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VII. English Language Arts,  
Reading Comprehension, Grade 8

## *Grade 8 English Language Arts Reading Comprehension Test*

The spring 2010 grade 8 MCAS 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](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html).

In test item analysis reports and on the Subject Area Subscore pages of the MCAS *School Reports* and *District Reports*, 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 MCAS grade 8 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 and Tools**

The use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries was allowed for current and former limited English proficient 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: SESSION 1

### DIRECTIONS

This session contains one reading selection with five multiple-choice questions and one open-response question. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

*In this memoir, Narciso Rodriguez, an internationally recognized clothing designer, offers the following definition of “family.” Read the memoir and answer the questions that follow.*

### Narciso Rodriguez

*from Home: The Blueprints of Our Lives*

- 1 My parents, originally from Cuba, arrived in the United States in 1956. After living for a year in a furnished one-room apartment, twenty-one-year-old Rawedia Maria and twenty-seven-year-old Narciso Rodriguez, Sr., could afford to move into a modest, three-room apartment I would soon call home.
- 2 In 1961, I was born into this simple house, situated in a two-family, blond-brick building in the Ironbound section of Newark, New Jersey. Within its walls, my young parents created our traditional Cuban home, the very heart of which was the kitchen. My parents both shared cooking duties and unwittingly passed on to me their rich culinary skills and a love of cooking that is still with me today (and for which I am eternally grateful). Passionate Cuban music (which I adore to this day) filled the air, mixing with the aromas of the kitchen. Here, the innocence of childhood, the congregation of family and friends, and endless celebrations that encompassed both, formed the backdrop to life in our warm home.
- 3 Growing up in this environment instilled in me a great sense that “family” had nothing to do with being a blood relative. Quite the contrary, our neighborhood was made up of mostly Spanish, Cuban, and Italian immigrants at a time when overt racism was the norm and segregation prevailed in the United States. In our neighborhood, despite customs elsewhere, all of these cultures came together in great solidarity and friendship. It was a close-knit community of honest, hardworking immigrants who extended a hand to people who, while not necessarily their own kind, were clearly in need.
- 4 Our landlord and his daughter, Alegria (my babysitter and first friend), lived above us, and Alegria graced our kitchen table for meals more often than not. Also at the table were Sergio and Edelmira, my surrogate grandparents who lived in the basement apartment. (I would not know my “real” grandparents, Narciso the Elder and Consuelo, until 1970 when they were allowed to leave Cuba.) My aunts Bertha and Juanita and my cousins Arnold, Maria, and Rosemary also all lived nearby and regularly joined us at our table. Countless extended family members came and went — and there was often someone staying with us temporarily until they were able to get back on their feet. My parents always kept their arms and their door open to the many people we considered family, knowing that they would do the same for us.

- 5 My mother and father had come to this country with such courage, without any knowledge of the language or the culture. They came selflessly, as many immigrants do, to give their children a better life, even though it meant leaving behind their families, friends, and careers in the country they loved. They struggled both personally and financially, braving the harsh northern winters while yearning for their native tropics and facing cultural hardships. The barriers to work were strong and high, and my parents both had to accept that they might not be able to find the kind of jobs they deserved. In Cuba, Narciso, Sr., had worked in a laboratory and Rawedia Maria had studied chemical engineering. In the United States, they had to start their lives over entirely, taking whatever work they could find. The faith that this struggle would lead them and their children to better times drove them to endure these hard times.
- 6 I will always be grateful to my parents for their love and sacrifice. I've often told them that what they did was a much more courageous thing than I could have ever done. I've often told them of my admiration for their strength and perseverance, and I've thanked them repeatedly. But, in reality, there is no way to express my gratitude for the spirit of generosity impressed upon me at such an early age and the demonstration of how important family and friends are. These are two lessons that my parents did not just tell me. They showed me with their lives, and these teachings have been the basis of my life.
- 7 It was in this simple house that my parents welcomed other refugees to celebrate their arrival to this country and where I celebrated my first birthdays. It was in the warmth of the kitchen in this humble house where a Cuban feast (albeit a frugal Cuban feast) always filled the air with not just scent and music but life and love. It was here where I learned the real definition of "family." And for this, I will never forget that house or its gracious neighborhood or the many things I learned there about how to love. I will never forget how my parents turned this simple house into a home.

