

Pennsylvania PSSA 2024
Grade 6 English Language Arts

Exam & Answer Key Materials
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pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

English Language Arts Item and Scoring Sampler



**2024–2025
Grade 6**

Passage 1

Read the following passage about a person who has just moved to a different state. Then answer questions 1–6 in your answer booklet.

Lambert, South Carolina

by Varian Johnson

The following passage is taken from chapter 2 of the novel *The Parker Inheritance*. The main character, Candice Miller, has just moved with her mother from Atlanta to her grandmother's house in South Carolina. The novel centers around a mysterious letter that promises to reveal clues about the location of a large fortune. In this passage, Candice learns more about her misunderstood grandmother.

Of course, twelve-year-old Candice Miller didn't know anything about a secret letter or hidden fortunes. She was just a girl trying to get through a horrible summer.

She sat at the kitchen table, finishing a book she'd read twice before. Then she closed the book, walked to her room, and flopped down on the carpeted floor.

Well, technically it wasn't *her* room. Her *real* room was in her *real* house in Atlanta.

This room, small and cramped, sat at the rear of a house unfamiliar to Candice, a house in Lambert, South Carolina, a city she had no desire to be living in. The house had belonged to her grandmother, Abigail Caldwell.

Still lying on the floor, Candice ran her fingers along the thin, battered aluminum bracelet circling her wrist. The bracelet used to belong to her grandmother, but she had given it to Candice almost five years ago. The letters *MS*—for Mississippi, her grandmother's home state—were engraved on the outside of the bracelet. On the inside was the word *Love*. Candice had begun wearing it again two weeks ago, after their move to Lambert. It just felt right.

The back door opened a few moments later, and Candice left her bedroom and returned to the kitchen. Her mom stood at the sink, filling a glass with tap water.

Candice was still getting used to her mom's small Afro¹—it had barely been a month since her mother had cut off all her hair in order to go natural. It looked good, but it was strange after the long, straight hair her mother had had all of Candice's life. Still, the big chop was about number 117 on the list of life-changing things that had happened over the past couple of years.

"Sorry I was gone for so long," her mother said.

Then her mother nodded toward Candice's wrist. "I'm glad you're wearing Mama's bracelet again. It looks good on you." Her mother paused, and Candice could almost hear the echo of sadness between them. The house even seemed to smell like her grandmother—like fresh lavender.

"Maybe we could take it to the jewelry store. Buff out some of those scratches."

"Grandma used to say that the scratches are what made it lucky."

¹ Afro—a hairstyle of tight curls in a full, evenly rounded shape

Her mother rolled her eyes. “Mama wasn’t really blessed in the luck department, especially when it came to Lambert.”

“What does that mean?” Candice asked. She had heard her mother make comments like that throughout the years, even when her grandmother was still alive. Grandma would always nod and counter with, “Just because you don’t see the path doesn’t mean it’s not there.” If Candice was nearby, she would turn to her and wink—like it was a shared secret between them. Not knowing how to respond, Candice would just smile back.

Her mother took a deep breath, then sat down at the table. “Since we’re going to be living here for a while, there’s a few things you need to know about your grandmother.” She motioned for Candice to sit as well. “Technically, Mama resigned from her job here. But she was really fired. It was a pretty big deal.”

Candice’s eyes widened. Her *grandmother*? “What did she do?”

“She acted a fool,” her mom muttered, almost to herself. “Your grandma somehow got it in her head that there was a buried treasure hidden somewhere in the city. She talked to the mayor about it. He told her to drop it. It seemed like one big con job.”

“But I guess she didn’t let it go.”

Her mother shook her head. “She spent months doing all this research about who knows what. Then she decided to dig up one of the old tennis courts. Forged city paperwork to pay a crew and rent a backhoe². Dug all night.”

Candice leaned forward. She pictured her grandmother with a shovel, digging up a pirate’s chest full of gold. “Did she find anything?”

“Nothing but dirt,” she replied. “Mama was lucky. The city didn’t want a scandal. They agreed not to press charges if she signed a confidentiality agreement and destroyed all her research.”

Candice had to sit on her hands to stop from bouncing. Lambert suddenly seemed a lot more interesting. A mystery like this was more exciting than any of the logic and strategy games on her old iPod touch. “What if Grandma was right? What if there really was a hidden fortune?”

“I can already see the gears turning in your head,” her mother said. “Let me stop you now. This isn’t one of your computer games. There is no buried treasure.” She crossed her arms. “That was what, almost ten years ago? If there really was a pile of money hidden around the city, I’m sure someone would have found it by now.”

“But—”

“I don’t think you understand. Your grandma was the first woman, and the first African American, to serve as city manager for Lambert. This was supposed to be a stepping-stone to other things. Columbia. Greenville. Savannah. Who knows—maybe she could have ended up running a big-time department for the City of Atlanta. But because she refused to let that one thing go, she torpedoed her career. And she made herself the laughingstock of the city. Of the entire state. It was all over the Internet. The Mole Lady. And of course, she never got another shot at being a city manager.”

The excitement that had been bubbling up inside Candice began to simmer down. “I never knew that.”

² backhoe—a power-driven vehicle used for digging

“No one likes to talk about their failures. Especially your grandmother.” She tapped the table. “I know you love a good mystery, but the last thing I need is you drumming up all this old stuff about a buried treasure. The past is the past. Mama’s legacy is tarnished enough. I don’t want you making it worse.”

“Just because Grandma made a mistake doesn’t mean she’s a failure,” Candice said.

