

Massachusetts MCAS 2021  
Grade 6 English Language Arts

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MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF  
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY  
**EDUCATION**

*Release of Spring 2021  
MCAS Test Items*

*from the*

*Grade 6 English Language Arts  
Paper-Based Test*

**June 2021**

**Massachusetts Department of  
Elementary and Secondary Education**

# Grade 6 English Language Arts

This session contains 20 questions.

## Directions

Read each passage and question carefully. Then answer each question as well as you can. You must record all answers in this Test & Answer Booklet.

For most questions, you will mark your answers by filling in the circles in your Test & Answer Booklet. Make sure you darken the circles completely. Do not make any marks outside of the circles. If you need to change an answer, be sure to erase your first answer completely.

Some questions will ask you to write a response. Write your response in the space provided. Only responses written within the provided space will be scored.

This passage discusses the research of archaeologist Jeffrey Dean, who has studied the ancient Anasazi people from the southwestern United States. Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

### The Anasazi

from *Case Closed? Nine Mysteries Unlocked by Modern Science*

by Susan Hughes

- Missing: the Anasazi—ancient Pueblo peoples
- Date last seen: around 1300
- Place last seen: southwestern North America
- Possible reasons for disappearance: war, drought, starvation

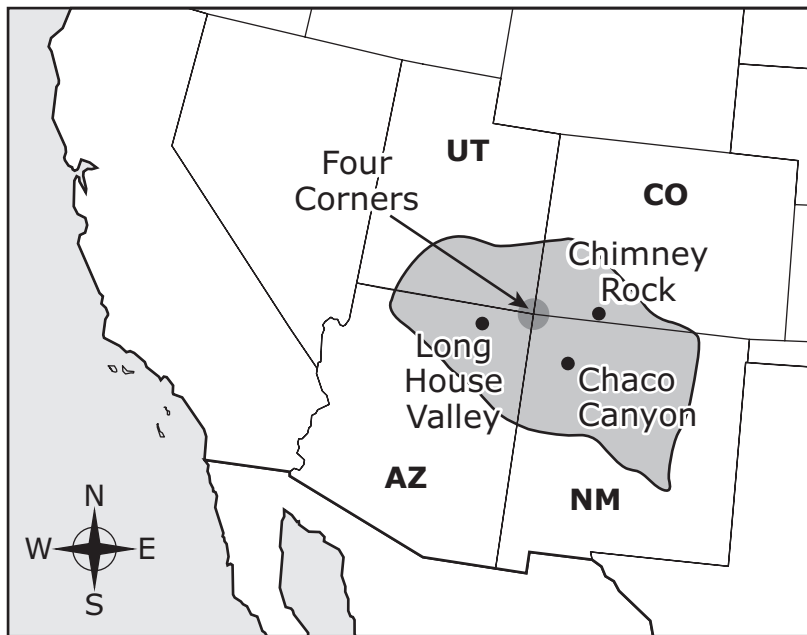
#### Background

- 1 The Anasazi (an-a-SAH-zee) had been an ancient nomadic people. For 10,000 years, they lived by hunting wild deer and gathering fruit, wild berries, nuts and other wild plants.
- 2 About 1800 years ago, they began settling in the plateau region of southwestern America, where sources of water and good farmland could be found. They built single-storey adobe shelters with wood, mortar and sandstone, and began living in villages, called pueblos. They grew crops and domesticated wild turkeys and dogs.
- 3 Rapidly, the population grew. The people gathered in larger pueblos within the canyons. They built dams, canals, reservoirs and even an observatory high atop Chimney Rock, in what is now southwestern Colorado. They used their remarkable building skills to construct multistoried “great houses,” similar to modern apartment blocks, with mortar and huge logs transported from mountaintops over 100 km (60 mi.) away. Some of these great houses had over 600 rooms and housed over 1000 people.
- 4 The Anasazi wove cotton clothing and blankets. They created art images on rock, perhaps to share important messages. They marked the passing of time so they would know when to plant their crops or harvest them. Spurred on by surplus crops, such as beans, squash and cotton, the Anasazi developed extensive trade routes. Hundreds of kilometers (miles)

of roads connected more than seventy outside communities to Chaco Canyon, likely the center of the Anasazi civilization.

