

Grade 8 ELA Common Core Sample Questions – 1st Non-Fiction PreRelease

Although these are English Language Arts, I am including them in History - first because there were no history common-core questions at the time, and second because they are non-fiction (with all that entails).

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Below are prerelease questions from the common-core development process. If my memory serves me correctly, they were posted publicly with requests for comment. They are the first release of non-fiction writing samples, a topic of much debate given the fiction writing they displace.

Since so few questions on slavery could be found at this time of writing, and since Wheelock personnel were tangentially involved in common-core development through the DESE/MCAS alignment for Common Core Federal standards, I have taken the liberty of including them here with all credit to NYC. This is first time use, and will not be disseminated after private launch without permission.

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

5 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

10 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

15 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.

20 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

25 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

30 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

35 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

40 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 that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an

50 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.

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Short Answer Constructed Response Questions for “The Story of My Life”

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.”)

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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.

“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.

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”).

Grade 8 ELA 20 Common Core Sample Questions

Short Answer Constructed Response Questions for “Narrative of the Life ...”

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 ...”).

Grade 8 ELA 21 Common Core Sample Questions

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”).

Grade 8 ELA 22 Common Core Sample Questions

Extended Constructed Response Paired Passages

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:

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

Write your answer in complete sentences.

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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.

