New York State administered the English Language Arts Tests in April 2021 and is now making the questions from Session 1 of these tests available for review and use. Only Session 1 was required in 2021.
New York State Testing Program
Grades 3–8 English Language Arts
Released Questions from 2021 Tests

Background

In 2013, New York State (NYS) began administering tests designed to assess student performance in accordance with the instructional shifts and rigor demanded by the new New York State P–12 Learning Standards in English Language Arts (ELA). To help in this transition to new assessments, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) has been releasing a number of test questions from the tests that were administered to students across the State in the spring. This year, NYSED is again releasing 2021 NYS Grades 3–8 English Language Arts and Mathematics test materials for review, discussion, and use.

In February 2021, with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic still forcing restrictions on all educational and learning activities statewide, NYSED submitted two federal waiver requests related to state assessment and accountability requirements. The waiver requests addressed the unique circumstances caused by the pandemic that have resulted in many students receiving some or all of their instruction remotely.

Later that month, the United States Department of Education (USDE) informed states that it would not grant a blanket waiver for state assessments. However, the USDE agreed to uncouple state assessments from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) accountability requirements so that test results will be used solely as a measure of student learning. Additionally, it was decided that NYSED would administer only Session 1 of the Grades 3–8 ELA and Mathematics Tests for the Spring 2021 administration and that the tests would include previously administered questions.

The decision to use previously administered test questions in this extraordinary year was based on guidance from nationally recognized experts in the assessment field and was recommended in a publication from the Council of Chief State School Officers to state education departments. Reusing test questions provided the benefit of having established scale scores and stable item parameters. Using previously administered test questions also ensured that it will be possible to develop new test forms for 2022 and beyond. Although it was not the driver of the decision, the reuse of previously administered test questions provided an opportunity for cost savings during these unique circumstances where the instructional models used by schools varied throughout the State.

For 2021, the entire Session 1 booklet is being released as this is all that students were required to take. Additionally, NYSED is providing information about the released passages; the associated text complexity for each passage; a map that details what learning standards each released question measures; and the correct response to each question. These released materials will help students, families, educators, and the public better understand the tests and NYSED’s expectations for students.
**Understanding ELA Questions**

**Multiple-Choice Questions**

Multiple-choice questions are designed to assess the New York State P–12 Learning Standards in English Language Arts. These questions ask students to analyze different aspects of a given text, including central idea, style elements, character and plot development, and vocabulary. Almost all questions, including vocabulary questions, will be answered correctly only if the student comprehends and makes use of the whole passage.

For multiple-choice questions, students select the correct response from four answer choices. Multiple-choice questions assess reading standards in a variety of ways. Some ask students to analyze aspects of text or vocabulary. Many questions require students to combine skills. For example, questions may ask students to identify a segment of text that best supports the central idea. To answer these questions correctly, a student must first comprehend the central idea and then show understanding of how that idea is supported. Questions tend to require more than rote recall or identification.

**New York State P–12 Learning Standards Alignment**

The alignment to the New York State P–12 Learning Standards for English Language Arts is intended to identify the analytic skills necessary to successfully answer each question. The released questions do not represent the full spectrum of how the standards should be taught and assessed in the classroom. It should not be assumed that a particular standard will be measured by an identical question in future assessments. Specific criteria for writing test questions, as well as additional assessment information, are available at [http://www.engageny.org/common-core-assessments](http://www.engageny.org/common-core-assessments).
2021 Grade 3 ELA Test Text Complexity Metrics
For Released Questions

Selecting high-quality, grade-appropriate passages requires both objective text complexity metrics and expert judgment. For the Grades 3–8 assessments based on the New York State P–12 Learning Standards for English Language Arts, both quantitative and qualitative rubrics are used to determine the complexity of the texts and their appropriate placement within a grade-level ELA exam.

Quantitative measures of text complexity are used to measure aspects of text complexity that are difficult for a human reader to evaluate when examining a text. These aspects include word frequency, word length, sentence length, and text cohesion. These aspects are efficiently measured by computer programs. While quantitative text complexity metrics are a helpful start, they are not definitive.