- 5 But suddenly, about 1300 CE,\* the Anasazi left their homes and vanished! Where did they go?

### The Four Corners Region of the United States



### Case Open

- 6 Jeffrey Dean, archaeologist and professor at the University of Arizona, stared at the computer screen. He was about to watch history come to life. Onscreen, he saw the Four Corners region of the United States (modern-day Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah) as it existed in the thirteenth century.
- 7 Everything looked about right. Dean had provided data about the climate and the landscape of the time. Other archaeologists had supplied information about the crops grown and tools used. And—although they were simulations—the “people,” or agents onscreen were programmed to act reasonably in response to their changing environment.

\*CE—Common Era, also known as AD

- 8 The computer program started, and the clock began ticking. Time advanced from 800 CE, and Dean watched as crops were planted, the population grew and villages increased in size. The date kept scrolling forward. Now Dean held his breath. What would happen when it reached 1300? Would the people simply up and vanish like the real Anasazi had done over 700 years ago?



Cliff Palace, an ancient Anasazi dwelling, is part of Mesa Verde National Park in Southwestern Colorado.

- 9 When the Anasazi people “vanished,” so did the stories, legends or traditions that might have given us pointers to their past. Anthropologists, who study how human cultures develop, had to turn to other peoples in the region for clues about the Anasazi. They discovered that most of the modern Pueblo peoples of Arizona and New Mexico, including the Hopi and the Zuni, count the Anasazi among their ancestors.
- 10 Archaeologists, such as Jeffrey Dean, support this idea. Ancient artifacts show us that areas to the south of Chaco Canyon became more and more crowded at the time that the Anasazi “disappeared,” making archaeologists think that the Anasazi actually moved south. Dean says, “Virtually all archaeologists agree that the Anasazi didn’t really vanish.” But what could have caused every person to pack up and abandon cities that had flourished for hundreds of years?

- 11 Archaeologists analyzed human bones from the 1300s found in the area. Some showed evidence of famine and malnutrition. Many infants died. Were these signs that food had become scarce? The Anasazi lived about 2100 m (6900 ft.) above sea level, where precipitation and the growing season were good for farming. But if the weather had changed dramatically, the Anasazi—who relied on crops for their survival—may have been forced to evacuate.
- 12 To know more about the history of precipitation in the area, researchers turned to dendrochronology, which is the study and dating of tree rings. A tree usually grows a new ring every year. The width of the ring is mainly affected by how much water and warmth the tree experienced. Dry years produce narrow rings, and wet years produce wide rings.
- 13 Scientists take a core sample from a tree and examine it. They try to match each ring to its corresponding calendar year. Then they can examine a ring's width and learn about what the environment was like that year. They might be able to tell, for example, how much rain fell, what the temperature was and even whether there was an insect outbreak.
- 14 Dean analyzed tree rings in the region. He found that in 1250, weather patterns became chaotic and unpredictable. He says, "Farming could no longer support the number of people that lived in the area. This, of course, increased competition for dwindling resources. In some areas, this resulted in Anasazi communities fighting with each other."

### **Tree Ring-ologies**

Scientists study tree rings to learn about many things, such as

- climatology (for example, past dry spells or cold periods);
- ecology (for example, past insect epidemics or forest fires);
- geology (for example, past volcanic eruptions or earthquakes); and
- anthropology (for example, past construction or desertion of societies).



Bands in a tree ring may be missing because insects stripped the tree's leaves, or there may be false bands created by dry spells.