After a few moments, her mother reached across the table and took Candice’s hand. “Your grandmother was many things. Strong. Dynamic. And determined too.” She sighed. “But she also made a big mistake. Maybe that doesn’t make her a failure in our eyes, but the world doesn’t always see people in the way we want.”

Multiple-Choice Items

1. Read the sentences from the passage.

“ ‘Your grandma was the first woman, and the first African American, to serve as city manager for Lambert. This was supposed to be a stepping-stone to other things.’ ”

What does the use of “stepping-stone” suggest about Candice’s grandmother’s job?

- A. She had the most authority in the city of Lambert.
- B. She worked to make Lambert a thriving community.
- C. Her job could have developed into a successful career.
- D. Her job served to inspire women to become city managers.

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	A-C.2.1.3
Answer Key	C
Depth of Knowledge	3
p-value A	10%
p-value B	12%
p-value C	55% (correct answer)
p-value D	23%
Option Annotations	The student is asked to determine what the phrase “stepping-stone” suggests about Candice’s grandmother’s job. Option C is the correct answer since this idiom refers to something that helps you get or achieve something. In the passage, the job of city manager was a position that was supposed to help Candice’s grandmother obtain better positions in order to advance her career. Options A, B, and D are incorrect since they do not reflect the meaning of the idiom “stepping-stone.”

2. Read the sentences from the passage.

“ ‘The past is the past. Mama’s legacy is tarnished enough. I don’t want you making it worse.’ ”

Based on the passage, what does the word tarnished reveal about Candice’s grandmother?

- A. She became unpopular.
- B. She lost the respect of others.
- C. She failed to achieve her goals.
- D. She embarrassed her daughter.

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	A-V.4.1.1
Answer Key	B
Depth of Knowledge	3
p-value A	11%
p-value B	47% (correct answer)
p-value C	34%
p-value D	8%
Option Annotations	The student is asked to use context clues to determine what the word “tarnished” reveals about Candice’s grandmother. Option B is the correct answer since one meaning of the word refers to having one’s reputation damaged, resulting in the loss of others’ respect. This choice is supported by the passage, which states that “she made herself the laughingstock of the city. Of the entire state.” This evidence shows that people lost respect for the grandmother. Options A, C, and D are incorrect since they do not reflect a meaning of the word “tarnished” and are not supported by textual evidence.

3. Read the sentence from the passage.

“‘I can already see the gears turning in your head,’ her mother said.”

What does the phrase “gears turning in your head” suggest in the sentence?

- A. Candice’s mother notices Candice is deep in thought.
- B. Candice’s mother thinks Candice is becoming sad.
- C. Candice’s mother remembers Candice as a child.
- D. Candice’s mother imagines Candice is a machine.

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	A-V.4.1.2
Answer Key	A
Depth of Knowledge	2
p-value A	83% (correct answer)
p-value B	8%
p-value C	5%
p-value D	4%
Option Annotations	The student is asked to determine what the phrase “gears turning in your head” suggests. Option A is the correct answer since this idiom is a humorous way of saying that someone is thinking so hard that the machinery in the brain can be heard. Options B, C, and D are incorrect since these are not correct meanings of the idiom.

4. Read the sentences from the passage.

“ ‘But because she refused to let that one thing go, she torpedoed her career. And she made herself the laughingstock of the city. Of the entire state.’ ”

How do the sentences contribute to the plot?

- A. They identify the reason Candice’s mother is angry with Candice’s grandmother.
- B. They explain why Candice and her mother returned to Lambert.
- C. They prove that Candice’s mother is amused by the idea of describing Candice’s grandmother as lucky.
- D. They emphasize the risks Candice would take by searching for the treasure.

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	A-C.2.1.2
Answer Key	D
Depth of Knowledge	3
p-value A	23%
p-value B	14%
p-value C	19%
p-value D	44% (correct answer)
Option Annotations	The student is asked to determine how the given sentences contribute to the plot of the passage. Option D is correct; the fact that the grandmother’s actions negatively impact her suggests that Candice “drumming up all this old stuff about a buried treasure” may make her grandmother’s legacy “worse.” Option A is incorrect; even though Candice’s mother believes her grandmother took unnecessary actions, these sentences do not most contribute to the plot. Option B is incorrect since these sentences do not relate at all to why Candice and her mother have returned to Lambert; this reason is not revealed in the text. Option C is incorrect; Candice’s mother is not amused by her mother’s actions, and she does not view Mama as lucky. In fact, she says that “Mama wasn’t really blessed in the luck department.”

Evidence-Based Selected-Response Item

5. This question has two parts. Answer Part One and then answer Part Two.

Part One

How does Candice's impression of Lambert change as her mother tells her about the city?

- A. Candice concludes that people in Lambert are not tolerant of mistakes.
- B. Candice becomes more interested in the adventures Lambert may offer.
- C. Candice believes that Lambert officials are keeping information from the community.
- D. Candice expresses pride in her family history in Lambert.

Part Two

Which evidence from the passage supports the answer in Part One? Choose **two** answers.

