



New York State Testing Program

ELA

Common Core Sample Questions

Grade

8

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Little Women

by Louisa May Alcott

Beth, Meg, and Jo March are the daughters of Mrs. March. Their next-door neighbor is an elderly, rich man named Mr. Laurence, who is raising his grandson, Laurie. Beth is very shy and perceives Mr. Laurence to be a grumpy man.

Beth Finds the Palace Beautiful

5 But Beth, though yearning for the grand piano, could not **pluck up** courage to go to the 'Mansion of Bliss,' as Meg called it. She went once with Jo, but the old gentleman, not being aware of her infirmity, stared at her so hard from under his heavy eyebrows, and said "Hey!" so loud, that he frightened her so much her 'feet chattered on the floor,' she never told her mother, and she ran away, declaring she would never go there any more, not even for the dear piano.

10 No persuasions or enticements could overcome her fear, till, the fact coming to Mr. Laurence's ear in some mysterious way, he set about mending matters. During one of the brief calls he made, he artfully led the conversation to music, and talked away about great singers whom he had seen, fine organs he had heard, and told such charming anecdotes that Beth found it impossible to stay in her distant corner, but crept nearer and nearer, as if fascinated. At the back of his chair she stopped and stood listening, with her great eyes wide open and her cheeks red with excitement of this unusual performance. Taking no more notice of her than if she had been a fly, Mr. Laurence talked on about Laurie's lessons and teachers. And presently, as if the idea had just occurred to him, he said to Mrs. March:

"The boy neglects his music now, and I'm glad of it, for he was getting too fond of it. But the piano suffers for want of use. Wouldn't some of your girls like to run over, and practice on it now and then, just to keep it in tune, you know, ma'am?"

20 Beth took a step forward, and pressed her hands tightly together to keep from clapping them, for this was an irresistible temptation, and the thought of practicing on that splendid instrument quite took her breath away. Before Mrs. March could reply, Mr. Laurence went on with an odd little nod and smile. "They needn't see or speak to anyone, but run in at any time. For I'm shut up in my study at the other end of the house, Laurie is out a great deal, and the servants are never near the drawing room after nine o'clock."

25 Here he rose, as if going, and Beth made up her mind to speak, for that last arrangement left nothing to be desired. "Please, tell the young ladies what I say, and if they don't care to come, why, never mind." Here a little hand slipped into his, and Beth looked up at him with a face full of gratitude, as she said, in her earnest yet timid way.

"Oh sir, they do care, very very much!"

30 "Are you the musical girl?" he asked, without any startling "Hey!" as he looked down at her very kindly.

“I’m Beth. I love it dearly, and I’ll come, if you are quite sure nobody will hear me, and be disturbed,” she added, fearing to be rude, and trembling at her own boldness as she spoke.

35 “Not a soul, my dear. The house is empty half the day, so come and drum away as much as you like, and I shall be obliged to you.”

“How kind you are, sir!”

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Words that could be defined for students are in bold.

DRAFT

1

Which statement **best** summarizes the central idea of the passage?

- A Beth is not able to learn the piano without assistance.
- B Beth wants to practice her music in front of her neighbors.
- C Beth wants to try new things to please her family.
- D Beth is able to overcome her fear to pursue something she loves.

Key: D

Aligned CCLS: RL.8.2.

Commentary: This item aligns to CCLS RL.8.2 because it asks students to summarize the central idea of the passage using details from the text. While not fully capturing the standard, the item addresses the interplay of characters within the developing plot.

Rationale: Option D is correct. In the passage, the reader learns that Beth overcomes her initial shyness and volunteers to come and practice on the old man's piano.

2

Closely reread this sentence from lines 1–2 of the passage:

*“But Beth, though **yearning** for the grand piano, could not pluck up courage to go to the ‘Mansion of Bliss,’ as Meg called it.”*

In this sentence, “yearning” most clearly means

- A reaching
- B desiring
- C pushing
- D worrying

Key: B

Aligned CCLS: RL.8.4

Commentary: This item aligns to CCLS RL.8.4 because it asks students to understand the meaning of a word in the context of the larger passage. Even if a student cannot glean meaning from the context immediately surrounding the word, the meaning should be apparent after a close reading of the entire passage.

Rationale: Option B is correct; it is closest in meaning to “yearning.”