—NARCISO RODRIGUEZ, Fashion designer  
*Hometown:* Newark, New Jersey

"Narciso Rodriguez" by Narciso Rodriguez, from *Home: The Blueprints of Our Lives*. Copyright © 2006 by John Edwards. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

- 1 In the memoir, what is the **main** purpose of paragraph 2?
- A. to describe the location of Narciso’s house
  - B. to explain why Narciso’s parents immigrated
  - C. to portray the overall feeling in Narciso’s home
  - D. to show the economic background of Narciso’s parents
- 2 According to the memoir, for what is Narciso **most** grateful?
- A. his educational opportunities
  - B. his Cuban culture and heritage
  - C. the chance to grow up in America
  - D. the caring and selflessness of his parents
- 3 What idea does the final sentence of the memoir emphasize?
- A. Home is where one lived as a child.
  - B. Memories of home are often better than reality.
  - C. Leaving home creates an appreciation of what one had.
  - D. Home is about relationships rather than physical space.
- 4 In paragraph 2, what is the purpose of the words in parentheses?
- A. to indicate a shift in tone
  - B. to give definitions of terms
  - C. to show contrasting information
  - D. to provide additional explanation
- 5 Which of the following words could **best** replace the word *solidarity* in paragraph 3?
- A. unity
  - B. happiness
  - C. satisfaction
  - D. organization

**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** Describe the mood created by the author in the memoir. Support your answer with relevant and specific information from the memoir.

# English Language Arts

## READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 2

### DIRECTIONS

This session contains one reading selection with ten multiple-choice questions and one open-response question. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

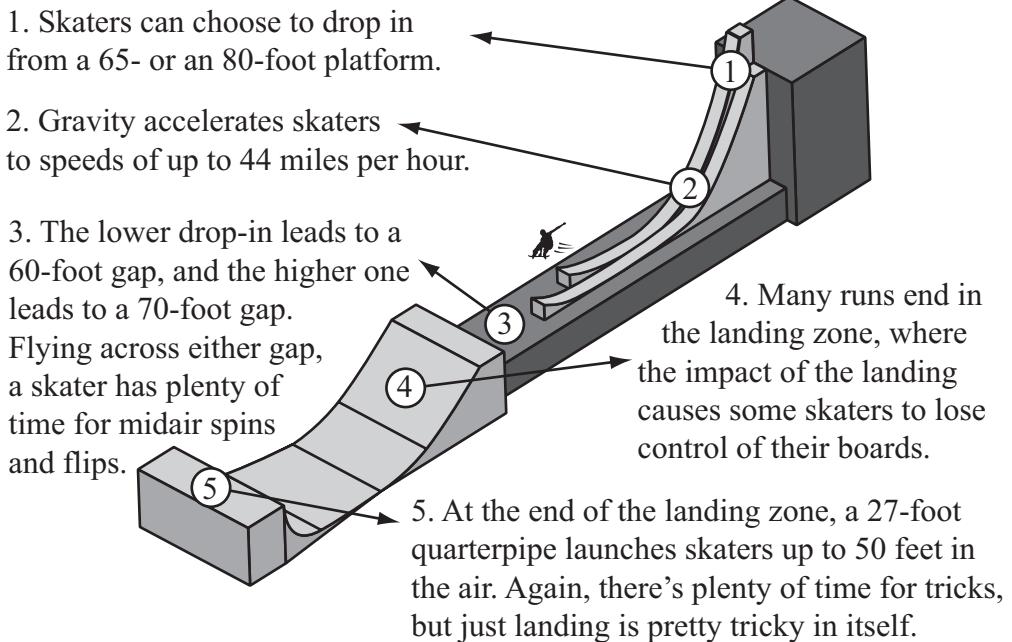
*“Ramp It Up” describes the MegaRamp, one of the biggest skateboarding ramps in the world, and explains how it works. Read the article and then answer the questions that follow.*

### Ramp It Up

by Pearl Tesler

#### Up in the Air

Nine stories tall and longer than a football field, the MegaRamp earns its name.



#### 'Gravity Rules!'

- 1 . . . Does skateboarding really defy physics?
- 2 “Nope, sorry,” says Paul Doherty, a physicist at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. “There’s no escaping the laws of physics.”
- 3 Skateboard ramps are in fact the perfect place to see physical laws in action, says Doherty. And the number-one law at work on the MegaRamp is the law of gravity. “Gravity rules!” says Doherty. “When these guys step off the ledge, every atom in the planet is pulling them down—and there are *lots* of atoms in the planet.