- A. “*This* room, small and cramped, sat at the rear of a house unfamiliar to Candice, a house in . . . a city she had no desire to be living in.”
- B. “ ‘They agreed not to press charges if she signed a confidentiality agreement and destroyed all her research.’ ”
- C. “A mystery like this was more exciting than any of the logic and strategy games on her old iPod touch.”
- D. “ ‘ . . . maybe she could have ended up running a big-time department for the City of Atlanta.’ ”

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	A-K.1.1.3
Answer Key: Part One	B
Answer Key: Part Two	A, C
Depth of Knowledge	3
Mean Score	1.33
Option Annotations	<p>The student is asked to determine how Candice's impression of Lambert changes as her mother tells her about the city and to support this answer with two pieces of evidence from the passage.</p> <p>Part One: Option B is the correct answer; in the beginning Candice views her time living in Lambert as “a horrible summer.” However, as her mother tells her about the alleged buried treasure, Candice's opinion about the town changes. The sentence “ ‘What if there really was a hidden fortune?’ ” suggests the town may offer an adventure. Option A is incorrect since it is Candice's mother who thinks that the people in Lambert are not tolerant of mistakes. Option C is incorrect; even though Candice wonders whether there is a hidden treasure, there is no evidence to support that city officials are keeping information from the community. Option D is incorrect; even though Candice thinks that making a mistake does not make her grandmother a failure, she does not express pride in her family history.</p> <p>Part Two: Options A and C are correct. Option A shows Candice's negative feelings toward Lambert at the beginning of the passage. Option C shows the excitement she feels after her mom tells her about the possible hidden fortune. Options B and D are incorrect since they relate to Candice's grandmother and not to Candice.</p>

Multiple-Choice Item

6. Which description provides the **best** objective summary of the passage?
- A. Candice Miller and her mother move to her grandmother’s house from Atlanta. Candice is bored in the small city. She wants something to do. She discovers a mystery about hidden treasure. Candice loves mysteries and decides to find the treasure.
 - B. Candice Miller and her mother move to her grandmother’s house in Lambert. Candice is having a bad summer. She misses her grandmother. Candice finds out that there may be hidden treasure in Lambert. Her mother, however, tells her not to waste time searching for it.
 - C. Candice Miller and her mother move to her grandmother’s house in Lambert. It is a small city and there is nothing for Candice to do. Her mother tells her a story about her grandmother searching for hidden treasure. Candice realizes that Lambert may be more exciting than she thought after all.
 - D. Candice Miller and her mother move from Atlanta to the small city of Lambert. They are staying in Candice’s grandmother’s house. Her mother tells her how her grandmother lost her job when she searched for a hidden treasure. The search ruined her grandmother’s career. Candice wonders if her grandmother may have been right and wants to search for the treasure. However, her mother warns her not to go looking for it.

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	A-K.1.1.2
Answer Key	D
Depth of Knowledge	2
p-value A	10%
p-value B	17%
p-value C	19%
p-value D	54% (correct answer)
Option Annotations	The student is asked to determine the best objective summary of the passage. Option D is the correct answer since it includes all the major events of the plot without inserting any personal opinions. Option A is incorrect since it is missing some major events in the plot. Option B is incorrect since it is missing major events and includes a personal opinion by stating that Candice should not “waste time” searching for the hidden treasure. Option C is incorrect since it is missing some major events and inserts a personal opinion by describing Lambert as “a small city.”

Passage 2

Read the following passage about a young person who is going through changes with her friends and family. Then answer question 7 in your answer booklet.

The following passage is a chapter from the novel *The Way to Bea*. The narrator is the twelve-year-old Bea, who is finishing sixth grade and just starting seventh grade. Bea is experiencing changes with her friends S, L, and L.

The Portal

by Kat Yeh

I rush down the hall and push through the exit, running across the soccer field, into the woods, and onto the path that leads home. I don't stop until I get to the clearing by the Wall.

It's like stepping into a safe zone. I let myself collapse onto the ground and try to catch my breath.

No one knows who made the paths that wind through the little woods and feed into all the streets in our neighborhood. They've just always been there. Maybe since the very first houses here on Long Island were built. They connect our street to S and L and L's streets and then to the main path, where you can take a left to the elementary school, a right to the middle school, or an even farther right to, well, to pretty much anywhere. Over the years, we've searched every inch of every path, and ours is the only one with a stone wall.

We were little the first time we came upon our crumbling Wall, and it looked like a stone creature to us, hunched over like a baby elephant in the clearing. We ran back to my parents' studio, yelling, "Why is there a wall in the woods? What is it? Where did it come from?"

Without looking up, Dad yelled, "Portal to the land of the goblin king!" and kept on drawing his comics.

And from her side of the studio, Mom called out, "Portal to the underworld!" and threw more black paint on her canvas.

Just as quickly as we'd come in, we ran back out to check the Wall for clues.

It might have been left over from an old mansion. Or a prison gate. Or a secret tower. But it didn't matter; it was ours. And the best part was that it had this . . . opening. Nothing special to look at. Just the kind of small dark hole you'd expect to find filled with crawling beetles and maybe moss. But it was more than that. Because when we pressed our eyes to it, we could see that it reached farther and deeper than any ordinary crawling-beetle-and-maybe-moss-filled hole should. As if the inside were bigger than the outside.

We named it the Portal.

We whispered our deepest secrets into it. We asked it our scariest questions. We could tell it anything. Inside the Portal was the safest place we knew.

A twig snaps.

I force myself not to look up. Because when you're waiting for someone on a path, every twig will snap and every bush will rustle, but no one will ever be there. No one ever is. Not in the mornings when I wait here until I'm late for school every day and not now.

And there's no way S would run after me after the scene I made.

Barging in late and crashing into everyone with my backpack.

Doing my weird skywriting in front of the whole class.

Ugh. And then screaming *NO!* like I was at a horror movie and not just watching a class presentation.

Why?

Why, why, WHY do I always have to be so . . .

. . . me.

For the first time, I'm glad I still have my backpack on. I squirm out of it and unzip the front section, scrabbling around until my fingers touch what I'm looking for. I close my eyes and take a deep breath.

People do different things to calm down or relax. My mom starts a painting. My dad shops online for new inks and old pens.

I make poems.

