
III. English Language Arts, Grade 4

A. Composition

B. Reading Comprehension

Grade 4 English Language Arts Test

Test Structure

The grade 4 English Language Arts test was presented in the following two parts:

- the ELA Composition test, which used a writing prompt to assess learning standards from the Massachusetts *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework's* **Composition** strand
- the ELA Reading Comprehension test, which used multiple-choice and open-response questions (items) to assess learning standards from the *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework's* **Language** and **Reading and Literature** strands

A. Composition

The spring 2012 grade 4 English Language Arts (ELA) Composition test and Composition Make-Up test were based on learning standards in the Composition strand of the Massachusetts *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* (2001). The learning standards for the Composition strand appear on pages 72–83 of the *Framework*, which is available on the Department website at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html.

ELA Composition test results are reported under the reporting categories **Composition: Topic Development** and **Composition: Standard English Conventions**.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The ELA Composition test included two separate test sessions, administered on the same day with a short break between sessions. During the first session, each student wrote an initial draft of a composition in response to the appropriate writing prompt on the next two pages. During the second session, each student revised his or her draft and submitted a final composition, which was scored in the areas of Topic Development and Standard English Conventions. The Scoring Guides for the MCAS English Language Arts Composition are available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/student/elacomp_scoreguide.html.

Reference Materials

At least one English-language dictionary per classroom was provided for student use during ELA Composition test sessions. The use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries was allowed for current and former English language learner students only. No other reference materials were allowed during either ELA Composition test session.

Cross-Reference Information

Framework general standards 19–22 are assessed by the ELA Composition.

English Language Arts Test

Grade 4 Writing Prompt

WRITING PROMPT

Write about a time you did something exciting. Give enough details in your writing to show what you did and why it was exciting for you.

You may use the space below to plan what you are going to write (notes, outlines, other pre-writing activities).