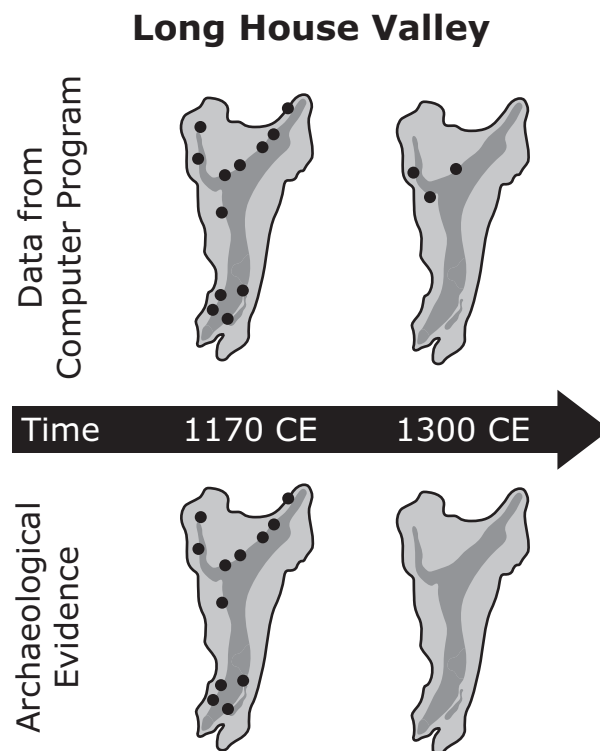
Dendrochronologists have to match patterns from tree to tree. This allows them to compare new samples to verified samples to spot absent or false bands so they can accurately pair rings with calendar years.

- 15 Other evidence supports Dean's theory. Archaeologists have discovered that in the 1200s, some Anasazi people began moving to higher ground, building pueblos into shallow caves in the cliff walls. Archaeologists think that one of the reasons the Anasazi moved into these "cliff dwellings" was because they offered protection from enemies.
- 16 And if famine and warfare weren't enough to drive away the Anasazi, some archaeologists offer another factor: religion. The Anasazi depended on predictable rainfall patterns for their crops, so they might have felt spiritual connections with nature. When the weather worsened, the people might have felt that connection was broken. To the Anasazi society, this spiritual break—in combination with conflict and drought—could have been catastrophic.



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- 17 Archaeologists have found signs of spiritual upheaval in other societies in the region. Perhaps a new type of religion, formed to the south, had appealed to the Anasazi people. This could have triggered the Anasazi to pick up and join a community with a more attractive faith.
- 18 Dean was excited to take part in another attempt to shed some light on the mystery. He and several other archaeologists, a social scientist and a computer modeler created the Artificial Anasazi Project. The simulation program constructed an artificial Anasazi society. Specifically, it showed how the people living in Long House Valley—an actual Anasazi settlement—might have behaved from 800 CE to 1350 CE. The model used 3-D satellite maps of the area and recreated known environmental factors, such as climate, crop production and drought.
- 19 The simulation was “agent based,” which means that each person who lived in the historical Anasazi settlement was represented by an agent. The agents were programmed so that they would act in simple, reasonable ways in response to events and conditions.
- 20 When the researchers ran the program, they watched with great interest as the date advanced. By the time 1300 CE rolled around, three-quarters of the Anasazi agents had left the valley. But some remained.



### **Mystery Solved?**

- 21 Scientists agree that the Anasazi people did not simply vanish. Rather, they migrated to other areas or merged with peoples whose descendants still live in the American Southwest.
- 22 But why? Thanks in part to the Artificial Anasazi Project, most scientists agree that environmental changes alone would not have caused all the Anasazi to evacuate the area. Other factors must have been at play. Researchers are studying the evidence and coming up with competing theories. Dean cautions, "Nearly every archaeologist has a personal opinion on how to interpret the archaeological and natural science data on the Anasazi abandonment of the Four Corners area in the late 1200s." There is still a lot of work to be done before this mystery is truly solved.

"The Anasazi" by Susan Hughes, from *Case Closed? Nine Mysteries Unlocked by Modern Science*. Text copyright © 2010 by Susan Hughes. Reprinted by permission of Kids Can Press Ltd. Photograph 1 courtesy of Wikimedia. Photograph 2 copyright © Julija Sergeeva/Dreamstime. Reprinted by permission of the photographer.

**1** Based on the passage, what does the map that appears after paragraph 5 **best** help the reader understand?

- Ⓐ where the Anasazi originally lived
- Ⓑ how far the Anasazi traveled as they fled their homes
- Ⓒ where natural resources used by the Anasazi were located
- Ⓓ how land features offered the Anasazi protection from their enemies

**2 Part A**

What is the **main** purpose of paragraph 5 in the passage?

- Ⓐ to build suspense
- Ⓑ to introduce a theory
- Ⓒ to present an argument
- Ⓓ to establish the location

**Part B**

Which other paragraph from the passage serves a purpose that is **most** similar to the answer to Part A?

