
IV. English Language Arts, Reading Comprehension, Grade 5

Grade 5 English Language Arts

Reading Comprehension Test

The spring 2015 grade 5 English Language Arts Reading Comprehension test was based on Pre-K–5 learning standards in two content strands of the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy* (March 2011) listed below. Page numbers for the learning standards appear in parentheses.

■ Reading (*Framework*, pages 13–19)

■ Language (*Framework*, pages 33–40)

The *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy* is 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, **Reading** and **Language**, which are identical to the two framework content strands listed above.

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

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The grade 5 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

During both ELA Reading Comprehension 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 any ELA Reading Comprehension test session.

Grade 5 English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION

DIRECTIONS

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

Young drummer boys played an important role in the Civil War for both the Union (Northern) and Confederate (Southern) armies. Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Drumbeats and Bullets

from *The Boys' War*

by Jim Murphy

1 **T**HE GROGGY SOLDIER woke up to a persistent, brain-rattling drumming noise. *Thrupp. Thrupp. Thrupp.* He rolled over in an attempt to ignore the sound and pulled his blanket up over his head. The drumming went on and intensified as drummers all over camp signaled the call to muster.¹ There was no escaping it, and eventually—and usually with a grumble—the soldier got up to start another day.

2 Soldiers probably came to hate the sound of the drums, especially when they heard them on a drizzly, cold morning. Yet drummer boys who served during the Civil War provided valuable service to the armies of both sides, although some didn't realize it at first.

3 “I wanted to fight the Rebs,”² a twelve-year-old boy wrote, “but I was very small and they would not give me a musket. The next day I went back and the man behind the desk said I looked as if I could hold a drum and if I wanted I could join that way. I did, but I was not happy to change a musket for a stick.”

4 This boy was disappointed at being assigned a “nonfighting” and, to him, dull job. Most likely, he saw himself always drumming in parades or in the safety of camp. He would soon learn differently.



The drum corps of the Ninety-third New York Infantry.

¹ *muster* — to assemble troops

² *Rebs* — a nickname given to soldiers in the Confederate army

5 The beat of the drum was one of the most important means of communicating orders to soldiers in the Civil War. Drummers did find themselves in camp sounding the routine calls to muster or meals and providing the beat for marching drills. But more often than not, they were with the troops in the field, not just marching to the site of the battle but in the middle of the fighting. It was the drumbeat that told the soldiers how and when to maneuver as smoke poured over the battlefield. And the sight of a drummer boy showed soldiers where their unit was located, helping to keep them close together.

6 Drummers were such a vital part of battle communication that they often found themselves the target of enemy fire. “A ball³ hit my drum and bounced off and I fell over,” a Confederate drummer at the Battle of Cedar Creek recalled. “When I got up, another ball tore a hole in the drum and another came so close to my ear that I heard it sing.”

7 Naturally, such killing fire alarmed many drummer boys at first. But like their counterparts with rifles, they soon learned how to face enemy shells without flinching.⁴ Fourteen-year-old Orion Howe was struck by several Confederate bullets during the Battle of Vicksburg in 1863. Despite his wounds, he maintained his position and relayed the orders given him. For his bravery, Howe would later receive the Medal of Honor.

8 Drumming wasn’t the only thing these boys did, either. While in camp, they would carry water, rub down horses, gather wood, or cook for the soldiers. There is even evidence that one was a barber for the troops when he wasn’t drumming. After a battle, most drummers helped carry wounded soldiers off the field or assisted in burial details. And many drummer boys even got their wish to fight the enemy.

9 Fighting in the Civil War was particularly bloody. Of the 900 men in the First Maine Heavy Artillery, 635 became casualties *in just seven minutes* of fighting at the Battle of Petersburg. A North Carolina regiment saw 714 of its 800 soldiers killed at Gettysburg. At such a time, these boys put down their drums and took up whatever rifle was handy. One such drummer was Johnny Clem.