My hand finds the stack of paper I cut into little three-by-three-inch squares and I can already feel my breathing slow. Next is a small glass bottle.

Lemon juice with exactly three drops of water in it. Invisible ink.

We learned all about invisible ink from this book called *Start Your Own Secret Club* that S and L and L and I got from the book club flyer at school when we were in third grade. There are lots of different formulas, but the best is lemon juice and water. To make the ink visible, you need someone to light a match and carefully hold it underneath.

The book has all these funny cartoons with this guy who explains what to do. My favorite one is where he's peeking from behind a tree, watching this girl read his invisible letter. His voice bubble says *Now all you have to do is wait for your friend to light a match, and your message will be received!* But it takes her so long to get the matches to light that by the time she finally does, he has this long white beard and he's all mad and she sees that the message says *Can you bring me a sandwich? I'm hungry!*

In the book, it says you can use a cotton swab to dip and write your message, but that just doesn't feel very poetic to me. I use this dip pen I stole from my dad. It has a golden nib etched with curly lines. I wonder if he's even noticed that it's missing. He's been pretty busy, so he isn't really noticing much lately.

I want to write something, but I'm not sure what and that makes me think of this thing my mom always says: *Whatever you feel on the inside is what you put out there in the universe.*

And what I'm thinking about now is a maze and how unfair it is when you think a path will lead you somewhere amazing and you just end up running into a dead end.

I close my eyes, hold my hand over my heart, and count out the beats of words that come from the inside.

if you are in a maze . . . (six).

Start again.

a blind alley up ahead . . . (seven).

No.

tell me why, my friend (five)

blind alleys have to appear (seven)

on the paths we walk (five)

Five, seven, five.

Thumb over my heart on the last beat.

Haiku.

The way I know when something I've written is perfect is that I feel truly connected to it in a way I didn't before. It's like the words and the feeling behind the words are coming right from my heart. Whether they're happy or wondering or sad, they just feel right and real and right.

I dip my pen into the invisible ink and write the words down. They shine bright and clear, made up of lemony water and whatever it is inside me that makes poems want to be in the world. I quickly close my eyes again before they can evaporate.

I know the whole point of invisible ink is to make things disappear, but today, this thought makes a little sting in my heart. Because no matter how long I wait out here, no matter how many snapping twigs or rustling bushes I hear, I know that no one is coming with a light to make my words visible again. And after all the thinking and feeling and writing, all I'm really left with is an invisible haiku that doesn't belong anywhere.

I open my eyes and see the Portal.

I stare for a second—then begin to roll the little paper as tight and tiny as I can. I search the ground and pull up a long piece of grass. The kind that's sturdy and wide. The kind you can make a long, loud whistle from when you hold it between your thumbs and blow. I wrap the grass around the roll twice and tie it.

I hear nearby rustling and quickly look side to side, but I'm still alone.

I take a deep breath.

Look into the Portal.

And tuck my invisible haiku inside.

Safe.

I'm about to walk away, but then I stop and grab a pack of matches I keep for testing out my invisible inks. And I tuck that in, too.

Because even invisible things deserve to have a little hope.

Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt

7. A theme in “The Portal” is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. Write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

Writer’s Checklist for the Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt

PLAN before you write

- Make sure you read the prompt carefully.
- Make sure you have read the entire passage carefully.
- Think about how the prompt relates to the passage.
- Organize your ideas on scratch paper. Use a thought map, outline, or other graphic organizer to plan your essay.

FOCUS while you write

- Analyze the information from the passage as you write your essay.
- Make sure you use evidence from the passage to support your response.
- Use precise language, a variety of sentence types, and transitions in your essay.
- Organize your paper with an introduction, body, and conclusion.

PROOFREAD after you write

- ☐ I wrote my final essay in the answer booklet.
- ☐ I stayed focused on responding to the prompt.
- ☐ I used evidence from the passage to support my response.
- ☐ I corrected errors in capitalization, spelling, sentence formation, punctuation, and word choice.

7. A theme in “The Portal” is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. Write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

GO ON 

[illegible]

GO ON 

[illegible]

After you have checked your work, close your answer booklet and test booklet so your teacher will know you are finished.



Text-Dependent Analysis Scoring Guidelines

#7 Item Information

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	A-K.1.1.2
Depth of Knowledge	3
Mean Score	2.06

Assessment Anchor:

E06.A-K.1.1—Key Ideas and Details

Specific Assessment Anchor Descriptor addressed by this item:

E06.A-K.1.1.2—Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through relevant details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

Item-Specific Scoring Guideline

Score	Description
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectively addresses all parts of the task demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the text(s) Effective introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s) Strong organizational structure that effectively supports the focus and ideas Thorough analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to effectively support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences Substantial, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant key details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions Substantial reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer's purpose Skillful use of transitions to link ideas Effective use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events Few errors, if any, are present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present do not interfere with meaning

Score	Description
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequately addresses all parts of the task demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text(s) • Clear introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s) • Appropriate organizational structure that adequately supports the focus and ideas • Clear analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences • Sufficient, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions • Sufficient reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer's purpose • Appropriate use of transitions to link ideas • Appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events • Some errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present seldom interfere with meaning
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistently addresses some parts of the task demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text(s) • Weak introduction, development, and/or conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea somewhat related to the text(s) • Weak organizational structure that inconsistently supports the focus and ideas • Weak or inconsistent analysis of explicit and/or implicit meanings from text(s) that somewhat supports claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences • Vague reference to the text(s) using some details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions • Weak reference to the main idea(s) and relevant details of the text(s) to support the writer's purpose • Inconsistent use of transitions to link ideas • Inconsistent use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events • Errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present may interfere with meaning
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimally addresses part(s) of the task demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text(s) • Minimal evidence of an introduction, development, and/or conclusion • Minimal evidence of an organizational structure • Insufficient or no analysis of the text(s); may or may not support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences • Insufficient reference to the text(s) using few details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions • Minimal reference to the main idea(s) and/or relevant details of the text(s) • Few, if any, transitions to link ideas • Little or no use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) • Many errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present often interfere with meaning

STUDENT RESPONSE

Response Score: 4 points

7. A theme in "The Portal" is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. Write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

A theme in "The Portal" is that self-discovery can be a difficult process, the narrator demonstrates this theme in th passage by questioning herself and her behavior. She wonders if her friends will forgive her.

