SECTION 3

SAMPLE TEST ITEMS FOR ELEMENTARY AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

This section of the Virginia Reading Assessment (VRA) Study Guide provides sample multiple-choice and constructed-response test items to assist you in preparing to take the VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers.

Multiple-Choice Items

This section contains the multiple-choice sample items and associated information as follows:

- a description of multiple-choice item formats;

- test directions for multiple-choice items;

- sample multiple-choice items; and

- an answer key for multiple-choice items with explanations for the correct responses.

Multiple-Choice Item Formats

VRA test items are designed to assess subject matter knowledge described in the test blueprint for each test field. In addition to demonstrating your ability to recall factual information, you will be asked to think critically about information, analyze it, apply it, consider it carefully, compare it with other knowledge you have, or make a judgment about it. The purpose of this section is to describe the most common multiple-choice item formats you may see on the VRA. This section also suggests possible ways to approach thinking about and answering them.

Multiple-Choice Item Format One: Single Test Items

In the single test-item format, a problem is presented as a direct question or an incomplete statement, and four response options (A, B, C, and D) appear below the question. Refer to sample item 2 as an example of this type of test item.

For test items in this format, a suggested approach is to read the entire item carefully and critically. Think about what it is asking and the situation it is describing. It is best to read and evaluate *all* four response options to find the best answer; you should not stop at the first answer that seems reasonable. After reading all four response options, eliminate any obviously wrong answers and select the best choice from the remaining answers. There is no penalty for incorrect multiple-choice item answers; therefore, it is better to select an answer than not to respond at all.

Multiple-Choice Item Format Two: Test Items with Stimulus Material

Some test items are preceded by stimulus material to which the test items relate. Some examples of stimulus material that may be included on a test are maps, charts, tables, graphs, reading passages, and descriptions of classroom situations. In some cases, there is only one test item related to the stimulus provided. In other cases, two or more test items are related to a single stimulus. Each stimulus is preceded by a direction line indicating how many items are related to that stimulus. Refer to sample item 8 as an example of a test item with stimulus material.

The following approach is suggested when responding to test items with stimulus material. First, examine the stimulus. Note how the information is presented. For sample items 8 and 9, the stimulus is a word map for exploring the different meanings of a word. Now read sample item 8 associated with this stimulus. As you consider each response option, look back at the stimulus to determine how it is most likely to promote students' reading development. It is best to read and evaluate *all* four response options to find the best answer; you should not stop at the first answer that seems reasonable. After reading all four response options, eliminate any obviously wrong answers and select the best choice from the remaining answers. There is no penalty for incorrect multiple-choice item answers; therefore, it is better to select an answer than not to respond at all.

Test Directions for Multiple-Choice Items

DIRECTIONS FOR SECTION I: MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEMS

Questions 1 to 90

Each question in this section is a multiple-choice item with four answer choices. Read each question carefully and choose the ONE best answer. Record each answer on page one or two of Answer Document A in the space that corresponds to the question number. Completely fill in the circle having the same letter as the answer you have chosen. *Use only a No. 2 lead pencil.*

Sample Question: 1.   What is the capital of Virginia?

A.   Roanoke
B.   Norfolk
C.   Richmond
D.   Charlottesville

The correct answer to this question is C. You would indicate that on Answer Document A as follows:

1.   Ⓐ Ⓑ ● Ⓓ

Try to answer all questions. In general, if you have some knowledge about a question, it is better to try to answer it. There is no penalty for incorrect multiple-choice item answers; therefore, it is better to select an answer than not to respond at all.

STOP

DO NOT GO ON UNTIL YOU ARE TOLD TO DO SO.

Sample Multiple-Choice Items

1. **Use the information below to answer the question that follows.**

   A second-grade teacher assesses a student's oral reading performance by having the student read aloud from an appropriate story while the teacher makes notes on a copy of the story. Printed below is an excerpt from the teacher's record of the student's oral reading.

   ---

   own ©
   Kate looked up and saw dark clouds. One drop of rain fell on her nose. Then more and more

   were ©
   drops of rain fell. Kate's dog Sam did not like storms. "Where are you, Sam?" called Kate.

   three ©
   There was a boom of thunder. Kate wanted to go home, but she had to find Sam.‖Where was

   kōm ©
   he hiding? "Sam, come here!" called Kate. But Sam did not│come. Kate was about to leave

   sōm ©
   when she saw a furry brown tail under some bushes. "Oh, Sam!" cried Kate. "I'm so glad

   to see you!"