English Language Arts Test

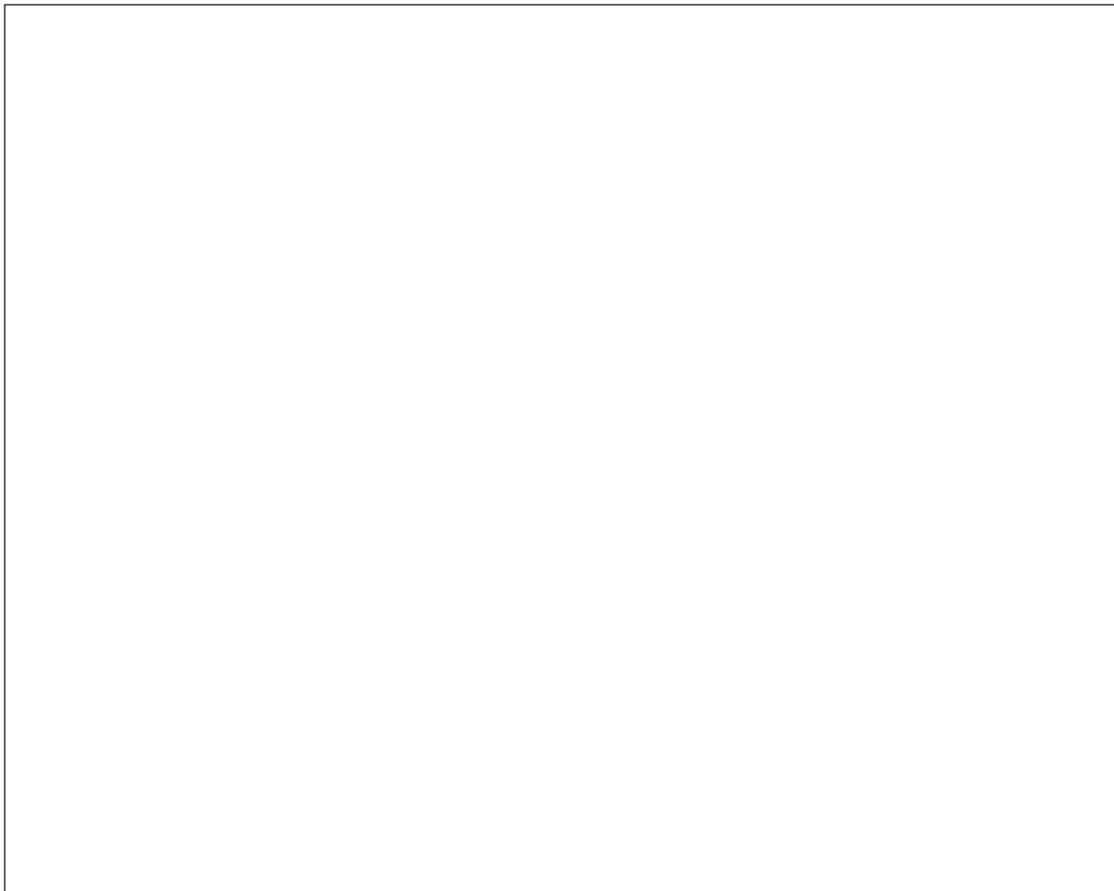
Grade 4 Make-Up Writing Prompt

WRITING PROMPT

Think about a time when you went to a special or an interesting place. Maybe it was the home of a friend or a relative, a place in your neighborhood, or someplace completely different.

Write a story about your special or interesting place and what happened to you while you were there. Give enough details to show the reader why this place was special or interesting to you.

You may use the space below to plan what you are going to write (notes, outlines, other pre-writing activities).



B. Reading Comprehension

The spring 2012 grade 4 English Language Arts Reading Comprehension test was based on learning standards in the two content strands of the Massachusetts *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* (2001) listed below. Page numbers for the learning standards appear in parentheses.

- Language (*Framework*, pages 19–26)
- Reading and Literature (*Framework*, pages 35–64)

The *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* is available on the Department website at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html.

ELA Reading Comprehension test results are reported under two MCAS reporting categories, **Language** and **Reading and Literature**, which are identical to the two framework content strands listed above.

Test Sessions and Content Overview

The grade 4 ELA Reading Comprehension test included two separate test sessions. Each session included reading passages, followed by multiple-choice and open-response questions. Selected common reading passages and approximately half of the common test items are shown on the following pages as they appeared in test booklets.

Reference Materials

The use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries was allowed for current and former English language learner students only, during both ELA Reading Comprehension test sessions. No other reference materials were allowed during any ELA Reading Comprehension test session.

Cross-Reference Information

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

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION

DIRECTIONS

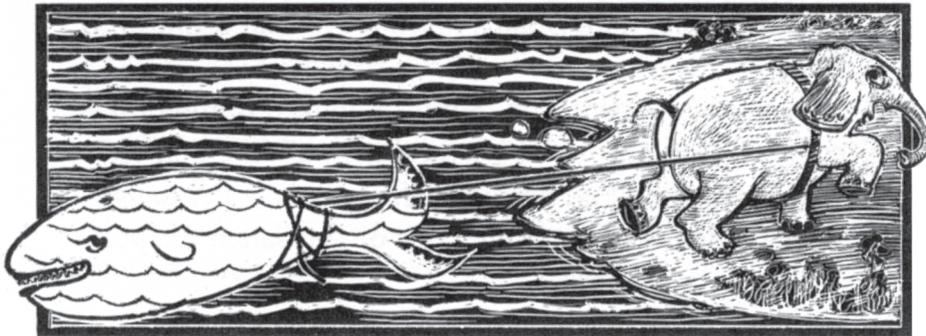
This session contains two reading selections with fifteen multiple-choice questions and two open-response questions. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

What happens when an elephant and a whale both think that they are the strongest animals on the earth? Read the folktale to find out and answer the questions that follow.

Strongest of All

LOUISIANA

by Pleasant DeSpain



- 1 One day long ago, clever Rabbit was walking along the seashore. Hearing voices, he stopped to listen. Elephant and Whale were having a conversation. He wanted to hear every word.
- 2 “Sister Whale,” said Elephant, “you are the largest, strongest, and most beautiful animal of the sea. Naturally, I’m the largest, strongest, and most beautiful animal on the land. We two should rule over all the animals, birds, and fish on the earth.”
- 3 “Yes, it’s true, Brother Elephant,” said Whale. “We are the greatest. You should rule the land. I’ll be happy to rule the sea.”
- 4 Rabbit decided to play a trick on these two behemoths.
- 5 “I’m twice as smart as both of them,” he said. “All I need is a long, strong rope and my jungle drum.”
- 6 Later that afternoon Rabbit found Elephant in the woods and said, “Hello, Powerful Ruler of All the Animals that Walk and All the Birds that Fly. I’m in need of a small favor.”
- 7 Elephant liked Rabbit’s compliment and was willing to listen.
- 8 “What can I do for you, my little friend?” he trumpeted.
- 9 “My milk-cow is stuck in the sand on the beach. I’m not big enough to pull her out. Let me tie one end of this rope around you and the other end around my cow. When you hear me beat my drum, you’ll know it’s time to pull hard, really hard.”