For example, when the narrator feels distraught about her behavior, she asks the question, "why?".

She then says, "Why, why, WHY do I always have to be so . . . me.", this is a perfect demonstration of why self discovery can be difficult because sometimes you don't know why you do things or why you act a certain way. When discovering yourself it gets easier by time.

Next, when the narrator is in class she feels that she is weird and acts different. " Doing my weird skywriting in front of the whole class. Ugh. And then screaming No! like I was at a horror movie and not just watching a class presentation. " This is an example of self discovery because she felt that she was weird and would make a scene. It also made her feel embarrassed because she knows that, that is abnormal.

GO ON

Then, when she grew nervous she would make poems to calm down or relax. This helped show that self discovery is a difficult process because if she made poems to calm her down she was stressed. This is shown when she states, "It's like the words and the feeling behind the words are coming right from my heart. Whether they're happy or wondering or sad, they feel just right and real and right." This lets you know that when she is distressed she can calm down.

Lastly, when she finishes writing her poem and put the bottle in the "Portal" she left matches with it aswell. This demonstrates how she felt with her friends and how she truly discovered herself. "I'm about to walk away, but then I stop and grab a pack of matches I keep for testing out my invisible inks. And I tuck that in, too. Because even invisible things deserve to have a little hope." This shows that her friendship still has hope and though self discovery is difficult there is still hope for herself.



This shows how a theme in "The Portal" is self-discovery can be a difficult process, and that the narrator demonstrates this in the passage by questioning herself and her behavior, but she learns how to cope with it in the end.

This response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating in-depth analytical understanding of the text. A strong organizational structure effectively supports the focus on the narrator's internal thoughts and related ideas. In the introduction, the student effectively establishes an analytic controlling idea (*the narrator demonstrates this theme in th[e] passage by questioning herself and her behavior. She wonders if her friends will forgive her*) that supports the focus. In the first body paragraph, the student combines thorough analysis and a generalization with a relevant text reference (*when the narrator feels distraught about her behavior, she asks the question, "why?" . . . this is a perfect demonstration of why self discovery can be difficult because sometimes you don't know why you do things or why you act a certain way. When discovering yourself it gets easier by time*). The next body paragraph is similarly constructed, with more thorough analysis supported with additional relevant text (*Next, when the narrator is in class she feels that she is weird and acts different. "Doing my weird skywriting in front of the whole class. Ugh. . . ." This is an example of self discovery because she felt that she was weird and would make a scene. It also made her feel embarrassed because she knows that, that is abnormal*). The next paragraph continues the pattern with strong analysis supported by text (*Then, when she grew nervous . . . because if she made poems to calm her down she was stressed . . . "It's like the words and the feeling . . .". This lets you know that when she is distressed she can calm down*). In the final body paragraph, the student incorporates thorough, insightful analysis with another well-chosen text reference (*Lastly, when she finishes writing her poem . . . demonstrates how she felt with her friends and how she truly discovered herself. "I'm about to walk away . . . invisible things deserve to have a little hope." This shows that her friendship still has hope and though self-discovery is difficult there is still hope for herself*). The conclusion is effective (*This shows how a theme in "The Portal" is self-discovery can be a difficult process, and that the narrator demonstrates this in the passage by questioning herself and her behavior, but she learns how to cope with it in the end*) and helps solidify the student's focus through the end of the response. The student employs transitions skillfully to link ideas (*the narrator demonstrates this theme, For example, She then says, this is a perfect demonstration of, because, Next, This is an example, also, Then, This helped show that, This is is shown, This lets you know, Lastly, This demonstrates how, This shows how*) throughout the response. A skillful use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*questioning, behavior, wonders, forgive, distraught, perfect, certain, easier, embarrassed, abnormal, nervous, stressed, distressed*) conveys ideas effectively throughout the response. The few errors present in spelling (*th[e]*, *aswell*) and punctuation (hyphens and commas) do not interfere with meaning.

STUDENT RESPONSE

**Computer Response Score: 4 points**

7. A theme in “The Portal” is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. Write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

In the story “The Portal” a theme is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. I am going to write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage.

In the story “The Portal” the theme is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. The narrator demonstrates this theme by explaining how Bea feels about herself. She is having a difficult time with her friends, so she goes to a portal to hide notes and poems that she writes. Although Bea has this portal, she is still trying to figure out how to mend her friendships. The author explains how she is feeling about herself and what is going on in her life. In the text it states “Why, why, WHY do I always have to be so me.” That shows that Bea is not happy with herself, and is embarrassed of herself! Another piece of evidence from the story that shows how the narrator demonstrates the theme is “The way I know something I’ve written is perfect is that I feel truly connected to it in a way I didn’t before. It’s like the words and the feeling behind the words are coming right from my heart.” That shows that she knows it is a good poem, and is now finding her way through life. Then right after this she says “whether they’re happy or wondering or sad, they just feel right and real and right. That shows that she knows the feelings that she wants to feel. Many people can connect to this story because they are finding their way too!