   Key:
   ◯ deletion │ short pause ⟵ repetition © self-correction
   ∧ insertion ‖ long pause cat/cow substitution

   The results of this informal assessment most clearly suggest that the student would benefit from instruction to:

   A. help the student learn how to use context clues while reading.

   B. improve the student's automatic recognition of some sight words.

   C. prompt the student to self-monitor comprehension while reading.

   D. strengthen the student's phonemic awareness and phonics skills.

2. A third-grade teacher plans to have students work in temporary, heterogeneous groups for reading projects. As the students collaborate on an assigned reading-related project, every member of the group will have a role to play. Clear behavioral and instructional guidelines and goals will be communicated to each group before the students begin working. Which of the following additional steps would best promote the effectiveness of this approach to flexible grouping?

   A. Identify activities for individual students to engage in independently if they finish assigned reading before other members of the group.

   B. Assign leadership responsibilities to the students in each group who are the most proficient readers.

   C. Plan alternative activities for students with reading difficulties rather than requiring them to participate in the group projects.

   D. Assess students' reading skills before, during, and after participation in the group project.

3. Students in a fourth-grade class play a game in which two students sit in chairs facing each other. One student can see a bulletin board on which the teacher displays a picture of an object. The student must describe the object without identifying it. Based on this description, the partner tries to guess what the object is. Then the partners switch places; the teacher displays another picture, and the process is repeated. This activity is most likely to promote students' literacy development by helping students:

   A. distinguish main ideas from supporting details when listening or speaking.

   B. expand their listening and speaking vocabularies.

   C. understand the importance of precise word choice in clear oral communication.

   D. gain skill in the use of expressive oral language.

4. A first-grade student demonstrates some phonological awareness but has difficulty segmenting words into phonemes. Which of the following questions is likely to be most difficult for the student to answer?

    A. Which two words begin with the same sound: *man*, *sat*, *sick*?

    B. Listen to the word parts, then say the whole word: *ta . . . ble*—What's the word?

    C. Which word does not rhyme: *cat*, *sat*, *pig*?

    D. Listen to this word: *sat*. How many sounds do you hear?

5. At the beginning of the school year, a kindergarten teacher observes a child "pretend reading" a book in the independent reading area of the classroom. The child turns the pages in sequence, looking at the illustrations and quietly telling a story but not referring to the printed text. The teacher could best interpret this behavior as an indication that the child:

    A. has developed an understanding of some concepts of print.

    B. lacks letter-recognition skills.

    C. has well-developed oral comprehension.

    D. lacks phonemic awareness.

6. Decodable texts are useful to include in materials for early reading programs primarily because such texts:

   A. promote automatic recognition of many high-frequency sight words.

   B. give children practice applying phonic associations that already have been taught.

   C. address high-interest topics that motivate children to read.

   D. introduce children to phonics generalizations that they can use to decode unfamiliar words.

7. A kindergarten student enjoys listening and responding to stories the teacher reads aloud. The student participates enthusiastically in prereading conversations, enjoys making predictions, and makes personal connections with literary characters. However, the student often exhibits confusion about what actually happened in the story. Which of the following instructional strategies is likely to be most effective in strengthening the student's comprehension of stories that are read aloud?

   A. asking the student direct comprehension questions immediately after reading a story

   B. encouraging the student to listen to stories on tape that the teacher already has read aloud

   C. having the student draw pictures of characters from the stories and share the pictures with the class

   D. helping the student use a story map or flannel board to retell stories that the teacher has read aloud

Use the information below to answer the two questions that follow.