Reading Comprehension

10 “It’s a good plan,” said Elephant. “You are wise to come to me as I’m the strongest friend you have.”

11 “Thank you, Elephant. Wait for the drum!”

12 So saying, Rabbit ran to the beach and found Whale sunning herself near the shore.

13 “Hello, Friend Whale. My, but you look sleek and powerful today,” said Rabbit.

14 Whale smiled and replied, “Yes, Rabbit, I’m strong today and every day. I rule all the creatures of the sea.”

15 “Of course,” responded Rabbit. “That’s why I’ve come to you with my small problem.”

16 “What can I do to help?” asked Whale.

17 “It’s my milk-cow. She’s mired deep in the bayou-mud way up in the woods. I can’t get her out. I’d like to tie one end of this rope around your tail and the other end around my cow. I’ll beat my drum so you’ll know when to pull.”

18 “Of course I’ll help,” said Whale.

19 She swam closer to shore so that he could tie the long rope to her massive tail.

20 “Pull hard when you hear my signal,” said Rabbit as he ran back into the woods.

21 He found his drum and pounded hard and loud. *Boom! Boom! Boom!* The sounds carried to both Elephant in the forest and Whale in the sea.

22 They both began to pull, each against the other, and were shocked at the resistance. Elephant tugged so hard that Whale hit the sand in the shallow water. Whale pulled back so hard that Elephant was being dragged out of the woods.

23 “That cow must be stuck in the sand up to her neck,” bellowed Elephant.

24 “That cow must be buried in the mud up to her nose,” cried Whale.

25 Next thing they knew the rope snapped! One end flew back and stung Elephant on the ear.

26 “Ouch!” he cried.

27 The other end smacked Whale on the tail.

28 “Ouch!” she cried.

29 Rabbit began to laugh. His laughter carried deep into the woods and far out to sea. Elephant and Whale realized that they had been tricked. They also discovered that when it came to cleverness, Rabbit was the strongest of all.

Reading Comprehension

- 1 Which of the following **best** describes the setting of the folktale?
- A. by the ocean many years ago
 - B. at the zoo many years from now
 - C. in the mountains many years ago
 - D. near the desert many years from now
- 2 Based on the folktale, what is the **real** reason Rabbit asks Elephant and Whale for help?
- A. to teach them a lesson
 - B. to pull an animal to safety
 - C. to make his situation easier
 - D. to bring the animals closer together
- 3 What do paragraphs 23 and 24 **mostly** show about Elephant and Whale?
- A. They do not want to help each other.
 - B. They each think they are the smartest.
 - C. They need to stop pulling on the rope.
 - D. They do not realize they have been fooled.
- 4 Which of the following **best** shows that “Strongest of All” is a folktale?
- A. It tells a story using talking animals.
 - B. It includes a problem and a solution.
 - C. It tells a story using rhythm and rhyme.
 - D. It includes facts about different animals.
- 5 Reread paragraph 22. Based on the paragraph, the use of the word **resistance** shows the animals are
- A. playing a game.
 - B. afraid of being hurt.
 - C. having a difficult time.
 - D. worried about getting wet.

Reading Comprehension

Question 6 is an open-response question.

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

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

- 6 Based on the folktale, explain the **most likely** reason the author states that “Rabbit was the strongest of all.” Support your answer with important details from the folktale.

Reading Comprehension

Donna O'Meara studies and photographs volcanoes. Read the selection to find out how she became interested in volcanoes and answer the questions that follow.

from *Into the Volcano*

BY DONNA O'MEARA

Some Like It Hot

1 **H**awaii's Kilauea volcano rumbles under my feet with thunder I feel in my stomach. The air reeks of burning metal. A towering dark steam cloud looms over me. Without warning, a football-sized chunk of gooey lava drops out of the cloud and plops onto the ground near me. I duck and run as more hissing red chunks splatter everywhere. These "lava bombs" could crush a skull as if it were an eggshell. What on Earth am I doing here, on the world's most active volcano?

2 **T**here were no volcanoes where I grew up. Our family lived in a quiet, little town in rural New England where the cows outnumbered the people. I was the eldest of three children and spent my childhood exploring the forests and fields.

3 My favorite pastime was sitting safe and dry on our porch watching violent summer thunderstorms rage through the Connecticut River Valley. Our springer spaniel, Dinney, would cower under my chair in fright, but the louder the thunder and brighter the lightning, the more thrilled I was.