*Johnny Clem, twelve,
just after the Battle
of Shiloh, 1862.*

³ *ball* — a lead ball fired from a gun

⁴ *flinching* — drawing away; falling back

- 10 Clem ran away from home in 1861 when he was eleven years old. He enlisted, and the Twenty-second Michigan Regiment took him in as their drummer, paying him thirteen dollars a month for his services. Several months later, at the Battle of Shiloh, Clem earned the nickname of “Johnny Shiloh” when a piece of cannon shell bounced off a tree stump and destroyed his drum. When another drum was shattered in battle, Clem found a musket and fought bravely for the rest of the war, becoming a sergeant in the fall of 1863.
- 11 The Civil War would be the last time drummer boys would be used in battle. The roar of big cannons and mortars, the rapid firing of thousands of rifles, and the shouts of tens of thousands of men made hearing a drumbeat difficult. More and more, bugles were being used to pass along orders. Military tactics were changing, too. Improved weapons made it impractical to have precise lines of soldiers face their enemy at close range. Instead, smaller, fast-moving units and trench warfare, neither of which required drummers, became popular.
- 12 Even as their role in the fighting was changing, Civil War drummers stayed at their positions signaling orders to the troops. Hundreds were killed and thousands more wounded. “A cannon ball came bouncing across the corn field,” a drummer boy recalled, “kicking up dirt and dust each time it struck the earth. Many of the men in our company took shelter behind a stone wall, but I stood where I was and never stopped drumming. An officer came by on horseback and chastised the men, saying ‘this boy puts you all to shame. Get up and move forward.’ We all began moving across the corn field. . . . Even when the fighting was at its fiercest and I was frightened, I stood straight and did as I was ordered. . . . I felt I had to be a good example for the others.”

“Drumbeats and Bullets” by Jim Murphy, from *The Boys’ War*. Text copyright © 1990 by Jim Murphy. Reprinted by permission of Clarion Books, an imprint of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Photograph of the Union Drum Corps copyright © CORBIS. Photograph of Johnny Clem in the public domain.

ELA Reading Comprehension

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

“ . . . I was not happy to change a musket for a stick.”

What does the sentence **mostly** suggest about the drummer boy?

- A. He wanted to be a fighting soldier.
- B. He already knew how to play a drum.
- C. He was more patriotic than other boys.
- D. He sometimes was asked to carry a gun.

- 2 According to the passage, what was the **most** important job of the drummer boys?

- A. passing on orders during battle
- B. helping to care for the wounded
- C. keeping the camps running properly
- D. scouting the position of enemy spies

- 3 Which detail from the passage illustrates how valuable the drummer boys were?

- A. Military tactics changed during the Civil War.
- B. Orion Howe was awarded the Medal of Honor.
- C. A North Carolina regiment lost many soldiers at Gettysburg.
- D. Johnny Clem joined the Twenty-second Michigan Regiment.

- 4 Based on the passage, what was true of the drummer boys?

- A. They were protected from gunfire.
- B. They were required to join the army.
- C. They were younger than most soldiers.
- D. They were there to entertain the troops.

- 5 Read the sentence from paragraph 1 in the box below.

The drumming went on and intensified as drummers all over camp signaled the call to muster.

Based on the sentence, what does the word **intensified** mean?

- A. changed beat
- B. grew stronger
- C. ended suddenly
- D. became musical

ELA Reading Comprehension

Question 6 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 6 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 6** Based on the passage, explain how drummer boys showed bravery in doing their jobs. Support your answer with important details from the passage.

ELA Reading Comprehension

*In the book *Turtle in Paradise*, Turtle is a young girl who is living with her aunt's family for a while in Key West, Florida, in the 1930s. In this selection, Turtle first gets to know her Nana Philly (who is ill) by going to help her at lunchtime. Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.*

*from **Turtle in Paradise***
by Jennifer L. Holm

1 We're walking out the front door to go to the matinee¹ when Aunt Minnie calls to us from where she's ironing in the parlor.

2 "I'm sorry," she says, wiping a hand on her forehead. "But one of you kids is going to have to go over to Nana Philly's and give her lunch. I've just got too much laundry to do today."

3 "Not me," Beans says quickly.

4 "Me neither!" says Kermit.

5 "No way, no how, Ma!" Buddy says.

6 Aunt Minnie looks up at the ceiling as if she's praying for patience. She's going to be praying a long time at this rate.

7 "I'll do it," I say. Nana Philly can't be any worse than Shirley Temple.²

8 Aunt Minnie gives me a long look. "Thank you, Turtle," she says. She sounds surprised. "You're a good girl."

9 "Course I am," I say. "You're just used to rotten boys."

10 "Why, Turtle!" Miss Bea says with a confused smile when she opens the door. "How lovely to see you! But I was expecting your aunt."