Students in a sixth-grade class are working in small groups to create word maps. The teacher assigns each group a word, and students begin drafting a word map by brainstorming different meanings of the word. Members of the group then use a dictionary to verify their ideas and add more meanings to the map. Each group presents its map to the class for further discussion. The groups then reconvene to compose a sentence to illustrate each meaning in the word map. The groups take turns reading aloud their sentences and discussing them with the class. Shown below is one group's completed word map.
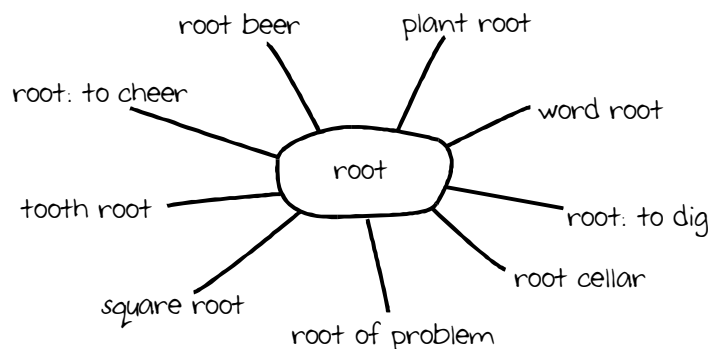
8. This approach to creating word maps is most likely to promote students' reading development in which of the following ways?

A. prompting students to make effective use of varied reference materials to improve their understanding of texts

B. enhancing students' skill in identifying key words as a strategy to improve reading comprehension

C. helping students identify and interpret words with multiple meanings that the students encounter in their reading

D. improving students' reading fluency by reinforcing their automatic word recognition

9. When students read aloud and discuss the sentences they composed, the teacher guides the class to identify the selected word's part of speech in each sentence (e.g., whether *root* is being used as a noun, a verb, or an adjective). This part of the discussion is most likely to promote students' vocabulary knowledge and skills by:

A. helping students distinguish the connotative meanings of words.

B. enhancing students' understanding of the semantic and syntactic functions of words.

C. motivating students to recognize and avoid errors in grammar or usage.

D. reinforcing students' skill in applying structural analysis as a word-identification strategy.

Use the information below to answer the two questions that follow.

Students in a fourth-grade class participate regularly in Readers Theatre performances. The teacher begins by selecting a story at an appropriate level of difficulty and converting it to a script. The teacher models an expressive reading of the story on which the script is based. After discussing the story with students, the teacher offers a minilesson on how to make a story "come alive" through expressive reading of a Readers Theatre script.

The teacher then distributes a copy of the script to each student in the group. The students practice reading aloud the script independently or with a partner. Then they rehearse the script as a group, reading their assigned roles and responding to coaching from the teacher. In subsequent rehearsals, the students switch roles, until every student has had a chance to perform each role at least once. Over the course of the week, the students rehearse the performance by reading the script aloud at least 12 times. The day before the performance, students rehearse their final roles. The performance, which requires no costumes or props, is presented to an audience of classmates, family members, school staff, or other groups of students.

10. Which of the following statements best describes the most important benefit of this approach to Readers Theatre?

A. Readers Theatre enhances students' reading comprehension and fluency by motivating students to identify and analyze varied text structures.

B. Readers Theatre motivates students to read independently by exposing them to varied genres and encouraging them to broaden their selection criteria.

C. Readers Theatre improves students' reading fluency by providing an authentic, motivating context for repeated oral readings.

D. Readers Theatre provides a motivating context for students to practice applying a variety of word-analysis strategies while reading.

11. The teacher wants to promote students' skill in writing for entertainment and creative expression. Which of the following writing activities related to Readers Theatre would be most appropriate for this purpose?

A. providing students with opportunities to write in their journals about what they learned by participating in the Readers Theatre performances

B. helping students work in small groups to write their own story or rewrite a favorite story as a script to perform for Readers Theatre

C. giving students samples of reviews by theatre critics to use as models for writing their own critical reviews of the Readers Theatre performances

D. having students work in small groups to prepare written programs for audience members who attend Readers Theatre performances

Use the information below to answer the two questions that follow.

Students in a fourth-grade class are using reading materials in the classroom library to conduct research on animals. Each student selects an animal to research and takes notes on a graphic organizer prepared by the teacher. Before reading, students write in the first column of the graphic organizer questions they have about the selected animal. Students then conduct their research by reading at least two sources that provide information about the animal. As they read, students take notes in the second column of the graphic organizer, recording information to answer each question in the first column. Shown below is an excerpt from one student's partially completed graphic organizer.

Name: Karen Research Topic: Anteaters	
My Questions	**Answers I Found By Reading**
What do anteaters look like?	
Where do anteaters live?	
How do the anteaters catch the ants to eat them?	