- 4 “As skaters plunge down the ramp, they convert energy from one form into another,” says Doherty. “At the top of the ramp, the skaters have what we call *gravitational potential energy*—energy due to height above the ground. As they go down, it gets converted into *kinetic energy*, the energy of motion.”
- 5 Kinetic energy means speed—in this case, a lot of it. At the bottom of the first steep descent, skaters move at 44 miles per hour—as fast as if they had simply jumped from the platform. The MegaRamp’s immense height confers such sizzling speed. On a standard 12-foot skateboard ramp, top speeds are confined to well under 20 miles per hour.
- 6 Are skaters then just pawns in gravity’s game? Can they control their descent speed at all? “Slightly,” says Doherty. Besides gravity, the other significant force acting on a descending skater is *air resistance*, a force exerted by air molecules that tends to slow any moving object. Air resistance increases with speed and with the frontal area a skater presents to the wind. “If you stand up tall and wear floppy clothes, you’ll go slower,” says Doherty. “But if you tuck down and make a smaller cross-sectional area, you’ll go faster.”

## Need for Speed

- 7 Maximum speed is a necessity on the MegaRamp. The smoothly arcing curve at the bottom of the big descent leads to the immense, 70-foot gap. Any loss of energy—any mistake that robs a skater of speed—can result in a potentially fatal failure to clear the gap. “If a skater bobbles on the way down, fails to keep a straight line, or touches his toe down, it could be very, very bad,” says Doherty. “Because once you’re in the air, it’s too late.”
- 8 As testimony to the big risks of big air, paramedics are standing by at the base of the giant ramp. Meanwhile, in preparation for the rough ride, competitors suit up with helmets, elbow pads, knee pads, wrist guards, and shoulder pads. Although the MegaRamp has claimed no lives, within an hour I see at least a dozen spills nasty enough to draw a collective “Oooooohhh!” from the fans. But every time a competitor falls, he leaps up and hustles back to the elevator, eager for more.

## Bigger Air?

- 9 After nailing several more soaring backflips, [Danny] Way seals a gold-medal victory in the big-air competition, his third in the three years that the competition has existed. But Way isn’t one to rest on his laurels. The wheels of his battered skateboard have barely quit spinning before he announces his desire to build a new—and possibly bigger—ramp. “There’s so much more possible,” he told ESPN.
- 10 Way’s announcement leaves skaters and fans alike wondering: Exactly how big can a skate ramp get? Could future skate ramps climb high into the stratosphere? Is the sky the limit?

- 11 Three factors put major limits on the height of a skate ramp, says Doherty. The first factor is *g-forces*, the body-squashing sensations familiar to astronauts and pilots. Whenever your body *accelerates*—that is, changes speed or direction—you experience a force. When that acceleration is extreme, the body can experience a force equal to or even greater than the downward force exerted by gravity. Such an extreme force due to acceleration is called a g-force, where *g* is short for *gravity*. During a space launch, astronauts are pinned to their seats by a force equivalent to three times the force of gravity—3 g's.
- 12 The skaters rocketing down the MegaRamp feel g-forces too. They feel the worst of them at the base of the steep initial descent, where the ramp curves from vertical to horizontal, a change in direction that puts about 2.5 g's of force on a skater. “For a 200-pound skater, this feels like suddenly weighing 500 pounds,” explains Doherty. “It feels like you’re being squashed into the ground.”
- 13 The g-forces a skateboarder feels in a curve are directly related to speed. “If you double speed, the g-forces actually quadruple,” says Doherty. A taller MegaRamp would increase skaters’ speeds and thereby increase the g-forces they experience in the curve at the bottom. For example, doubling the height of the MegaRamp would expose skaters to about 5 g's. “For a 200-pound athlete, that’s like bench-pressing 1,000 pounds with the legs just to stand up. Few athletes can actually do that.” So to keep g-forces bearable, a taller MegaRamp would have to have more gradual curves.

### Terminal Speed

- 14 The second factor limiting the height of a skate ramp is its *terminal velocity* (natural speed limit), a phenomenon familiar to skydivers. It is imposed by air resistance. When skydivers jump out of a plane, they gain speed at a constant rate because of gravity. But air resistance slows them, and air resistance increases with speed. As the skydivers fall and their speed increases, the downward force of gravity is eventually balanced by the upward force of air resistance. Skydivers then reach their maximum speed, or terminal velocity. Depending on how divers hold their body, their terminal velocity can range from 120 to 200 miles per hour.
- 15 “When you jump out of an airplane,” says Doherty, “you reach terminal velocity after about 1,000 feet. So any skateboard ramp more than 1,000 feet high is pointless. After about 1,000 feet, you won’t gain any more speed, no matter how tall the ramp is. So if you run a ramp down the side of the Empire State Building—that’s 1,200 feet—that’s as big as you need to go. You’ll reach terminal velocity—around 120 miles per hour—just before you reach the bottom.”