11 "Aunt Minnie's got laundry. I'll give Nana Philly her lunch," I say.

12 "Aren't you a dear," she says. "Well, whatever you make her, just be sure it's soft." She lowers her voice a notch. "Her teeth aren't very good."

13 "All right," I say.

14 "I won't be long," she says, walking down the steps. "You're so sweet to do this!"

15 But I'm not sweet—I'm curious. It's not every day you find out you have a grandmother you didn't even know was alive. And despite what everyone says about Nana Philly being terrible, I've been wanting to see if she'll be different with me. After all, I'm a girl. Maybe she just hates boys. Wouldn't blame her if she did.

16 I walk into the house with fresh eyes. This is where Mama grew up. A thousand questions flash through my mind: Which bedroom did she sleep in? Did she run up and down the hallway? Did she sit at the piano? I hope not. That stool doesn't look too sturdy.

17 Nana Philly is sitting in the rocking chair in her bedroom reading a new magazine. She's dressed the same way as when I first saw her.

¹ *matinee* — an afternoon movie

² *Shirley Temple* — a child movie star of the time

- 18 “I don’t know if you remember me, but I’m Turtle,” I say. “Your granddaughter.”
19 She looks up.
20 “Sadiebelle’s girl.”
21 And blinks.
22 “Mama’s in New Jersey,” I explain. “She got a job as a housekeeper to a rich lady.”
23 Nana Philly stares at me.
24 “I’m supposed to make you lunch. You hungry?” I ask.
25 The old lady doesn’t say anything; she just looks back down at her magazine. It’s not exactly the tearful reunion I was imagining, although maybe that blink was her way of saying she was happy to see me. Then again, maybe she has dust in her eye.
26 I go into the kitchen and look around. Mama’s always making fancy lunches for the ladies she works for. You wouldn’t even know people were standing in breadlines³ if you walked in and saw what they were eating: iced cantaloupe, shrimp aspic, caviar sandwiches with cream cheese, hearts of lettuce with French dressing, meringue cookies.
27 There’s no caviar or cream cheese in sight, but there is bread on the table and milk in the icebox,⁴ so I decide to make milk toast. I toast up some bread, stick it in a bowl, and pour milk over it. It’s tasty, and it’s mushy.
28 Nana Philly eyes the bowl suspiciously when I place it on the little table in front of her.
29 “It’s milk toast,” I say. “We eat it all the time.” Strange as it seems, I want her to like it.
30 She doesn’t move and then I realize why.
31 “Oh, no! I forgot your spoon,” I say, and rush back into the kitchen. I hear a thump, and when I return, the bowl is lying facedown on the floor, milk splattered everywhere.
32 “What happened?” I ask.
33 Nana Philly doesn’t say anything. Not that I really expect her to.
34 “I must have put it too close to the edge,” I say, and clean up the mess. Then I set about making another bowl of milk toast. I bring it out—with a spoon this time—and place it in front of her on the little table.
35 “Here you go,” I say. “I hope you like it.”
36 She looks at the bowl for a moment and then her hand whips out and knocks it right off the table and onto the floor.
37 I’m so shocked, I just stand there. I didn’t really believe what the boys said about her before, but I do now.
38 “You did that on purpose,” I say. “Why? I’m your granddaughter!”
39 Her mouth twitches as if this amuses her.
40 Something hopeful in me hardens. She reminds me of all the rotten kids I’ve ever lived with.

³ *breadlines* — lines of people waiting to receive free food given by the government in the 1930s

⁴ *icebox* — refrigerator

ELA Reading Comprehension

41 “You don’t scare me,” I say.

42 I clean up the mess again and make another bowl of milk toast. But this time I don’t give it to the mean old lady who’s my grandmother; instead, I sit down in a chair and start eating. She stares at me, her eyes following every spoonful.

43 “This is delicious,” I say, and smile. “Shame you spilled yours.”

44 I swear I can see her mouth watering.

45 When Miss Bea returns, Nana Philly and I are sitting in the parlor.

46 “Did you two have a nice lunch?”

47 “We had a lovely time,” I say.

48 “Would you like to come again tomorrow? Give your poor aunt a break?” Miss Bea asks.

49 “Sure,” I say, and smile sweetly at Nana Philly. “I’m looking forward to getting to know my grandmother.”