In the passage “The Portal” the theme was that self-discovery can be a difficult process. The narrator demonstrates this by showing how Bea feels about her life situation.

This response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the text. A strong organizational structure effectively supports the focus on Bea's feelings about herself. The introduction straightforwardly restates the prompt and acknowledges the task. The first body paragraph establishes the controlling idea (*The narrator demonstrates this theme by explaining how Bea feels about herself*). Next, the student references relevant text to provide context (*She is having a difficult time with her friends, so she goes to a portal to hide notes and poems that she writes*) for the thorough analysis that follows (*Although Bea has this portal, she is still trying to figure out how to mend her friendships. The author explains how she is feeling about herself and what is going on in her life*). Next, a well-chosen quote (*"Why, why, WHY do I always have to be so me"*) supports additional insightful analysis (*That shows that Bea is not happy with herself, and is embarrassed of herself!*). This is followed by another relevant text reference (*"The way I know something I've written is perfect is that I feel truly connected to it in a way I didn't before. It's like the words and the feeling behind the words are coming right from my heart"*) that supports the focus and provides a jumping-off point for additional perceptive analysis (*That shows that she knows it is a good poem, and is now finding her way through life*). Another well-chosen quote (*"whether they're happy or wondering or sad, they just feel right and real and right"*) is then followed with more strong analysis (*That shows that she knows the feelings that she wants to feel*) and an astute generalization (*Many people can connect to this story because they are finding their way too!*), all of which demonstrates a thorough understanding of explicit and implicit meanings from the text. The conclusion is concise (*the theme was that self-discovery can be a difficult process . . . by showing how Bea feels about her life situation*) yet effective. There is a skillful use of transitions (*In the story, The narrator demonstrates this theme by, so, Although, The author explains how, That shows that, Another, Then right after this, because*) as well as precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*explaining, feels, figure out, mend, embarrassed, connect, finding, situation*). The few errors present (minor punctuation mistakes) do not interfere with meaning.

STUDENT RESPONSE

Response Score: 3 points

7. A theme in “The Portal” is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. Write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

In the passage “The Portal” the author informs the reader about the theme in the passage. The theme is that self-discovery can be a hard process.

To begin, the author demonstrates the theme throughout the story. The character in the story would struggle by her-self and wished her friends would come back. She would always think there comeing back because she would hear sounds, but they weren't. The text states, “I force myself not to look. Because when you're waiting for someone on a path, every twig will snap and every bush will rustle, but no one ever be there. No one ever is. Not in the mornings when I wait here until I'm late for school every day and not now. And there is no way S would run after me after the scene I made.” From this text the reader can infer that the theme, self-discovery can be a difficult process was demonstrated throughout the passage because the narrater made the character want her friends to come back. It was hard for her to find the portal on her own. There fore the author demonstrated the theme in the story.

To cunclude, the author demonstrated the theme throughout the story.



This response adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text. An appropriate organizational structure adequately supports the focus and ideas. The introduction, while clear, simply restates ideas from the prompt (*self-discovery can be a hard process*). In the first body paragraph, the student provides clear analysis (*The character in the story would struggle by her-self and wished her friends would come back. She would always think there comeing back because she would hear sounds, but they weren't*) that is supported with relevant text (*"I force myself not to look. Because when you're waiting for someone on a path, every twig will snap and every bush will rustle, but no one ever be there. No one ever is. Not in the mornings when I wait here until I'm late for school every day and not now. And there is no way S would run after me after the scene I made"*). This is followed by additional clear analysis (*From this text the reader can infer that the theme, self-discovery can be a difficult process was demonstrated throughout the passage because the narrator made the character want her friends to come back. It was hard for her to find the portal on her own. There fore the author demonstrated the theme in the story*) to complete the response's development. The student's conclusion is perfunctory (*To cunclude, the author demonstrated the theme throughout the story*) but clear. There is an appropriate use of transitions to link ideas (*In the passage, To begin, The text states, From this text, because, There fore, To cunclude*) as well as precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*informs, character, struggle, wished, infer, There fore*). The errors present in usage (*her-self* for "herself," *there* for "they're," *There fore* for "Therefore"), spelling (*comeing, narrator, cunclude*), and punctuation seldom interfere with meaning.

STUDENT RESPONSE

**Computer Response Score: 3 points**

7. A theme in “The Portal” is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. Write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

The narrator demonstrates that the theme of the story is that self discovery can be a hard process. The author denonstrates this by writing about her heart and how alone she is. She says that theres a little sting in her heart and that she's still alone.

The auother states that “this thought makes a littile sting in my heart.” “I know that no one is coming with a light to make my words visable again.” “I hear nearby rustling and quickly look to the side, but I’m still alone.”

I know that in my expierence if you are alone, No ones hearing your words, and you’ve got a sting in your heart that you are still trying to discover your-self and find who the real you is. This can be hard at times but we all go through it.

The narrator denestrates that self discovery can be a very hard process to go through. She states that she has a sting in her heart and that shes all alone. So, the theme of the story is that self discovery can be a very hard Process that you have to get through.