- Ⓐ paragraph 1
- Ⓑ paragraph 8
- Ⓒ paragraph 9
- Ⓓ paragraph 21

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**3** Which of the following is closest in meaning to the word *simulations* in paragraph 7?

- Ⓐ drawings
- Ⓑ reflections
- Ⓒ experiences
- Ⓓ reenactments

**4** Read the sentence from paragraph 9 in the box.

They discovered that most of the modern Pueblo peoples of Arizona and New Mexico, including the Hopi and the Zuni, count the Anasazi among their ancestors.

Based on the passage, which claim is **best** supported by the sentence?

- Ⓐ The Anasazi relocated and became members of other tribes.
- Ⓑ The Anasazi returned to the region and became a tribe of builders.
- Ⓒ Those related to the Anasazi were unable to explain what had happened to the tribe.
- Ⓓ Those related to the Anasazi had invented stories that made determining the fate of the tribe difficult.

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- 5 Read the sentence from paragraph 11 in the box.

But if the weather had changed dramatically, the Anasazi—who relied on crops for their survival—may have been forced to evacuate.

What is the **main** purpose of the dashes in the sentence?

- Ⓐ to provide a definition
  - Ⓑ to show a contrasting idea
  - Ⓒ to set off additional information
  - Ⓓ to emphasize specific examples
- 6 According to the passage, how did archaeologists determine that there was famine around the time the Anasazi disappeared?
- Ⓐ by analyzing local soil
  - Ⓑ by analyzing birth rates
  - Ⓒ by studying human bones
  - Ⓓ by studying nearby societies

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- 7 Based on the passage, what information learned from the dating of tree rings provided clues about why the Anasazi disappeared?
- Ⓐ what the weather was like in the region
  - Ⓑ when earthquakes occurred in the region
  - Ⓒ how insects caused problems in the region
  - Ⓓ what plants grew successfully in the region
- 8 Based on the passage, which of the following is evidence that **best** supports Jeffrey Dean's belief that the Anasazi may have begun fighting?
- Ⓐ They began building pueblos in the walls of cliffs.
  - Ⓑ They began building pueblos that housed more people.
  - Ⓒ They left behind marks recording how long each battle lasted.
  - Ⓓ They left behind images of great warriors on rocks in the region.

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- 9 Based on the passage and the illustration after paragraph 20, select the word or phrase that **best** completes each sentence.

The computer program showed that the number of Anasazi people who lived in Long House Valley in 1170 CE was \_\_\_\_\_?\_\_\_\_\_ the number shown by archaeological evidence from 1170 CE.

- Ⓐ the same as
- Ⓑ fewer than
- Ⓒ more than

The computer program showed that by 1300 CE \_\_\_\_\_?\_\_\_\_\_ of the Anasazi people remained in Long House Valley.

- Ⓐ all
- Ⓑ fewer
- Ⓒ none

Archaeological evidence showed that by 1300 CE \_\_\_\_\_?\_\_\_\_\_ of the Anasazi people remained in Long House Valley.

- Ⓐ many
- Ⓑ few
- Ⓒ none

- 10 Which sentence **best** states the **primary** claim of the passage?
- Ⓐ The Anasazi people greatly influenced other tribes living around them.
  - Ⓑ New evidence will someday reveal the complete history of the Anasazi.
  - Ⓒ Archaeologists should work together to gather new evidence on the Anasazi.
  - Ⓓ A variety of causes likely combined to force the Anasazi people to move to other areas.
- 11 With which statement would the author of the passage **most likely** agree?
- Ⓐ Developing computer programs is the best way to gather data for scientific investigation.
  - Ⓑ Using physical evidence in science may lead to incorrect conclusions during scientific investigation.
  - Ⓒ Understanding the priorities of ancient peoples is of little importance in solving archaeological mysteries.
  - Ⓓ Examining evidence from multiple sources is the most effective method for trying to solve archaeological mysteries.



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**For this question, you will write an essay based on the passage(s). Write your essay in the space provided on the next two pages. Your writing should:**

- **Present and develop a central idea.**
- **Provide evidence and/or details from the passage(s).**
- **Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.**

- 12** Based on “The Anasazi,” write an essay explaining how technology and sciences such as archaeology were used by researchers trying to solve the mystery of the Anasazi’s disappearance. Be sure to use information from the passage to develop your essay.