Qualitative measures are a crucial complement to quantitative measures. Using qualitative measures of text complexity involves making an informed decision about the difficulty of a text in terms of one or more factors discernible to a human reader applying trained judgment to the task. To qualitatively determine the complexity of a text, educators use a rubric composed of five factors; four of these factors are required and one factor is optional. The required criteria are: meaning, text structure, language features, and knowledge demands. The optional factor, graphics, is used only if a graphic appears in the text.

To make the final determination as to whether a text is at grade-level and thus appropriate to be included on a Grades 3–8 assessment, New York State uses a two-step review process, which is an industry best-practice. First, all prospective passages undergo quantitative text complexity analysis using three text complexity measures. If at least two of the three measures suggest that the passage is grade-appropriate, the passage then moves to the second step, which is the qualitative review using the text-complexity rubrics. Only passages that are determined appropriate by at least two of three quantitative measures of complexity and are determined appropriate by the qualitative measure of complexity are deemed appropriate for use on the exam.

For more information about text selection, complexity, and the review process please refer to:

https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-passage-selection-resources-for-grade-3-8-assessments


### Text Complexity Metrics for 2021 Grade 3 Passages

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<tr>
<th>Passage Title</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>Lexile</th>
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<th>Degrees of Reading Power*</th>
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* Depending on when the passage was selected, either the Reading Maturity Metric or Degrees of Reading Power was used as the third quantitative metric.

### New York State 2021 Quantitative Text Complexity Chart for Assessment and Curriculum

To determine if a text’s quantitative complexity is at the appropriate grade level, New York State uses the table below. In cases where a text is excerpted from a large work, only the complexity of the excerpt that students see on the test is measured, not the large work, so it is possible that the complexity of a book might be above or below grade level, but the text used on the assessment is at grade level. Because the measurement of text complexity is inexact, quantitative measures of complexity are defined by grade band rather than by individual grade level and then paired with the qualitative review by an educator.

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<th>Grade Band</th>
<th>ATOS</th>
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Source: Student Achievement Partners
New York State Testing Program

English Language Arts Test
Session 1

Grade 3

v202

Released Questions
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TIPS FOR TAKING THE TEST

Here are some suggestions to help you do your best:

• Be sure to read all the directions carefully.

• Most questions will make sense only when you read the whole passage. You may read the passage more than once to answer a question. When a question includes a quotation from a passage, be sure to keep in mind what you learned from reading the whole passage. You may need to review both the quotation and the passage in order to answer the question correctly.

• Read each question carefully and think about the answer before making your choice.
Craig watched his older sister, Riley, and her friend Liz race up and down the lake on their skates, dodging the other hockey players. Their skate blades looked like silver smoke.

When the game was over, the girls skated up to the bench where Craig was sitting. Craig asked Riley what skating felt like.

“When I go really fast, I feel like I’m flying,” she said.

That’s silly, thought Craig. Flying is something birds do in the air, not something people do on ice skates. Then he watched Riley go back out on the ice. She skated around and around the edge of the lake with her arms pumping and her scarf trailing behind her. Soon she was going so fast that her arms looked like wings and her scarf looked like a feathery tail. Maybe skating really was like flying.

When Riley sat down to take her skates off, Craig said, “I wish I could fly.”

Riley retied her skate laces and crouched next to Craig. “Get on my back,” she said, and Craig did. Riley started skating, but Craig didn’t feel like he was flying. It just felt like a wobbly piggy-back ride.

“You’re too heavy,” Riley said. “I can’t go fast when I’m carrying you.” She skated slowly back to the bench. Craig got off her back.

“Even if you could go fast, I wouldn’t be flying,” he said sadly. “I need skates to fly.”

Riley didn’t say anything on the walk home, but a few days later she asked Craig if he wanted to go skating.

“To watch?” he asked.

“No, to skate,” she said cheerfully. “Mom and I found a pair of my old skates. They might fit you.”
The skates were a little big, but when Riley stuffed newspaper in the toes, they fit. Craig couldn’t stop smiling. He didn’t want to take them off, but he had to so he could walk to the lake.

Riley and Liz went with him. They carried their hockey sticks, two orange cones, and a wooden chair. When they got to the lake, Craig put his skates back on and Riley helped him onto the ice. Then she put his hands on the back of the chair.