12. Using the graphic organizer is likely to promote the students' comprehension of nonfiction texts primarily by helping the students:

    A. set a purpose for reading.

    B. distinguish main ideas from supporting details.

    C. recognize logical patterns.

    D. link prior knowledge to new information.

13. Which of the following additional activities using the graphic organizer would best promote students' ability to synthesize and communicate research findings?

    A. Students copy the information recorded in the graphic organizer into a formal outline of their research findings.

    B. Students transfer the information in the graphic organizer to a semantic map to illustrate their research findings.

    C. Students give an oral presentation to share their research by reading aloud the notes they have recorded in the graphic organizer.

    D. Students prepare a research report by converting the information in each row of the graphic organizer to a written paragraph.

14.   **Use the child's writing sample below to answer the question that follows.**

I NO MI CAT R
HP T C ME

("I know my cats are happy to see me.")
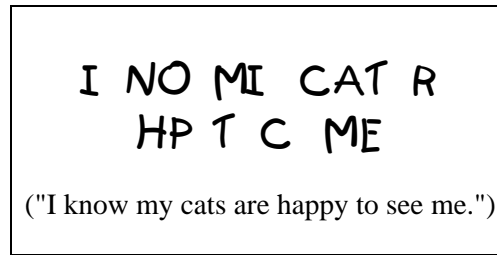
This writing sample best supports which of the following conclusions about the child's literacy development?

A.   The child is a prephonetic speller who has not yet developed a basic understanding of the alphabetic principle.

B.   The child has weak phonemic awareness skills and most likely relies on recall of sight words when reading and writing.

C.   The child has strong beginning phonics skills but lacks understanding of word boundaries and other concepts of print.

D.   The child demonstrates knowledge of basic phonetic principles but sometimes substitutes letter names for letter sounds when spelling.

Answer Key

Item 1, Objective 1, Correct Response B
The teacher's record of the student's oral reading indicates miscues for the words *one*, *where*, *there*, *come*, and *some*. These are all high-frequency words with irregular spellings that cannot be decoded by applying knowledge of phonics generalizations (e.g., *come* does not have the long vowel sound usually associated with CVCe words). Beginning readers therefore must learn to recognize these words automatically as "sight words." Even though the student self-corrects, the initial misreading of the words suggests that the student would benefit from instruction to promote automatic recognition of these frequently occurring sight words.

Item 2, Objective 2, Correct Response A
Flexible heterogeneous grouping allows students with varying levels of reading proficiency to collaborate in small groups on reading projects that benefit all students. Because some students are likely to read more quickly than others, it is useful to include in the project independent activities that will reduce distractions by keeping the more proficient readers actively engaged until the remaining group members complete the assigned reading and are ready for collaborative activities.

Item 3, Objective 3, Correct Response C
The activity described promotes students' literacy development by improving their oral communication skills. Presented as a game, the activity motivates students to choose their words carefully in order to help their partners interpret oral messages and visualize hidden objects. Alternately serving as speaker and listener, students use critical listening skills to improve their own word choice and to provide constructive feedback for their partners.

Item 4, Objective 4, Correct Response D
First-grade students who demonstrate some basic phonological awareness may have difficulty with more advanced phonemic awareness tasks. In this case, the student has difficulty segmenting spoken words into phonemes. In order to count the sounds in a spoken word such as *sat*, the student must be able to distinguish each phoneme by segmenting the word (/s/ /a/ /t/). For this reason, the student is likely to have difficulty performing the task described in response D.

Item 5, Objective 5, Correct Response A
The child's "pretend reading" behaviors suggest that the child has developed an understanding of some concepts of print. The child demonstrates book handling skills (e.g., holds a book correctly, turns pages from front to back) and shows some awareness of the relationship between spoken and printed language (e.g., tells a story while turning the pages of a book).

Item 6, Objective 6, Correct Response B
Beginning readers learn to associate letters with their most common sounds, then develop phonics skills by blending the sounds of letters to read simple printed words in isolation and in connected text. Decodable texts are composed primarily of words with regular spellings that students are capable of reading, based on their current phonics knowledge. In this way, decodable texts reinforce students' phonics skills and build their confidence as readers.