3

Closely reread this sentence from lines 7–8 of the passage:

“No persuasions or enticements could overcome her fear, till, the fact coming to Mr. Laurence’s ear in some mysterious way, he set about mending matters.”

What effect does this sentence provide the reader as the story develops?

- A The reader believes that what is happening at the house is mysterious.
- B The reader remains unaware that Mr. Laurence typically helps his neighbors.
- C The reader thinks that Mr. Laurence will not succeed even though he tries.
- D The reader understands Mr. Laurence’s intentions even though Beth does not.

Key: D

Aligned CCLS: RL.8.6

Commentary: This item aligns to CCLS RL.8.6 because it asks students to analyze how differences in the reader’s and Beth’s perspectives create a dramatic effect.

Rationale: Option D is correct. This line informs the reader that Mr. Laurence is aware of Beth’s passion for music and her shyness. With this information the reader understands Mr. Laurence better than Beth does.

4

Closely reread this line spoken by Mr. Laurence from lines 22–23 of the passage:

“They needn’t see or speak to anyone, but run in at any time.”

Why does Mr. Laurence say this to the girls?

- A He wants them to know he does not like to be disturbed.
- B He is trying to create a comfortable situation for Beth.
- C He is trying to express the general rules of the mansion.
- D He wants them to know they will not be alone in the big mansion.

Key: B

Aligned CCLS: RL.8.3

Commentary: This item aligns to CCLS RL.8.3 because it asks students to analyze how Mr. Laurence’s dialogue reveals his intentions.

Rationale: Option B is correct. Mr. Laurence knows that Beth is shy and would be more likely to come play the piano if she does not have to see anyone.

California Folk Music Project
Collection of Traditional Music in California

Instructions to Workers

The purpose of this undertaking is to collect and preserve the old-time music now in circulation in California, particularly the songs which are fast disappearing and which, for the most part, have never been printed or even written down, but have been passed on from one performer to another by **rote**. "California" folk music is understood to mean any traditional music—song or dance tune—now current in California; items from other states which deal with California life or history may be included. The investigation is not of course to be limited to performers whose native language is English. The minority groups in California have much to add that is of great interest.

We want to preserve a song:

- 1) If it was widely current at any time, known to and sung by many people;
- 2) If it has been known to several generations in a family;
- 3) If it is an account of a true happening, with local details and place names, even if it was not known widely; or if it tells about the early days in general (lumber camps, mining camps, the crossing of the plains; crimes, catastrophes; any local trade;)
- 4) If it is a special favorite and particularly good fun to sing.

We want to know what instruments are found in this region, and where any unusual ones may be examined; also names and addresses of performers on any folk instrument, particularly fiddlers who play for dances in the old fashion, and 5-string (not tenor) banjo players. Please note general type of instrument, and mention any odd feature about construction or performance which struck you particularly.

Local pride in the preservation of the cultural things that belong to the old days should be stimulated wherever possible, particularly in the minority groups. Remember that the Anglo-Saxon music which we are inclined to think of as the only "American" kind is a relatively recent importation on this continent, exactly as the Hungarian, Finnish and Armenian folk musics are. The Portuguese and Spanish have been in California three times as long as the "Americans."

It is a good idea to spend much time making friends among the older people who are likely to know songs or to have friends who know them. Don't feel that time spent in conversation about things apparently quite unconnected with songs is wasted, for it will make you seem less a stranger. A few minutes of general conversation (don't scorn the weather as a topic!) should always precede any explanation of the reason for your visit. A casual friendly, unhurried manner is disarming; a busy, efficient one creates suspicion.

When you find someone who knows a few songs, explain that the University of California is interested in seeing that they aren't lost, and ask him if he'd feel like making

out a list of the titles, just to see how many songs he can remember, and which ones. If he will dictate the words to you, tell him you'll make up a typewritten booklet of them and give him a copy. Do not mention recording on disks until specifically told to do this by the Supervisor.

Never judge a folk-singer by the tonal beauty of his singing. If the tune is fairly definite and the words reasonably clear that is all that is necessary for our purposes. Often the singing that sounds most curious to our ears is the oldest and most valuable to preserve. It is important for the collector to realize that in the mind of a true folk-singer the song is of every importance, the singer of none at all. Never admire a performance, only the story of the song or the line of the melody.