“Hang on to this and you won’t fall,” she said. “Just push it along in front of you, OK?”

Craig grinned. “OK.” His feet felt wobbly, but he held on to the chair and he didn’t fall. Riley and Liz cheered him on as he started to move forward. Then they set up the cones and practiced passing the puck to each other and shooting goals.

Craig watched them. They made skating look easy. He tried to skate like them, but when he let go of the chair he fell. So he grabbed on to it again and inched along. His skate blades went *scritch scritch scritch* instead of the *swish swish* sound that his sister’s blades made. This wasn’t like flying at all. It was like being a snail.

“Ready to go home?” Riley finally asked.

Craig nodded, frowning. Riley had never said how hard skating was.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“I wanted to skate like you,” Craig said. “I wanted to fly.”

“Someday you will,” Riley said. “It takes practice.” She patted his shoulder. Then she whispered something to Liz, who grinned and winked at Craig. Each girl took one of Craig’s hands.

“Someday you’ll fly on your own,” Riley said. “But today Liz and I will help you.”

Riley and Liz started skating, pulling Craig with them. The edges of his skate blades just touched the ice. The girls went faster and faster, and so did he. When he looked down, his skate blades were a silver blur. His hat nearly blew off.

“I’m flying!” he yelled, and the words blew away in the wind like a bird’s happy song.
What does the word “crouched” mean as it is used in paragraph 6?

A  spun around  
B  bent down  
C  stood up  
D  fell over

In paragraph 9, what is the most likely reason Riley stays quiet as she and Craig walk home?

A  She is thinking about how well she played hockey.  
B  She is upset with Craig because he hurt her back.  
C  She is thinking about how to get skates for Craig.  
D  She is tired from skating in the hockey game.

What does paragraph 12 help the reader understand about Craig?

A  Craig is too young to learn how to skate.  
B  Craig is very excited about learning to skate.  
C  Craig is unable to take the skates off by himself.  
D  Craig is worried that his sister will take the skates back.
In paragraph 16, what does the phrase “like being a snail” help the reader to understand about Craig?

A He skates very slowly.
B He moves in a crooked line.
C He searches for a place to hide.
D He looks like all the other skaters.

Which sentence best describes how paragraph 6 relates to paragraph 23?

A Paragraph 6 provides a problem and paragraph 23 provides a solution.
B Paragraph 6 asks a question and paragraph 23 provides an answer.
C Paragraph 6 provides a cause and paragraph 23 shows an effect.
D Paragraph 6 provides similarities and paragraph 23 shows differences.

Which sentence best describes a central message of the story?

A Change is normal and an important part of life.
B Friendships often become stronger over time.
C New experiences can be exciting and wonderful.
D Natural talent is more important than practice.
Directions
Read this passage. Then answer questions 7 through 12.

Excerpt from Nature’s Fireworks: A Book About Lightning

by Josepha Sherman

1. Flash! Lightning streaks from a dark cloud.
2. Crash! Thunder shakes our roofs and windows. A lightning storm dazzles the sky like flickering fireworks.

Lightning Begins
3. High above the ground, water droplets and ice crystals swirl and swarm inside the moving clouds. The tiny particles bump into one another. When the particles rush together, they become charged. Electricity is created.

Lightning is Electricity
4. A single stroke of lightning carries millions of volts of electricity. Each stroke heats the air in its path to as much as 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit (27,760 degrees Celsius). That is five times as hot as the surface of the sun.

GO ON
Thunder and Lightning

The heat from lightning makes the air expand quickly. Expanding air makes a booming, bursting sound like a firecracker. This is the sound of thunder. Thunder and lightning happen at the same time. Light travels faster than sound. This is why we often see the flash before we hear the boom.

expand = make larger

How Far Lightning Travels

Lightning can flash faster than you can blink. During a single flash, lightning can streak down to the ground and back up to the clouds. A lightning stroke that flashes down to earth can stretch up to nine miles (14 kilometers). That’s taller than the world’s highest mountain. Lightning flashes from cloud to cloud can travel even longer distances.