4 In school I loved earth science and biology, but my guidance counselor suggested I take typing classes and become a secretary. That didn't interest me. Fortunately, I was artistic, so instead I majored in creative arts—painting, photography and writing. To this day I still can't type.

Reading Comprehension

- 5 In the 1970s I moved to Boston and worked for magazine and book publishers. But something was missing in my life. Although getting out into the countryside helped, I finally decided I had to make some changes. I wanted to learn about the earth and the sky and the stars, where they all came from and where they were going.
- 6 At age 32, I went back to college. My teacher, Stephen James O’Meara, opened my eyes to science when he described how our solar system was shaped by geological forces. One of the most dynamic forces, Steve said, was volcanism. I pictured Earth, with its 1500 or more volcanoes spewing lava, as it spun dizzily around our sun.
- 7 Steve studied volcanoes to learn how planets formed and to search for clues that might help predict when a volcano will erupt here on Earth. So far, no single scientific method can accurately predict deadly eruptions. Any new discoveries would be important scientifically and could save lives.
- 8 Steve’s daring tales of exploring erupting volcanoes held me spellbound. When he passed around a piece of rough, hardened lava, I held it tight, closed my eyes and imagined myself climbing an erupting volcano in an exotic foreign country. Now that sounded like a good job for me!
- 9 Weeks after class ended, Steve and I had dinner. He described how he’d once jumped over a moving lava flow to save his life. I could barely believe what I was hearing. Asleep that night I dreamed of volcanoes.
- 10 On December 23, 1986, around noon, my office phone rang. It was Steve.
11 “Donna, have you ever seen an erupting volcano?”
12 No, of course I hadn’t.
13 “I’m on my way to Kilauea and need a field assistant.”
14 “Kilauea, Hawaii? When do we leave?”
15 I said “aloha” to my magazine boss and was on a plane to Hawaii before sunset that same night.

My First Volcano

- 16 **A**t noon on December 24, 1986, Steve and I strapped ourselves into a helicopter without doors and bounced on air drafts over a sizzling Hawaiian lava lake.
- 17 The lake had formed when a new vent, called Kupaianaha, had burst open on the east side of Kilauea volcano. A vent is an opening through which a volcano erupts lava and ash from inside the Earth.

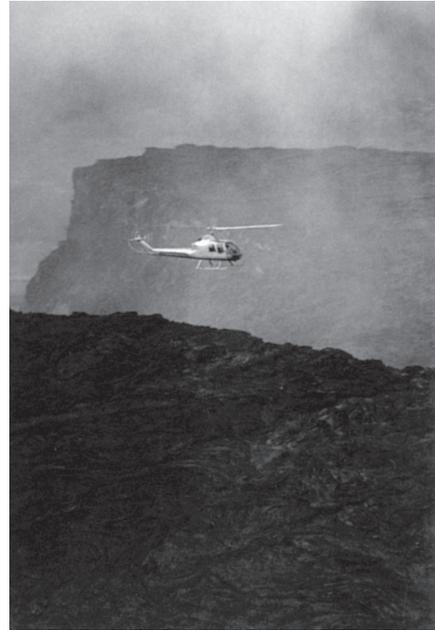
Reading Comprehension

18 Lava oozed out of the vent, filling a huge depression to overflowing and creating a lava lake. The lava gushing into the lake from the vent caused sloshing waves.

19 As our pilot tilted the chopper to give us a better view, I clutched at the seat cushion for fear I would slide across the smooth leather and right out the open door. Below us a red lake the size of two football fields bubbled like a pot of oatmeal. Only this wasn't oatmeal. It was burning hot molten lava.

20 The chopper whirled down to the edge of the sizzling lake. Hot, glowing rock oozed from the earth like toothpaste out of a cracked tube. The helicopter cabin got hotter, and a burnt metal smell filled the air. Our pilot expertly dodged chunks of spatter the volcano flung at us. We landed on the ground with a soft thump.

21 Steve and the pilot jumped out and ducked the rotors, leaving the engine running for a fast getaway. I thought about the gasoline in the engine near this heat.



Helicopters take volcano hunters where the action is. This one approaches a smoking crater. It's similar to the one we took to see the lava lake — only our chopper didn't have doors!



Fresh lava smells like burning metal. Here, it wipes out a road. I didn't know then that molten lava can be 1150°C (2100°F) when it erupts out of the earth.