### Fear Factor

- 16 The final factor to consider isn’t physical but psychological—the fear factor. If Way builds an even taller skate ramp, will anyone be brave enough to ride it? Would you? Amazingly, Way himself has admitted to a fear of heights: “There’s no question I get butterflies when I’m on the edges of the top of the tower,” he told the *Los Angeles Times*.

17 For now, the only permanently installed MegaRamp in the world is located at the home of Bob Burnquist, bronze medalist in the big-air competition, who is famous for having jumped his skateboard off the edge of the Grand Canyon (wearing a parachute, of course). Despite an obvious knack for aerial stunts, even Burnquist finds the MegaRamp daunting. “It’s scary,” he told *The New York Times*. “You calculate as much as you can, and you try to assess everything that you possibly can, but sometimes it’s just ‘close your eyes and go.’”

“Ramp It Up” by Pearl Tesler, from *Current Science*, May 4, 2007. Copyright © 2007 by Weekly Reader Corporation. Reprinted by permission of Weekly Reader.

7 What is the **main** purpose of the article?

- A. to argue the athletic merits of skateboarding
- B. to interest readers in becoming professional skateboarders
- C. to reveal how the rules of physics affect the sport of skateboarding
- D. to show readers how understanding physics can make them expert skateboarders

8 According to the boxed information in “Up in the Air,” what is the biggest challenge the MegaRamp poses for skaters?

- A. landing safely
- B. launching properly
- C. choosing a platform
- D. reaching the landing zone

9 According to the article, kinetic energy is related to

- A. air.
- B. resistance.
- C. molecules.
- D. movement.

10 Read the sentence from paragraph 5 in the box below.

The MegaRamp’s immense height confers such sizzling speed.

What is the **main** effect of using the words “immense” and “sizzling” in the sentence?

- A. to warn skateboarders of possible harm
- B. to show the drama of participating in the activity
- C. to emphasize the heat energy generated by movement
- D. to introduce scientific terms describing how skateboarders win competitions

11 According to paragraph 6, how can skaters slow their descent speed?

- A. by adding extra weight
- B. by folding in their arms
- C. by wearing a looser shirt
- D. by squatting on the board

12 Based on the article, how are skateboarders able to cross the 70-foot gap in the MegaRamp?

- A. by standing up straight
- B. by building up sufficient speed
- C. by escaping the force of gravity
- D. by eliminating the drag of friction

13 According to the section “Bigger Air?” what affects skateboarders **most** when they reach the base of the ramp?

- A. g-forces
- B. dizziness
- C. air resistance
- D. potential energy

14 In paragraphs 14 and 15, why does the author compare skateboarding to skydiving?

- A. to suggest that both are dangerous sports
- B. to contrast the risks involved in both sports
- C. to interest enthusiasts in trying something new
- D. to illustrate the physical restrictions of traveling fast

15 According to paragraph 15, what is significant about 1,000 feet as the height of a skateboard ramp?

- A. It limits the effects of g-forces.
- B. It is the maximum height regulations permit.
- C. It is the height of the tallest skateboarding ramp.
- D. It allows skateboarders to reach maximum speed.

16 What does the word *daunting* mean as it is used in paragraph 17?

- A. unsafe
- B. thrilling
- C. untested
- D. frightening

**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 article, identify the three factors that limit the height of a skate ramp **and** explain how each of them limits the ramp’s height. Support your answer with relevant and specific details from the article.

**Grade 8 English Language Arts**  
**Reading Comprehension**  
**Spring 2010 Released Items:**  
**Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers\***

Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Correct Answer (MC)*
1	85	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
2	85	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
3	85	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	11	D
4	85	<i>Language</i>	5	D
5	85	<i>Language</i>	4	A
6	86	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	
7	90	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
8	90	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	A
9	90	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
10	90	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	B
11	91	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
12	91	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	B
13	91	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	A
14	91	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
15	91	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
16	91	<i>Language</i>	4	D
17	92	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	

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

**Grade 8 English Language Arts**  
**Reading Comprehension**  
**Spring 2010 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>	15
22	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13
23	<i>Language</i>	4
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>	15
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>Reading and Literature</i>	11
34	<i>Language</i>	4
35	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12
36	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16
37	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15
38	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16
39	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16
40	<i>Language</i>	4