Ribbon lightning darts from the sky. It looks like jagged streaks side by side. Forked lightning looks like an upside-down tree. The branches of electricity reach through the clouds. Sheet lightning streaks inside a cloud. The cloud lights up like a bright, white sheet. Heat lightning happens during the hot summer. It looks like faraway flashes in the sky. Heat lightning is too far away for its thunder to be heard.
**Lightning Around the World**

Every day, lightning flashes from thousands of thunderstorms around the world. Every second, more than 100 lightning bolts hit the ground. Lightning can strike a tree or dry grass. When this happens, a wildfire can start. Lightning bolts can hit tall buildings. They also can hit electrical towers, houses, and cars.

Flash! Lightning is streaking through the clouds. Every flash is another display of nature’s fireworks.

**Fast Facts**

It does not have to be raining outside for lightning to strike. Lightning can strike both before and after the rain falls, or even when there is no rain at all. Lightning helps nature by putting nitrogen into the ground and air. Nitrogen is a nutrient. That means it feeds plants and helps them grow.

**Safety Tips**

Windows, water faucets, pipes, telephones, and electrical outlets can be dangerous when there is lightning in the sky. You should not run water or talk on the phone if you see lightning. You could get an electrical shock.

Benjamin Franklin once flew a kite in a lightning storm. That is how he learned about electricity. But today, we know lightning is very dangerous. If you see lightning, you should go indoors right away.
According to paragraph 5, what happens right before thunder can be heard?

A. Little drops of water move around in the sky.
B. Dark clouds appear in the sky.
C. Rain droplets start to fall from the clouds.
D. The air spreads because of heat from lightning.

What is the main idea of paragraph 6?

A. Lightning can reach from the sky to the ground.
B. A bolt of lightning can travel up to nine miles.
C. Flashes of lightning can jump from one cloud to another.
D. Lightning can move over large distances very quickly.

Which idea from the passage does the second illustration best support?

A. Lightning can be helpful for nature.
B. Lightning moves very quickly.
C. Lightning appears in different ways in the sky.
D. Lightning may strike before or after it rains.
10. What does the word “nutrient” mean as it is used in paragraph 10?

A. a type of lightning
B. a supply of heat
C. a kind of plant
D. a form of food

11. Which question does the section “Fast Facts” help to answer?

A. How does lightning help the earth?
B. How is lightning different in the summer?
C. How is electricity created in clouds?
D. How can someone avoid an electrical shock?

12. Which sentence shows a cause and effect relationship that is stated in the passage?

A. People see lightning before they hear thunder.
B. Wildfires can start when lightning touches the ground.
C. Heat from electricity is hotter than the surface of the sun.
D. Lightning bolts can hit tall trees and buildings.
Directions
Read this story. Then answer questions 13 through 18.

Excerpt from Crabbing for Supper

by Laurel Sheridan

1  Dad handed me the bucket and the net with a long, wooden handle. He
gave Paulie two dead fish wrapped in newspaper. They were tied up with
string like a present. I held my nose, but Paulie held those fish like they
were his best baseball cards.

2  The briny air from Chesapeake Bay filled our noses. This was the best
place in the world to catch blue crabs. They like grassy, shadowy water, so
Paulie and I headed for our old wooden dock. It was hot for June, and I sat
down and swung my legs over the edge, into the cool water. Paulie
struggled to tie the string to one of the slippery fish. Then he slid the extra
fish into the bucket and set it in the dark water under the dock for later.
“Here.” Paulie handed me the baited string. “Dangle this down in the water to call the crabs.”

Crabs love stinky old fish, so our first crab didn’t take long to come. Its big claw clamped the bait, and I raised the string real slow so Paulie could net it. But my legs swishing in the water startled that crab, and it let go and floated back to the bottom like a leaf off a tree. Paulie brought up the net and stood there with the handle on the dock.

I went back to dangling the fish.

“Well, get ready,” he urged. “Here comes another one.”

The sun was hot on our backs. My clothes were already sticking to me, and sweat trickled down our faces. A fly buzzed around my head. I remembered what Paulie had said and sat perfectly still as the new crab clamped onto the fish. But as Paulie scotched forward on his belly to lower the net, he knocked a pebble off the dock and scared that crab away, too.

“Crabs are scaredy-cats,” I said, pulling up the line to check the bait. “This smells disgusting. How can they eat this?”

“I don’t know. How can Mom and Dad eat broccoli casserole? I really hate that stuff,” Paulie moaned.