Reading Comprehension

22 I watched as Steve walked right up to the creeping lava flow—and survived. The scientist in me said “Hey, isn’t this what you went back to school for?” The artist in me had to admit the lake was strangely beautiful. Glowing pinkish-orange lava was creeping along, hissing and popping as if it were alive. This was the opportunity I had been waiting for my whole life. I grabbed my camera and jumped out of the chopper. I felt heat through the soles of my sneakers. I changed lenses and started shooting.

Explosive Facts

Name of volcano: Kilauea

Location: Hawaii, U.S.A.

Status: active

Type: shield volcano

Height: 1222 m (4009 ft.)

Known people killed: about 120

Into the Volcano by Donna O’Meara. Text copyright © 2005 by Donna O’Meara. Photographs copyright © by Stephen James O’Meara and Donna O’Meara. Reprinted by permission of Kids Can Press Ltd.

- 7 What is the **main** purpose of paragraph 1 in the selection?
- A. to grab the reader’s interest
 - B. to explain the main problem
 - C. to introduce the main character
 - D. to answer the reader’s questions

- 8 Based on paragraph 5, which of the following is **most likely** true about the author?
- A. She is scared of things that are new to her.
 - B. She is upset about things she cannot control.
 - C. She is satisfied with things that remain the same.
 - D. She is curious about things she does not understand.

Reading Comprehension

- 9 Based on the selection, what **first** made the author interested in volcanoes?
- A. She saw a volcano erupting.
 - B. She studied volcanoes in college.
 - C. She wrote a book about volcanoes.
 - D. She heard about a volcano as a child.

- 10 According to paragraph 19, why did the helicopter turn?
- A. to visit a different volcano
 - B. to find another landing spot
 - C. to help the passengers see better
 - D. to keep the passengers in their seats

- 11 Read the sentence from paragraph 20 in the box below.

Hot, glowing rock oozed from the earth like toothpaste out of a cracked tube.

In the sentence, the lava is compared to toothpaste to show

- A. how hot the lava feels to the touch.
- B. how clean the lava looks on the ground.
- C. how sticky the lava looks against the rocks.
- D. how slowly the lava flows from the ground.

Reading Comprehension

12 Which of the following events from the selection happened **last**?

- A. The author rode in a helicopter.
- B. The author studied painting in school.
- C. The author photographed the volcano.
- D. The author worked for a book publisher.

13 What is the **main** purpose of the “Explosive Facts” box?

- A. to explain the dangers of Kilauea
- B. to describe the appearance of Kilauea
- C. to give more information about Kilauea
- D. to list other volcanoes found around Kilauea

14 Which of the following **best** shows that the selection is from an autobiography?

- A. The author teaches facts about volcanoes.
- B. The author describes events from her own life.
- C. The author persuades readers to protect nature.
- D. The author makes up a story about a famous scientist.

Reading Comprehension

- 15 Read the sentence from paragraph 6 in the box below.

I pictured Earth, with its 1500 or more volcanoes spewing lava, as it spun dizzily around our sun.

Which of the following words from the sentence is a verb?

- A. volcanoes
- B. lava
- C. spun
- D. around

- 16 Read the sentence from paragraph 7 in the box below.

Steve studied volcanoes to learn how planets formed and to search for clues that might help predict when a volcano will erupt here on Earth.

Based on the sentence, what does *predict* mean?

- A. to describe changes
- B. to hear something clearly
- C. to find something that was lost
- D. to tell what will happen in the future

Reading Comprehension

Question 17 is an open-response question.

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

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

- 17** Based on the selection, describe what the author’s first experience with a volcano was like. Support your answer with important information from the selection.

**Grade 4 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2012 Released Items:
Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers***

Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Correct Answer (MC)*
1	27	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	A
2	27	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	A
3	27	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	D
4	27	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	10	A
5	27	<i>Language</i>	4	C
6	28	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	
7	32	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	A
8	32	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
9	33	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	B
10	33	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	C
11	33	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	D
12	34	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	C
13	34	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
14	34	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	10	B
15	35	<i>Language</i>	5	C
16	35	<i>Language</i>	4	D
17	36	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	

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

Grade 4 English Language Arts
Reading Comprehension
Spring 2012 Unreleased Common Items:
Reporting Categories and Standards

Item No.	Reporting Category	Standard
18	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
19	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
20	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
21	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8
22	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
23	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
24	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
25	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
26	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
27	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
28	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
29	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
30	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
31	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
32	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
33	<i>Language</i>	4
34	<i>Language</i>	5
35	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
36	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15
37	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	14
38	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15
39	<i>Language</i>	5
40	<i>Language</i>	4