**Write your answer on the next two pages.**

*You have a total of two pages on which to write your response.*

12

Handwriting practice lines for item 12.



Read the passage about the poet William Carlos Williams, as well as three of his poems. Answer the questions that follow.

### from *A River of Words*

by Jen Bryant

#### Author's Note

- 1 William Carlos Williams was a family doctor in his hometown of Rutherford, New Jersey, for more than forty years. He specialized in pediatrics (care of children) and obstetrics (delivering babies). Records indicate that he presided over more than 3,000 births. Like most doctors of his time, Williams made house calls, spending his days and some nights, too, caring for the sick in their homes. During the Great Depression, when many adults were unemployed and families could not afford to pay, Williams helped them anyway. Often, after stitching a wound, dispensing medicine for a fever, or helping a woman deliver her child after a long night's labor, he would leave with a homemade scarf, a jar of jam, or a warm casserole as payment.
- 2 Despite the constant demands of his profession, Williams always made time for poetry. In his earliest verses, he adopted the methods of traditional English poets who focused on grand topics and used regular patterns of rhyme. Slowly, however, he developed his own distinctive style in which he used shorter lines, brief stanzas, and little or no punctuation. But perhaps his most important contribution to American poetry was his focus on everyday objects and the lives of common people. In his poems, readers can find fire trucks, cats, flowerpots, plums, babies, construction workers, and refrigerators. By stripping away unnecessary details, Williams tried to "see the thing itself . . . with great intensity and perception."
- 3 Although he wrote poems for most of his adult life, his poetry was not well known until he was in his sixties. By then, he had already published more than a dozen poetry books as well as several volumes of essays, plays, and short stories. Today William Carlos Williams is considered one of our most influential American poets and his work is read and studied in schools and universities all over the world. Williams died in 1963 at the age of seventy-nine.

## Poems by William Carlos Williams

### The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

5 glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens

### The Great Figure

Among the rain  
and lights  
I saw the figure 5  
in gold

5 on a red  
firetruck  
moving  
tense

unheeded  
10 to gong\* clangs  
siren howls  
and wheels rumbling  
through the dark city.

\*gong—a type of shallow bell; often has a deep, loud sound

### **This Is Just to Say**

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

5 and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

10 Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

*A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams* by Jen Bryant. Copyright © 2008 by Jen Bryant. Reprinted by permission of Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.

"The Red Wheelbarrow," "This Is Just to Say," and "The Great Figure" by William Carlos Williams, from *The Collected Poems: Volume I, 1909–1939*. Copyright © 1938 by New Directions Publishing Corp. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

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- 13 Read the sentence from paragraph 2 of the passage in the box.

Despite the constant demands of his profession, Williams always made time for poetry.

In the sentence, how is the word *despite* used?

- Ⓐ to show cause and effect
  - Ⓑ to introduce opposing details
  - Ⓒ to indicate supporting information
  - Ⓓ to compare the past and the future
- 14 In paragraph 2 of the passage, what does the word *distinctive* mean?
- Ⓐ tricky
  - Ⓑ unique
  - Ⓒ strange
  - Ⓓ advanced
- 15 What evidence from the passage **best** shows that Williams was a caring doctor?
- Ⓐ He treated whole families.
  - Ⓑ He delivered many babies.
  - Ⓒ He practiced medicine in his hometown.
  - Ⓓ He accepted homemade items as payment.

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- 16** Based on the passage, which of the following best describes the process Williams used when he **first** started writing poetry?
- Ⓐ He struggled to find topics.
  - Ⓑ He used classic poetic techniques.
  - Ⓒ He described his patients in poetry.
  - Ⓓ He used his knowledge as a physician.
- 17** Based on the passage, which of the following **best** describes the public's reaction to Williams's poetry?
- Ⓐ Many people believed that his grammar was poor.
  - Ⓑ It took time for people to appreciate his new style.
  - Ⓒ Many people enjoyed explaining his work to children.
  - Ⓓ It was hard for people to understand the words he used.
- 18** In the poem "The Red Wheelbarrow," what is the **main** purpose of lines 5–8?
- Ⓐ to explain an unusual setting
  - Ⓑ to provide a strong opinion
  - Ⓒ to show a clear resolution
  - Ⓓ to create a vivid picture