“Me, too,” I said. “Blech!”

We thought about the big pot waiting and Dad dropping the crabs into the spicy, boiling water. They would turn a beautiful bright red after a few moments, and we’d have a crab feast, cracking the shells and pulling out the sweet white meat. We had to keep trying. I smacked a mosquito off Paulie’s arm and dangled the bait some more. We squinted past the sun’s reflection on the water.

“Sit still now. Here comes another one,” said Paulie.

He inched the net into the water.

“Got him!”

Paulie hauled up the net with the crab inside, but that crab was all claws and those mad pincers were waving all over the place!
“Look out!” I screamed, but the crab’s big claw already had hold of Paulie’s finger.

“Ow! OW! Get him off! Get him off!”

Paulie hopped around, shaking his hand up and down, swinging that crab all over the place.

I yelled, “Let go!” but the crab didn’t seem to understand English. Finally, Paulie swung his arm in a giant arc, and the crab landed back in the water. Paulie’s finger was all red and puffy. I could tell he was trying not to cry.

“What should we do now?” I asked.

We both thought about broccoli casserole.

“Keep trying,” said Paulie, dunking his sore finger into the cold water.

But the harder we tried, the darker it got. When the sun began to set, we couldn’t see into the water anymore. We heard Mom yell from the house, “Bring all you’ve got and come on in now.”

Paulie let go of the string and wiped his hands clean on his shorts as the stinky bait sank to the bottom.

“Guess what’s for supper,” I sighed.

“Broccoli, here we come,” Paulie groaned.

“Remember to get the bucket with the spare bait,” I reminded him, slumping along with the net dragging behind me.

Suddenly, Paulie grabbed my arm. “Listen,” he whispered.

Noises came from the bucket Paulie was carrying. We leaned in close, but it was too dark to see.

“What’s all that scratching?” I asked. We ran through the sand to the light of the screened-in porch.

“Well, would you look at that?” exclaimed Paulie with a high-five. There, in the bucket, was a mountain of beautiful blue crabs fighting over our extra fish.

“Let’s go!” I yelled.

We raced to give Dad the crabs.
“Whoa!” he said. “You caught a lot!”

“Great!” Mom said. “Well, I don’t think that the leftover casserole will keep for another day . . .” She started scraping the broccoli into the garbage disposal.

I looked at Paulie. “Yes!” we mouthed silently to each other with huge grins.
13 What does the word “clamped” mean as it is used in paragraph 4?

A smelled  
B lowered  
C moved  
D grabbed

14 Which detail from the story best shows the narrator’s point of view about catching crabs for supper?

A “My clothes were already sticking to me, and sweat trickled down our faces.” (paragraph 7)
B “This smells disgusting. How can they eat this?” (paragraph 8)
C “. . . cracking the shells and pulling out the sweet white meat. We had to keep trying.” (paragraph 11)
D “. . . but that crab was all claws and those mad pincers were waving all over the place!” (paragraph 15)

15 Which detail from the story best shows why Paulie and the narrator keep trying to catch a crab?

A “Crabs love stinky old fish, so our first crab didn’t take long to come.” (paragraph 4)
B “Crabs are scaredy-cats,’ I said, pulling up the line to check the bait.” (paragraph 8)
C “I could tell he was trying not to cry.” (paragraph 19)
D “We both thought about broccoli casserole.” (paragraph 21)
What happens **right before** Paulie and the narrator reach the porch in paragraph 30?

A. They learn that they will have broccoli casserole for dinner.
B. They hand a bucket of crabs to their father.
C. They find out that something is moving in the bucket.
D. They hear their mother calling them to come home.

How does paragraph 31 connect to the problem in paragraph 26?

A. It shows the solution to the problem.
B. It gives an effect of the problem.
C. It explains the cause of the problem.
D. It gives an example of the problem.

What **best** states the lesson of paragraphs 27 through 31?

A. Hard work and a strong will can solve almost any problem.
B. Good things can happen even when all hope seems lost.
C. Staying calm is important when faced with a problem.
D. Working with and trusting others can help to finish any job.
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This item map is intended to identify the primary analytic skills necessary to successfully answer each question on the 2021 operational ELA test.