Sometimes it is necessary, in order to keep your singer's goodwill, to take down songs that aren't particularly interesting, simply because they are favorites of his. Often, too, it is necessary to take down one that has been published, though the singer does not know this because he, probably, learned it by rote. Don't scorn such songs, their variation from the printed version is very interesting to students, and they should be noted down carefully. In every case we want the singer's own version of words and tune, so never correct him.

In going to call on "foreign" Californians it is almost always necessary to go in company with someone known to your performer—someone in whom he has confidence and whom you have interested in your project ahead of time. This should be a person able to understand your work in its historical and social aspects, so that if your performer suspects you of attempting to exploit his music commercially, your sponsor for the contact will be able to reassure him effectively. Never ask foreigners directly for the date of their arrival in the United States. Even when they are in this country legally they are often uncertain of their status and this query may ruin your contact. Usually the approximate date is easy to determine indirectly.

Your call should always have the aspect of a social visit, not a business one. Remember that 'foreign' manners are usually more formal and in general more consistent than ours, so be on your best behavior! Don't press people; treat them as collaborators. On the other hand, don't allow a performer to feel that he is doing you a personal favor by allowing you to take down his songs. The undertaking requires hard and concentrated work from both of you, and the best attitude for you is to assume that he will be glad to make the effort to get a more complete record of the history of old-time things, just as you are.

The interview forms which follow should be studied carefully to clarify in your mind the various things we are interested to know. You are not expected to fill these out in full for every performer, but insofar as any of this information is obtainable in general conversation, without more than a few direct questions, it should be included on these forms. A performer's interest should not be exhausted in answering questions since it is infinitely more important to record his music. Never fill out these forms in the presence of the performer.

<http://memory.loc.gov>

5

This text was written to instruct

- A migrant workers
- B folk musicians
- C university researchers
- D elementary students

Key: C

Aligned CCLS: RI.8.6

Commentary: The question aligns to CCLS RI.8.6 because it asks students to determine the audience of the text, which also delineates the purpose.

Rationale: Option C is correct. The text provides instructions for University of California researchers who will be interviewing folk musicians to collect their songs.

6

Closely reread the following paragraph from lines 23–28 of the text:

“Local pride in the preservation of cultural things that belong to the old days should be stimulated wherever possible, particularly in the minority groups. Remember that the Anglo-Saxon music that we are inclined to think of as the only ‘American’ kind is a relatively recent importation on this continent, exactly as the Hungarian, Finnish, and Armenian folk musics are. The Portuguese and the Spanish have been in California three times as long as the ‘Americans.’”

Why does the author write that the Portuguese and the Spanish have been in California longer than the “Americans?”

- A to broaden the reader’s idea of what should be considered “American” folk music
- B to argue that Hungarian, Finnish, and Armenian folk musics are not truly American
- C to suggest that “American” folk music is music that has not been imported to the continent
- D to convince the reader that the Portuguese and Spanish should not be considered minority groups in California

Key: A

Aligned CCLS: RI.8.5

Commentary: The question aligns to CCLS RI.8.5 because it asks students to analyze how a particular sentence develops a concept expressed in a paragraph.

Rationale: Option A is correct. The sentence serves to complete the argument of the paragraph that folk music from minority groups is as historically important and “American” as music from ethnic groups from other parts of Europe.

7 The passage suggests all of the following as strategies for making the musicians comfortable EXCEPT

- A** talking about the weather
- B** bringing someone they know
- C** listening to songs they find boring
- D** suggesting they sell their songs

Key: D

Aligned CCLS: RI.8.2

Commentary: The question aligns to CCLS RI.8.2 because it asks students to trace how the passage develops a central idea of the text.

Rationale: Option D is correct. Interviewers are instructed to inform the musicians that they will NOT use their songs commercially. All other options are suggested as strategies.

8

As used in the passage, the word *collaborators* (line 65) is closest in meaning to

- A performers
- B partners
- C writers
- D guests

Key: B

Aligned CCLS: RI.8.4

Commentary: The question aligns to CCLS RI.8.4 because it asks students to determine the meaning of words as they are used in a text.

Rationale: Option B is correct. Treating the musicians as “collaborators” here means including them as “partners” in the research.