50 Miss Bea’s waiting for me on the front porch with her shopping basket when I arrive the next afternoon.

51 “There’s grits-and-grunts-and-gravy on the stove and guava duff for dessert. There’s plenty for both of you,” Miss Bea says. “I’ve got shopping to do, so I might be a while.”

52 “Take your time,” I say.

53 “Thank you, Turtle,” she says. “You’re a dear.”

54 Nana Philly’s in her room looking at her magazine as usual. I notice it’s upside down.

55 “Must be some real interesting reading you got there,” I say.

56 The old woman ignores me, so I go into the kitchen. I spoon out two bowls of grits-and-grunts-and-gravy. Folks here eat this all the time. Grunts are little fish and grits are like porridge. That’s the one good thing about Key West: there’s food everywhere—hanging from trees, in the ocean—and it’s all free.

57 After what happened yesterday at lunch, I figured Nana Philly would have wised up. But I guess you can’t teach a mean old lady new tricks, because the bowl hasn’t been in front of her for more than a moment when her hand knocks it off the table. It falls to the floor in a splatter.

58 “You know, there sure are a lot of hungry folks who would have liked to eat that,” I say, but all she does is stare at the upside-down magazine a little harder.

59 I clean up the mess and eat my own lunch with her watching the whole time. It’s uncomfortable, but it’s just like dealing with a rotten kid: if you back down in front of them, they’ll never leave you be.

60 When I’m finished, I carry a bowl of guava duff out and place it in front of her. She lifts her hand to smack it, but I snatch it away just in time.

61 “You’re not wasting dessert,” I say. “I’ll eat it.”

62 I sit down and take a bite. It’s delicious. It tastes a little like plum pudding.

63 “Miss Bea sure is a good cook.”

64 Nana Philly pretends to ignore me, but I can tell she’s watching. She reminds me of a lobster, with her beady eyes peeking out at me from under her red hat.

ELA Reading Comprehension

65 “Mama’s a good cook, too. She makes the best caramel custard. One of our old employers,
Mr. Hearn, couldn’t get enough of it. He had her make it four nights a week.”

66 I study Nana Philly closely. “You know, Mama told me you were dead.”

67 She glances down quickly, and it comes to me.

68 “You were mean to her, too, weren’t you?” I ask. “Is that why she hasn’t come back
to Key West?”

69 My grandmother doesn’t look up, and I know the answer to my own question.

70 “Poor Mama,” I whisper. Chased off by her own mother. No wonder she’s such
a wreck.

71 A shadow crosses Nana Philly’s face and, for a brief moment, I see something like
regret in her blue eyes, but then it’s gone.

* * *

72 It happens just like in the Bible: on the third day, there’s a miracle.

73 “I can tell the old girl’s really looking forward to seeing you today,” Miss Bea says.

74 I doubt that, but say, “Really?”

75 “Even had me get out her best hat,” Miss Bea says.

76 I’m not impressed. I didn’t even want to come here today after what I learned yesterday,
but Aunt Minnie got used to me helping out, so I don’t have any choice now. This is what
I get for being a good girl.

77 When I walk into the bedroom, Nana Philly puts down her magazine and looks at me.
She’s wearing a royal blue hat with a peacock feather.

78 “You expecting the queen?” I ask.

79 Miss Bea has made conch chowder, and it’s simmering on the stove. I fill two bowls
and carry them out, placing one in front of Nana Philly. I sit down with my bowl and
start eating, waiting to hear her bowl hit the floor. But when I look up, she’s holding the
spoon. She brings it to her mouth with her good hand and swallows the chowder.

80 She takes another spoonful. And another.

81 Soon her bowl is empty.

82 “You know,” I say, “I missed seeing a matinee the first day when I came here to give
you lunch. It was a Shirley Temple picture.”

83 Her eyes fly to my face.

84 “Which is fine by me, because I hate Shirley Temple,” I say.

85 A corner of my grandmother’s mouth turns up in a crooked smile, and her
eyes shine.

86 “Me thoo,” she says.

- 7 Based on paragraphs 1–6, why is Aunt Minnie “praying for patience”?
- A. because her children refuse to help
 - B. because she has not yet prepared lunch
 - C. because her children are not supposed to go out
 - D. because she is having a hard time with the ironing

- 8 Based on the selection, what does Turtle **most likely** hope to gain from her visits to Nana Philly?
- A. Turtle wants to find out why Nana Philly has been ill.
 - B. Turtle wants to show Nana Philly that she is dependable.
 - C. Turtle wants to know more about her mother and Nana Philly.
 - D. Turtle wants to convince her aunt and cousins to like Nana Philly.