Item 7, Objective 9, Correct Response D

The student's reading-related behaviors reflect some strengths in literary response (e.g., drawing on personal experience to interpret literary characters), but the student's confusion about the plot of stories that the teacher has read aloud suggests that the student needs help understanding and recalling the sequence of events. The teacher can support the student's reading development in this area by using concrete visual aids, such as story maps or flannel boards, to help clarify the student's understanding of a story's plot.

Item 8, Objective 7, Correct Response C

In English, a single word may have multiple meanings; the context in which the word is used provides clues to its intended meaning. Readers who encounter such a word while reading must recall that it has more than one meaning and discern the appropriate meaning in context. In addition to enriching vocabulary knowledge, the word map activity helps familiarize students with common words, such as *root*, that have multiple meanings and develops students' skill in using context to verify the intended meaning.

Item 9, Objective 7, Correct Response B

When students discuss the meaning of *root* in a given sentence, they are learning about the word's semantic function. When they discuss the grammatical function of *root* (e.g., noun, verb, adjective) in a given sentence, they are learning about the word's syntactic function. Such discussions enrich vocabulary knowledge and skills by reinforcing students' understanding of the word's varied meanings and by helping students rapidly identify the word's meaning in context (e.g., recognizing that *root* is a verb rather than a noun in the sentence, "Root for the home team.").

Item 10, Objective 8, Correct Response C

During the course of the Readers Theatre activity, students read the script aloud in an expressive manner at least a dozen times. These repeated readings are likely to improve the reading fluency of participating students by increasing their reading rate, promoting automatic word recognition, and developing appropriate phrasing. Unlike other types of repeated reading, which can become tedious, Readers Theatre motivates students by setting a fun and authentic purpose for the oral reading (i.e., to prepare a performance for friends/family).

Item 11, Objective 11, Correct Response B

Student writing plays an important role in promoting literacy development. Having students work in small groups to compose or adapt a story for Readers Theatre actively engages the students in writing for entertainment and creative expression. The activity sensitizes students to connections between reading and writing, and working with peers helps develop students' writing and reading skills.

Item 12, Objective 10, Correct Response A

Setting a purpose for reading can improve comprehension of nonfiction texts by activating prior knowledge related to the text, alerting the reader to key words/ideas in the text, and prompting the reader to self-monitor understanding. The graphic organizer guides students to set a purpose for reading by providing a question-and-answer structure for the assignment. Students are prompted to formulate their own questions, which activates their prior knowledge and motivates them to read thoughtfully and purposefully.

Item 13, Objective 13, Correct Response D

Students use the second column of the graphic organizer to record their notes on two or more sources. By converting the information in each row to a written paragraph, students synthesize and communicate what they have learned through their research. The guiding question in the first column provides a primary focus for each paragraph, encouraging students to develop a clear topic sentence.

Item 14, Objective 12, Correct Response D

The child's writing sample demonstrates knowledge of the sounds that correspond to some letters (e.g., the initial letters in *my*, *cats*, *happy*, *me*). However, the child substitutes the name of the letter "r" for the word *are* and the name of the letter "c" for the word *see*. These spelling patterns are consistent with the early phonetic stage of spelling development.

Constructed-Response Items

This section contains the constructed-response sample item and associated information as follows:

- a description of the constructed-response item format;
- test directions for constructed-response items;
- a sample constructed-response item;
- the performance characteristics and scoring scale for the constructed-response item; and
- a strong response to the sample constructed-response item.

Constructed-Response Item Format

The VRA for Elementary Education and Special Education Teachers includes four constructed-response items that correspond to the four content domains of the test blueprint for the VRA for Elementary and Special Education teachers. You should answer all constructed-response items. Each constructed-response item is designed to test the candidate's knowledge of content defined in one of these four domains. Each constructed-response item is expected to have a typical written response time of approximately 15 minutes. Refer to the test blueprint at **www.va.nesinc.com**.

Each constructed-response item will typically include:

1. contextual or background information that presents the topic of the constructed-response item; and

2. one or more specific directions or assignments that advise you of the elements that you are expected to provide in your response.

All responses to constructed-response items are scored holistically using a scoring scale that describes varying levels of performance. This scale is used by scorers in judging the overall effectiveness of each response. Committees of Virginia educators reviewed both the performance characteristics and the scoring scale before they were approved by the Virginia Department of Education.

The **Performance Characteristics** guide scorers in considering responses to the constructed-response items. Review the performance characteristics contained in this section as you prepare to take the VRA.

