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Grade 8 English Language Arts

Sample Test Items

Read the passage and then answer the questions that follow.

Excerpt from ***Donald and Dorothy***

by Mary Mapes Dodge

Fourteen-year-old Dorothy (Dorry or Dot) is about to ride a horse, Lady, through the field where her twin brother, Donald, and some other children are playing.

1 Jog, jog went Lady out through the wide stable doorway, across the yard into the open field. Dorry, hastily arranging her skirts and settling herself comfortably upon the grand but dingy saddle (it had been Aunt Kate's in the days gone by), laughed to herself, thinking how astonished they all must be to see her riding Lady back to them. For a moment she playfully pretended to be unconscious of their gaze. Then she looked up.

2 Poor Dorry! Not a boy, not even Donald, had remained in the field! He and the little Danbys were listening to one of Ben's stories of adventure. Even the two horses and Don's pony were quietly nosing the dry grass in search of green tufts.

3 "I don't care," she murmured gayly, overcoming her disappointment. "I mean to have a ride, any way. Get up, Lady!"

4 Lady did get up. She shook her head, pricked up her ears, and started off at a beautiful canter across the fields.

5 "How lovely!" thought Dorry, especially pleased at that moment to see several figures coming toward her from the Danby yard; "it's just like flying!"

6 Lady's canter had become a run, and the run soon grew into a series of leaps. Still Dorry kept her seat. Young as she was, she was a fearless rider, and at first, as we have seen, rather enjoyed the prospect of a tussle with Lady. But as the speed increased, Dorry found herself growing deaf, dumb and blind in the breathless race. Still, if she could only hold on, all would be well; she certainly could not consent to be conquered before "those boys."

7 Lady seemed to go twenty feet in the air at every leap. There was no merry shouting now. The little boys stood pale and breathless. Ben, trying to hold Don back, was wondering what was to be done, and Charity was wringing her hands.

8 "Oh, oh! She'll be thrown!" cried the girls.

9 "Not a bit of it!" insisted Donald. "I've seen Dot on a horse before." But his looks betrayed his anxiety. "See! the mare's trying to throw her now! But she can't do it—she can't do it! Dot understands herself, I tell you,—Whoa-o!—Let me go!" and, breaking from Ben, he tore across the field, through the opening in the hedge, and was on his pony's back in a twinkling. How he did it, he never knew. He had heard Dorry scream, and somehow that scream made him and his pony one. Together, they flew over the field; with a steady, calm purpose, they cut across Lady's course, and soon were at her side. Donald's "Hold on, Dot!" was followed by his quick plunge toward the mare. It seemed that she certainly would ride over him, but he never faltered. Grasping his pony's mane with one hand, he clutched Lady's bridle with the other. The mare plunged, but the boy's grip was as firm as iron. Though almost dragged from his seat, he held on, and the more she struggled, the harder he tugged,—the pony bearing itself nobly, and quivering in eager sympathy with Donald's every movement. Jack and Ben were now tearing across the field, bent on rescue; but they were not needed. Don was master of the situation. The mare, her frolic over, had yielded with superb grace, almost as if with a bow, and the pony was rubbing its nose against her steaming side.

10 "Good for you, Dot!" was Donald's first word. "You held on magnificently."



Excerpt from *Donald and Dorothy* by Mary Mapes Dodge. Originally published in 1883.

1. Read the sentence from paragraph 1.

Dorry, hastily arranging her skirts and settling herself comfortably upon the grand but dingy saddle (it had been Aunt Kate's in the days gone by), laughed to herself, thinking how astonished they all must be to see her riding Lady back to them.

What does the word hastily mean as it is used in the sentence?

- Ⓐ carefully
- Ⓑ deliberately
- Ⓒ hurriedly
- Ⓓ unconsciously

2. Read the sentences from paragraph 6.

Young as she was, she was a fearless rider, and at first, as we have seen, rather enjoyed the prospect of a tussle with Lady. But as the speed increased, Dorry found herself growing deaf, dumb and blind in the breathless race. Still, if she could only hold on, all would be well; she certainly could not consent to be conquered before “those boys.”

Based on the sentences, what inference can be made about Dorry?

- Ⓐ Dorry is sick.
- Ⓑ Dorry is angry.
- Ⓒ Dorry is afraid.
- Ⓓ Dorry is determined.