- 9 In paragraph 16, what do the questions represent?

- A. Turtle’s thoughts
- B. Turtle’s confusion
- C. Turtle’s memories
- D. Turtle’s conversation

- 10 Read Turtle’s comments from paragraph 25 in the box below.

It’s not exactly the tearful reunion I was imagining, although maybe that blink was her way of saying she was happy to see me. Then again, maybe she has dust in her eye.

What do the comments suggest about Turtle?

- A. She is unhappy that she offered to help Nana Philly.
- B. She is uncertain how Nana Philly feels about her.
- C. She is concerned that Nana Philly may be hurt.
- D. She is growing impatient with Nana Philly.

- 11 In the selection, the spaces between paragraphs 9 and 10, 44 and 45, and 49 and 50 all show a change in
- A. plot.
 - B. time.
 - C. theme.
 - D. narrator.
- 12 In the selection, how does Turtle teach Nana Philly a lesson?
- A. by eating in front of Nana Philly
 - B. by refusing to help Nana Philly again
 - C. by telling her aunt how Nana Philly behaved
 - D. by convincing her cousins to visit Nana Philly
- 13 What does the description of Nana Philly in paragraph 71 suggest?
- A. She is becoming weaker and more forgetful.
 - B. She is trying to make others feel sorry for her.
 - C. She is upset because she has missed her dessert.
 - D. She is starting to feel bad about what she has done.
- 14 What does the end of the selection suggest?
- A. Turtle and Nana Philly will go to the movies.
 - B. Turtle and Nana Philly will start to get along.
 - C. Turtle believes Nana Philly is getting stronger.
 - D. Turtle believes Nana Philly is going to knock over her lunch.

- 15 In the selection, which of the following is a problem Turtle faces?
- A. She gets in trouble for the mess Nana Philly makes.
 - B. She does not understand why Nana Philly acts mean.
 - C. She does not feel appreciated for helping Nana Philly.
 - D. She has to take care of Nana Philly while her cousins play.
- 16 In paragraph 26, how are commas used?
- A. to separate items in a list
 - B. to show a series of events
 - C. to show a ranking by importance
 - D. to separate words from their definitions

ELA Reading Comprehension

Question 17 is an open-response question.

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

Write your answer to question 17 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 17** Based on the selection, describe Turtle's character traits. Support your answer with important details from the selection.

**Grade 5 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2015 Released Items:
Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers***

Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Correct Answer (MC)*
1	47	<i>Reading</i>	3	A
2	47	<i>Reading</i>	2	A
3	47	<i>Reading</i>	1	B
4	47	<i>Reading</i>	1	C
5	47	<i>Language</i>	4	B
6	48	<i>Reading</i>	3	
7	53	<i>Reading</i>	1	A
8	53	<i>Reading</i>	3	C
9	53	<i>Reading</i>	6	A
10	53	<i>Reading</i>	3	B
11	54	<i>Reading</i>	5	B
12	54	<i>Reading</i>	1	A
13	54	<i>Reading</i>	3	D
14	54	<i>Reading</i>	8.a	B
15	55	<i>Reading</i>	2	B
16	55	<i>Language</i>	2	A
17	56	<i>Reading</i>	3	

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

Grade 5 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2015 Unreleased Common Items:
Reporting Categories and Standards

Item No.	Reporting Category	Standard
18	<i>Reading</i>	1
19	<i>Reading</i>	1
20	<i>Reading</i>	5
21	<i>Reading</i>	5
22	<i>Reading</i>	2
23	<i>Language</i>	4
24	<i>Reading</i>	3
25	<i>Reading</i>	1
26	<i>Reading</i>	1
27	<i>Reading</i>	1
28	<i>Reading</i>	4
29	<i>Reading</i>	7
30	<i>Reading</i>	3
31	<i>Reading</i>	1
32	<i>Reading</i>	2
33	<i>Reading</i>	5
34	<i>Language</i>	5
35	<i>Reading</i>	2
36	<i>Reading</i>	4
37	<i>Reading</i>	8.a
38	<i>Reading</i>	4
39	<i>Reading</i>	6
40	<i>Language</i>	4