This response adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text. An appropriate organizational structure supports the focus and ideas. In the clear introduction, the student puts forth a controlling idea related to the text (*The author denonstrates this by writing about her heart and how alone she is. She says that theres a little sting in her heart and that she's still alone*). The first body paragraph includes a series of relevant quotes from the text's narrator (*“this thought makes a littile sting in my heart.” “I know that no one is coming with a light to make my words visable again.” “I hear nearby rustling and quickly look to the side, but I’m still alone.”*). In the next paragraph, clear analysis, including an experiential generalization, clarifies the narrator's quotes (*I know that in my expierence if you are alone, No ones hearing your words, and you’ve got a sting in your heart that you are still trying to discover your-self and find who the real you is. This can be hard at times but we all go through it*). The student's conclusion is clear, albeit somewhat repetitive (*The narrator denenstrates that self discovery can be a very hard process . . . that you have to get through*). There are an appropriate use of transitions (*The narrator demonstrates that, She says that, The auother states that, I know that, This can be, but, So*) throughout the response and an appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*demonstrates, in my expierence, discover, we all go through it, Process, that you have to get through*). The errors present in spelling (*denonstrates/ denenstrates, littile, visable, expierence*) and punctuation (missing hyphens, commas, and apostrophes) may interfere with meaning.

STUDENT RESPONSE

Response Score: 2 points

7. A theme in “The Portal” is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. Write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

In “The Portal” a theme is that self discovery can be a difficult process. In the story Bea (the narrotor) is having troluble finding herself. I read on page 41, “Why? Why, Why, WHY do I always have to be so me.” When I get fustrated I question myself or my choices by using the common phrase, “Why?”. It can be hard to find yourself and be alright with This is who I am”. Alot of people when They Find out who they are, they don’t enjoy it but they get used to it evetruly. The story in “The Portal” states that self-discovery can be a difficult process.

This response inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text. A weak organizational structure inconsistently supports the student’s focus on how Bea’s reflections show the difficulty of self-discovery. The weak introduction includes an inference that functions as a controlling idea (*In the story Bea (the narrotor) is having troluble finding herself*). Next, a text reference (*“Why? Why, Why, WHY do I always have to be so me”*) followed by an introspective generalization (*When I get fustrated I question myself or my choices by using the common phrase, “Why?”. It can be hard to find yourself and be alright with This is who I am”*). *Alot of people when They Find out who they are, they don’t enjoy it but they get used to it evetruly*) extends the idea presented in the introduction. The student concludes the response abruptly, reiterating the prompt without further development (*The story in “The Portal” states that self-discovery can be a difficult process*). There are an inconsistent use of transitions (*In the story, I read*) in the response and an inconsistent use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*fustrated, common phrase, evetruly*). The errors present in spelling (*fustrated, Alot, evetruly*), capitalization, and punctuation sometimes interfere with meaning.

STUDENT RESPONSE

**Computer Response Score: 2 points**

7. A theme in “The Portal” is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. Write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

This is how the narrator demonstrates the theme in this passage called “The Portal”. In the passage she doesn’t like herself, and says “Why? why why why do I have to be so me. She then talks about how other peop calm down and she says she makes poems, and she discovers who she is when she makes a Haiku and it stings her heart. She decides that poem doesn’t need to be invisible, and sticks it into “The Portal” for someone else to find. That is how the narrator demonstrates the theme in this passage called “The Portal”.

This response inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text. A weak organizational structure inconsistently supports the focus and ideas. The student begins by abruptly referencing the task (*This is how the narrator demonstrates the theme in this passage called “The Portal”*). Next, an inference (*she doesn’t like herself*) is employed to provide context for a text reference (*“Why? why why why do I have to be so me”*). The student then reiterates portions of the story using vague text references (*She then talks about how other peop calm down and she says she makes poems*). These are followed by another inference (*and she discovers who she is*) that is weakly supported with an example from the text (*she makes a Haiku and it stings her heart*). A final, weak inference (*She decides that poem doesn’t need to be invisible*) is also supported by text (*and sticks it into “The Portal” for someone else to find*). The conclusion reiterates the weak introduction (*That is how the narrator demonstrates the theme in this passage called “The Portal”*) without offering any new analysis or explanation. There are an inconsistent use of transitions (*This is how, In the passage, then, and, That is how*) and an inconsistent use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*calm down, discovers, Haiku, stings her heart, decides, invisible*). The errors present do not interfere with meaning.

STUDENT RESPONSE

Response Score: 1 point

7. A theme in “The Portal” is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. Write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

The narrator tells me in the begining that heS
runing from something at least hegos to this wall and
at the middle of the Story he tells a back story of
when he was little.

This response minimally addresses part of the task, demonstrating inadequate understanding of the text. There is minimal evidence of an organizational structure, as the response consists of a vague summary of portions of the text. Although there is a very minimal inference (*heS runing from something*), true analysis is lacking and text references are both insufficient and vague (*The narrator tells me in the begining that heS runing from something at least hegos to this wall and at the middle of the Story he tells a back story of when he was little*). Few transitions are used to link ideas (*in the begining, at least*), and there is little use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary (*runing from something*) drawn from the text. The errors present in grammar, spelling, and punctuation sometimes interfere with meaning.

STUDENT RESPONSE

**Computer Response Score: 1 point**

7. A theme in “The Portal” is that self-discovery can be a difficult process. Write an essay analyzing how the narrator demonstrates this theme in the passage. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

This story is about a self discovery about the Portal all so in the story A lot of crazy false stuff happen thats why its faicsin

This response minimally addresses parts of the task, demonstrating inadequate understanding of the text. There is minimal evidence of an organizational structure in this brief response. Specifically, there is minimal evidence of an introduction (*This story is about a self discovery about the Portal*), development (*all so in the story A lot of crazy false stuff happen*), and conclusion (*thats why its faicsin*). There is no analysis of the text to support claims, opinions, ideas, or inferences. References to the text are insufficient and devoid of details, examples, quotes, facts, or definitions. There is minimal reference to the main idea or relevant details of the text. The student employs few transitions to link ideas (*This story is about, all so in the story, thats why*), and there is very little use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*Portal*). Errors present in sentence formation (response consists of a single run-on sentence), usage (*all so* for “also,” *happen* for “happens”), spelling (*faicsin* for “fiction”), capitalization, and punctuation often interfere with meaning. Holistically, as a minimal attempt to respond to the task, this response receives a score of 1.