The **Scoring Scale** is related to the performance characteristics for the test and is used by scorers in assigning scores to responses to the constructed-response items.

As a whole, the response to each assignment must demonstrate an understanding of the content of the field. Responses are scored on the extent to which they achieve the purpose of the assignment, are appropriate and accurate in the application of subject matter knowledge, provide high-quality and relevant supporting evidence, and demonstrate a soundness of argument and an understanding of the subject area.

A response to a constructed-response item is designated "unscorable" if it is unrelated to the assigned topic, illegible, not in the appropriate language, of insufficient length to score, or merely a repetition of the assignment. If there is no response to a constructed-response item, it is designated "blank."

Test Directions for Constructed-Response Items

DIRECTIONS FOR SECTION II: CONSTRUCTED-RESPONSE ITEMS

Assignments 1 to 4

This section of the test consists of four constructed-response assignments. For each of these assignments, you are to prepare a written response and record it in the area provided in Answer Document A.

Read each assignment carefully before you begin to write. Think about how you will organize what you plan to write. You may use any blank space provided in this test booklet following each assignment to make notes, write an outline, or otherwise prepare your response. *Your final responses, however, must be written on the appropriate page of Answer Document A.*

Written responses will be evaluated based on the extent to which they demonstrate knowledge and skills important for effective delivery of a balanced, comprehensive reading program. Read each assignment carefully to ensure that you address all aspects of the assignment. Your responses to the assignments will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Purpose: The candidate demonstrates an understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain by fulfilling the purpose of the assignment.

Application of Content: The candidate accurately and effectively applies the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.

Support: The candidate supports the response with appropriate evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.

The assignments are intended to assess knowledge and skills of reading instruction, not writing ability. Your responses, however, must be communicated clearly enough to permit a valid judgment of your knowledge and skills. Your responses should be written for an audience of educators knowledgeable about reading instruction.

The final version of each response should conform to the conventions of edited American English. Your responses should be your original work, written in your own words, and not copied or paraphrased from some other work. You may, however, use citations when appropriate.

The multiple-choice section of Answer Document A containing your name will be removed from your written responses to maintain your anonymity during the scoring process. Do not write your name on any other portion of Answer Document A, and do not separate any of the sheets from the document.

You may work on the assignments in any order you choose, but be sure to record your final responses in the appropriate locations, as listed in the directions for each individual assignment.

Sample Constructed-Response Item

Use the information below to complete the exercise that follows.

A kindergarten teacher draws a ladder on the chalkboard. On the bottom rung of the ladder, the teacher writes the word *cat*. The teacher then asks if anyone can change one letter of *cat* to form a new word. When a new word has been formed, the teacher writes that word on the second rung. The game continues until all the rungs of the ladder have been filled.

<u>Examinee Task</u>

Write a response in which you explain one way that the approach described above can help promote students' reading development.

Performance Characteristics

- **PURPOSE**

  The candidate demonstrates an understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain by fulfilling the purpose of the assignment.

- **APPLICATION OF CONTENT**

  The candidate accurately and effectively applies the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.

- **SUPPORT**

  The candidate supports the response with appropriate evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.

Scoring Scale

3	**The "3" response reflects a thorough understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.** The response completely fulfills the purpose of the assignment by responding fully to the given task. The response demonstrates an accurate and effective application of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain. The response provides strong supporting evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.
2	**The "2" response reflects a general understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.** The response generally fulfills the purpose of the assignment by responding to the given task. The response demonstrates a generally accurate and reasonably effective application of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain. The response provides supporting evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.
1	**The "1" response reflects limited or no understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.** The response partially fulfills or fails to fulfill the purpose of the assignment by responding in a limited way or inadequately to the given task. The response demonstrates a limited and/or ineffective application of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain and may contain significant inaccuracies. The response provides limited or no supporting evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.

A Strong Response to the Sample Constructed-Response Item

This activity promotes reading development by helping students understand and apply phonics principles. The activity is a fun game, which motivates students to learn phonics skills. The game reinforces students' knowledge of individual letter-sound correspondences, as students replace the "c" in "cat" with various letters and sound out the new words. The game also improves decoding skills by helping students recognize the common CVC spelling pattern of "cat" and the other words on the ladder.