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- 19 In the poem “The Great Figure,” the **most likely** reason Williams uses one-word lines is to suggest
- Ⓐ urgency.
  - Ⓑ boredom.
  - Ⓒ confusion.
  - Ⓓ annoyance.
- 20 In the poem “This Is Just to Say,” what is the **most likely** reason Williams uses the first-person point of view?
- Ⓐ to make the plot exciting
  - Ⓑ to show the reason for a conflict
  - Ⓒ to identify the time and place of the setting
  - Ⓓ to describe the thoughts and actions of the speaker

**Grade 6 English Language Arts**  
**Spring 2021 Released Operational Items**

<b>PBT Item No.</b>	<b>Page No.</b>	<b>Reporting Category</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Item Type*</b>	<b>Item Description</b>	<b>Correct Answer (SR)**</b>
1	10	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.7	SR	Determine how a map supports information presented in a passage.	A
2	10	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.5	SR	Analyze how particular paragraphs contribute to the development of ideas in a passage.	A;B
3	11	<i>Language</i>	L.6.4	SR	Determine the meaning of an academic word in context.	D
4	11	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.8	SR	Identify a claim that is supported by evidence from a passage.	A
5	12	<i>Language</i>	L.6.2	SR	Determine the function of punctuation used in a sentence.	C
6	12	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.3	SR	Analyze how an idea is introduced in a passage.	C
7	13	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.2	SR	Determine how a detail in a passage helps to develop a central idea.	A
8	13	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.8	SR	Determine which evidence best supports a claim in a passage.	A
9	14	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.7	SR	Determine how an illustration reveals information presented in a passage.	A;B;C
10	15	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.8	SR	Identify the primary claim of a passage.	D
11	15	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.6	SR	Determine an author's point of view in a passage.	D
12	16	<i>Language, Writing</i>	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3, W.6.2, W.6.4	ES	Write an essay explaining how science was used to try to solve a mystery in a passage; use information from the passage to support the explanation.	
13	22	<i>Language</i>	L.6.5	SR	Analyze the function of a word in a passage.	B
14	22	<i>Language</i>	L.6.4	SR	Determine the meaning of a word in context.	B
15	22	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.1	SR	Identify evidence from a passage that supports an inference about an individual in the passage.	D
16	23	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.3	SR	Analyze how an individual's actions are described in a passage.	B
17	23	<i>Reading</i>	RI.6.3	SR	Analyze an important idea in a passage.	B
18	23	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.6	SR	Identify the purpose of particular lines in a poem.	D
19	24	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.5	SR	Analyze an important structural element of a poem.	A
20	24	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.6	SR	Analyze the reason for using a specific point of view in a poem.	D

\* ELA item types are: selected-response (SR) and essay (ES).

\*\* Answers are provided here for selected-response items only. Sample responses and scoring guidelines for any essay items will be posted to the Department's website later this year.

**Grade 6 English Language Arts**  
**Spring 2021 Unreleased Operational Items**

<b>PBT Item No.</b>	<b>Reporting Category</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Item Type*</b>	<b>Item Description</b>
21	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.3	SR	Analyze how paragraphs in a passage develop a character.
22	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.4	SR	Analyze the impact of word choice in a passage.
23	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.5	SR	Determine how a particular paragraph contributes to the development of ideas in a passage.
24	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.3	SR	Determine the reason for a character's action in a passage.
25	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.1	SR	Make an inference about a character in a passage.
26	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.1	SR	Make an inference based on a detail from a passage.
27	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.1	SR	Select evidence to support an inference about a character in a passage.
28	<i>Language</i>	L.6.4	SR	Determine the meaning of a word in context.
29	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.3	SR	Analyze how an interaction between characters helps to advance the plot in a passage.
30	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.2	SR	Identify how the interactions of characters help to develop a central idea of a passage.
31	<i>Reading</i>	RL.6.4	SR	Analyze symbolism in a passage.
32	<i>Language, Writing</i>	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3, W.6.2, W.6.4	ES	Write an essay that explains how a character changes over the course of a passage; use information from the passage to support the explanation.

\* ELA item types are: selected-response (SR) and essay (ES).