9

Closely reread these sentences from lines 71–77 of the passage:

“The interview forms which follow should be studied carefully to clarify in your mind the various things we are interested to know ... Never fill out these forms in the presence of the performer.”

Why does the author make this recommendation?

- A Interviewers should not let the musicians know about the information they are recording.
- B The forms would remain as confidential property of the University of California.
- C The forms could hinder the musician from sharing songs and information.
- D Musicians should not let their filling out the forms get in the way of performing their music.

Key: C

Aligned CCLS: RI.8.1; additional standards may be added after further development.

Commentary: The question aligns to CCLS RI.8.1 because it asks students to connect textual evidence to a supported inference.

Rationale: Option C is correct. Interviewers are instructed not to fill out the forms with the musicians because it could disrupt the relationship that the passage teaches interviewers to develop with the musicians.

Paired Passages

The Story of My Life

by Helen Keller

The morning after my teacher came she led me into her room and gave me a doll. The little blind children at the Perkins Institution had sent it and Laura Bridgman had dressed it; but I did not know this until afterward. When I had played with it a little while, Miss Sullivan slowly spelled into my hand the word “d-o-l-l.” I was at once interested in this finger play and tried to imitate it. When I finally succeeded in making the letters correctly I was flushed with childish pleasure and pride. Running downstairs to my mother I held up my hand and made the letters for doll. I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed; I was simply making my fingers go in monkey-like imitation. In the days that followed I learned to spell in this uncomprehending way a great many words, among them *pin*, *hat*, *cup* and a few verbs like *sit*, *stand* and *walk*. But my teacher had been with me several weeks before I understood that everything has a name.

One day, while I was playing with my new doll, Miss Sullivan put my big rag doll into my lap also, spelled “d-o-l-l” and tried to make me understand that “d-o-l-l” applied to both. Earlier in the day we had had a tussle over the words “m-u-g” and “w-a-t-e-r.” Miss Sullivan had tried to impress it upon me that “m-u-g” is *mug* and that “w-a-t-e-r” is *water*, but I persisted in confounding the two. In despair she had dropped the subject for the time, only to renew it at the first opportunity. I became impatient at her repeated attempts and, seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the floor. I was keenly delighted when I felt the fragments of the broken doll at my feet. Neither sorrow nor regret followed my passionate outburst. I had not loved the doll. In the still, dark world in which I lived there was no strong sentiment of tenderness. I felt my teacher sweep the fragments to one side of the hearth, and I had a sense of satisfaction that the cause of my discomfort was removed. She brought me my hat, and I knew I was going out into the warm sunshine. This thought, if a wordless sensation may be called a thought, made me hop and skip with pleasure.

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Some one was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to **quiver** with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me. On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to

put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow.

www.gutenberg.org

Words that could be defined for students are in bold.

DRAFT

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

by Frederick Douglass

I lived in Master Hugh's family about seven years. During this time, I succeeded in learning to read and write. In accomplishing this, I was compelled to resort to various **stratagems**. I had no regular teacher. My mistress, who had kindly commenced to instruct me, had, in compliance with the advice and direction of her husband, not only ceased to instruct, but had set her face against my being instructed by anyone else. It is due, however, to my mistress to say of her, that she did not adopt this course of treatment immediately. She at first lacked the **depravity** indispensable to shutting me up in mental darkness. It was at least necessary for her to have some training in the exercise of irresponsible power, to make her equal to the task of treating me as though I were a brute.

My mistress was, as I have said, a kind and tender-hearted woman; and in the simplicity of her soul she commenced, when I first went to live with her, to treat me as she supposed one human being ought to treat another. In entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I sustained to her the relation of a mere **chattel**, and that for her to treat me as a human being was not only wrong, but dangerously so. Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me. She now commenced to practice her husband's **precepts**. She finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself. She was not satisfied with simply doing as well as he had commanded; she seemed anxious to do better. Nothing seemed to make her more angry than to see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay the danger. I have had her rush at me with a face made all up of fury, and snatch from me a newspaper, in a manner that fully revealed her apprehension. She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other.

From this time I was most narrowly watched. If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called to give an account of myself. All this, however, was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the *inch*, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the *ell*.

