, but they were almost equally alarmed by every little occurrence. The mast of a wrecked vessel floated by, and they feared it was a sign that their vessel, too, would be wrecked. After a while, the magnetic needle ceased to point to the north star, and they were filled with dread lest they should lose their way on the vast ocean. One night a brilliant meteor appeared, and then they were sure that destruction was at hand.

The good east wind was sweeping them gently along; but even that worried them, for they feared it would never alter, and how could they get home? Some of them had begun to whisper together of throwing Columbus overboard, when one day they saw land-birds and floating weeds and finally a glimmering light. Then the sailors were as eager to press onward as their leader.

Early on the following morning land appeared. Columbus, wearing his brilliant scarlet robes and bearing the standard of Spain, was rowed ashore. He fell upon his knees and kissed the ground, thanking God most heartily for his care. Then he took possession of the land for Spain.

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Read the sentence from the text.

The good east wind was sweeping them gently along; but even that worried them, for they feared it would never alter, and how could they get home?

How does the underlined phrase impact the reader’s interpretation of the meaning of the text? Select **three** options.

- A. The weather delayed the sailors.
- B. The weather quickened the journey.
- C. The weather slowed down the journey.
- D. The sailors were happy about the conditions.
- E. The sailors lacked knowledge about weather.
- F. The sailors remained suspicious of positive events.

Area	Reading Demonstrating understanding of literary and nonfiction texts
Standard(s)	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. A) Interpret figures of speech (e.g. verbal irony, puns) in context.
Answer	B, E, and F