English Language Arts Test Directions for Conventions of Standard English Questions

Directions:

On the following pages are the Conventions of Standard English questions.

Directions for Multiple-Choice Questions:

Each question will ask you to select an answer from among four choices.

For the multiple-choice questions:

- Read each question and choose the best answer.
- Only one of the answers provided is correct.
- Record your choice in the answer booklet.

Conventions of Standard English Multiple-Choice Questions

8. Read the paragraph.

Bonsai trees are tiny trees that are grown in pots. The practice of growing bonsai trees is thought to have originated in China. Growing bonsai trees is now also popular in Japan. The bonsai tree's roots are trimmed as the young plant grows. These trimmed roots limit the tree's upward growth. The tree's limbs are also shaped and bent with wire. Bonsai trees are sometimes considered works of art.

Which revision would **most** improve the paragraph?

- A. combining the ideas in some sentences
- B. varying the sentence beginnings
- C. changing the order of the sentences
- D. correcting some run-on sentences

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	D.2.1.1
Answer Key	A
Depth of Knowledge	3
p-value A	49% (correct answer)
p-value B	16%
p-value C	21%
p-value D	14%
Option Annotations	The student is asked to identify the revision that would most improve the given paragraph. Option A is the correct answer; since the sentences are short, the style of the paragraph could be improved by combining sentences to provide variation. Option B is incorrect; although varying the sentence beginning may improve the style, it is not the choice that would most improve the paragraph. Option C is incorrect since the order of the sentences is appropriate and includes an introduction, sequential details, and a conclusion. Option D is incorrect since there are no run-on sentences in the paragraph.

9. Read the sentence.

Earthworms in a person’s garden are helpful for the soil and plants.

Which revision of the sentence provides the **most** specific information?

- A. Earthworms can benefit the soil in people’s gardens in many ways.
- B. People often find earthworms when they begin to dig into damp, rich soil.
- C. Earthworms dig burrows into the soil, which helps to allow air and water to enter.
- D. There are hidden earthworms burrowing through the soil of many people’s gardens.

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	D.2.1.3
Answer Key	C
Depth of Knowledge	3
p-value A	36%
p-value B	12%
p-value C	47% (correct answer)
p-value D	5%
Option Annotations	The student is asked to determine which revision of the given sentence provides the most specific information. Option C is the correct answer since the phrases “dig burrows” and “helps to allow air and water to enter” provide specific details about how earthworms are helpful for soil and plants. Option A is incorrect since this revision is general and does not provide any more specific information. Options B and D are more specific but do not provide specific details about how earthworms are helpful for soil and plants.

10. Read the paragraph.

(1) Our class was planning a bake sale to raise money for our trip. (2) They decided that we should do it on Thursday after school. (3) Many of us volunteered to bring cakes, cookies, and bread. (4) We raised more than enough money; our sale was a huge success!

Which sentence contains an inappropriate shift in pronoun person?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	D.1.1.3
Answer Key	B
Depth of Knowledge	2
p-value A	9%
p-value B	53% (correct answer)
p-value C	18%
p-value D	20%
Option Annotations	The student is asked to determine the sentence in the given paragraph that contains an inappropriate shift in pronoun person. Option B is the correct answer since the third-person plural pronoun “they” in sentence 2 should be the first-person plural pronoun “we.” Options A, C, and D are incorrect; they all use the first-person plural pronouns “our,” “us,” and “we.”

11. Read the paragraph.

(1) Last week, my sister and I were walking by the creek. (2) We found two abandoned baby animals. (3) After calling around, we found an animal rescue to take it. (4) We felt good that we had saved the animals.

Which sentence has a vague pronoun?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	D.1.1.4
Answer Key	C
Depth of Knowledge	2
p-value A	22%
p-value B	18%
p-value C	41% (correct answer)
p-value D	19%
Option Annotations	The student is asked to determine the sentence in the given paragraph that has a vague pronoun. Option C is the correct answer; the pronoun “it” is unclear as to whether it refers to the “animal rescue” or one of the “animals.” Options A, B, and D are incorrect since these sentences do not contain any vague pronouns.

English Language Arts—Sample Item Summary Data

Multiple-Choice and Evidence-Based Selected-Response Questions

An asterisk (*) indicates the key.

Sample Number	Alignment	Answer Key	Depth of Knowledge	p-value A	p-value B	p-value C	p-value D
1	A-C.2.1.3	C	3	10%	12%	55%*	23%
2	A-V.4.1.1	B	3	11%	47%*	34%	8%
3	A-V.4.1.2	A	2	83%*	8%	5%	4%
4	A-C.2.1.2	D	3	23%	14%	19%	44%*
5	A-K.1.1.3	Part One: B Part Two: A, C	3	Mean Score: 1.33			
6	A-K.1.1.2	D	2	10%	17%	19%	54%*
8	D.2.1.1	A	3	49%*	16%	21%	14%
9	D.2.1.3	C	3	36%	12%	47%*	5%
10	D.1.1.3	B	2	9%	53%*	18%	20%
11	D.1.1.4	C	2	22%	18%	41%*	19%

Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt

Sample Number	Alignment	Points	Depth of Knowledge	Mean Score
7	A-K.1.1.2	4	3	2.06