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent of errands, I always took my book with me, and by doing one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white

45 children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little
urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am
strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a
testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids;—not
50 that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an
unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough
to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin
and Bailey’s ship-yard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would
sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got
to be men. “You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, but I am a slave for life!
55 Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?” These words used to trouble
them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the
hope that something would occur by which I might be free.

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Words that could be defined for students are in bold.

Short Answer Constructed Response Questions for "The Story of My Life"

10

Closely reread the following sentences from lines 37–39 of the passage:

"Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life."

How do these sentences reflect the author's changing relationship with language? Use **two** details from the passage to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.

Aligned CCLS: RI.8.2

Commentary: This item aligns to CCLS RI.8.2 because it asks students to analyze how a particular incident reveals an aspect of the author.

Rationale: The response accurately describes how the author's newfound relationship to words (that objects now "quiver with life"), brought on by her experience with touching water, is different from her initial experiences with words. (The correct response can include either the initial experience with the word "doll" or the later initial experience with "mug" and "water.")

11

Describe how the author’s attitude toward the doll symbolizes her changing attitude toward learning words throughout the story. Use **two** details from the passage to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.

Aligned CCLS: RI.8.2

Commentary: This item is aligned to CCLS RI.8.2 because it asks students to think about how the doll illustrates, or symbolizes, the author’s changing attitude toward language, a central idea of the text.

Rationale: The response accurately describes the author’s initial connection of words with the doll (“Running downstairs to my mother I held up my hand and made the letters for doll. I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed”), then how she connects her frustration with learning words to the doll (“I became impatient at her repeated attempts”) and (“seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the floor”), and finally her exhilaration and eagerness to learn new words (“That living word awakened my soul”) and how her newfound skill causes her to have new feelings about the doll (“for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow”).

Short Answer Constructed Response Questions for "Narrative of the Life ..."

- 12** Describe Master Hugh's wife's changing attitudes toward the author. Use **two** details from the passage to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.

Aligned CCLS: RI.8.2.

Commentary: This item aligns to CCLS RI.8.2 because it asks students to analyze the development of a central idea.

Rationale: The response accurately explains that Master Hugh's wife initially is friendly and kind to the author, even teaching him how to read ("My mistress was, as I have said, a kind and tender-hearted woman ..."). The response goes on to describe a change in Master Hugh's wife's attitude toward the author ("Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these ... qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone ...").

13

Explain how the author’s relationship with the boys in the neighborhood is different from his relationship with Master Hugh’s wife. Use **two** details from the passage to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.

Aligned CCLS: RI.8.1; additional standards may be added after further development.

Commentary: This item aligns to CCLS RI.8.1 because it asks students to analyze what the text says explicitly.

Rationale: The response accurately explains that the author’s relationship with the boys is one of kindness and mutual respect (“These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy”) and that the author’s relationship with Master Hugh’s wife is one of meanness and disrespect (“She finally became even more violent in her opposition... I have had her rush at me with a face made all up of fury... apprehension”).

Extended Constructed Response Paired Passages

14

In the two autobiographies, the authors describe the challenges they must overcome to learn essential skills. Using specific details from the two passages, compare and contrast the challenges that each author faces and how each addresses those challenges.

In your response, be sure to do the following:

- describe the challenge presented in “Story of My Life”
- describe the challenge presented in “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave”
- explain how the author of each passage addresses the challenge
- compare and contrast the challenges the authors faced and how they overcame their challenge
- use details from both passages in your response

Write your answer in complete sentences.

Aligned CCLS: RI.8.2, W.8.2, W.8.9

Commentary: This item aligns to RI.8.2, W.8.2, and W.8.9 because it asks students to determine the main theme in each passage, and then select evidence from the passages to support written analysis.

Rationale: The response thoroughly and accurately describes the challenge presented in each passage: in the first passage the author is deaf and blind and so must learn to read through a special sign language; and in the second passage the author is a slave who must find a way to learn how to read when his mistress tries to prevent him from learning. The response further describes the impediments to learning that each author encounters and their respective ways of overcoming those impediments: the author of the first passage cannot initially grasp what words are but eventually learns, through the persistence of her teacher, how to experience

words and their meanings in a concrete way; and the author of the second passage must overcome the hostilities of Master Hugh's wife and seek help from the boys in the neighborhood, who are kind enough to teach him how to read.

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Grade 8

ELA

Common Core Sample Questions

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