3. Which three details should be included in an accurate summary of the passage?

- Ⓐ Donald breaks away from Ben’s hold.
- Ⓑ Donald is impressed with Dorry’s riding skill.
- Ⓒ Donald rescues Dorry from the runaway horse.
- Ⓓ Dorry decides to use her Aunt Kate’s old saddle.
- Ⓔ Dorry enjoys the ride when Lady initially speeds up.
- Ⓕ Dorry realizes she no longer has control over the horse.
- Ⓖ Dorry got on the horse to impress Donald and the others.

4. Read the sentence from paragraph 6.

Young as she was, she was a fearless rider, and at first, as we have seen, rather enjoyed the prospect of a tussle with Lady.

What does the word tussle mean as it is used in the sentence?

- Ⓐ excursion
- Ⓑ meeting
- Ⓒ performance
- Ⓓ struggle

5. Read the sentence from paragraph 9.

But his looks betrayed his anxiety.

What effect does the sentence have on the passage?

- Ⓐ It adds to the tension of the passage.
- Ⓑ It creates a tone of irony in the passage.
- Ⓒ It creates a tone of frustration in the passage.
- Ⓓ It shows differences between characters in the passage.

6. Read the sentences from paragraph 9.

“See! the mare’s trying to throw her now! But she can’t do it—she can’t do it! Dot understands herself, I tell you,—Whoa-o!—Let me go!”

How do these sentences propel the action of the plot?

- Ⓐ They show that Donald breaks free from Ben and tries to save Dorry.
- Ⓑ They describe how Donald compliments his sister for staying on the horse.
- Ⓒ They reveal that Dorothy is in danger, but Donald refuses to do anything.
- Ⓓ They emphasize how Dorothy is determined to impress her friends by riding Lady.

7. Read the sentence from paragraph 9.

. . . and, breaking from Ben, he tore across the field, through the opening in the hedge, and was on his pony's back in a twinkling.

What does the phrase in a twinkling mean as it is used in the sentence?

- Ⓐ brightly
- Ⓑ heroically
- Ⓒ swiftly
- Ⓓ violently

8. Read the sentences from paragraph 9.

He had heard Dorry scream, and somehow that scream made him and his pony one. Together, they flew over the field; with a steady, calm purpose, they cut across Lady's course, and soon were at her side.

What is the impact of the figurative language used in the sentences?

- Ⓐ It illustrates that Dorry is in pain.
 - Ⓑ It creates a sense of rhythm as Donald races to Dorry.
 - Ⓒ It illustrates the speed with which Donald helps Dorry.
 - Ⓓ It creates a sense of patience that Dorry and Donald possess.
9. What inference can be made about Donald in paragraph 9?
- Ⓐ Donald is a more experienced rider than Dorry.
 - Ⓑ Donald does not think it is safe for Dorry to ride.
 - Ⓒ Donald would rather be around the boys than Dorry.
 - Ⓓ Donald thinks Dorry tries too hard to impress others.

10. Read the sentence from paragraph 9.

The mare plunged, but the boy's grip was as firm as iron.

What impact does the use of the phrase "firm as iron" have on the passage?

- Ⓐ It illustrates the strength and determination of Donald.
- Ⓑ It illustrates the love and devotion between Donald and Dorry.
- Ⓒ It shows that the horses involved are powerful and yet dangerous.
- Ⓓ It shows that there is a sense of urgency toward the end of the passage.

Read the passage and then answer the questions that follow.

Reasoning Like a Raven

by Charles C. Hofer

- 1 *One hot afternoon, a thirsty crow found a tall pitcher with water in it. But the bird could not reach the water at the bottom of the container. The crow thought and thought about this problem . . . then it had an idea. One by one, the crow gathered pebbles and dropped them into the pitcher. The water began to rise and rise, until finally it reached the rim. At last, the crow took a long drink of refreshing water, a job well done.*

—Aesop’s “The Crow and the Pitcher”

- 2 When Aesop first told his famous fable some 2,500 years ago, the crow and its close cousin, the raven, were already well known around the world for their crafty smarts. In one ancient Greek myth, the god Apollo used a raven as a messenger. Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest depicted the crow as a wise trickster. And the Norse god Odin kept two ravens as sneaky spies.

- 3 Crows and ravens belong to a family of birds known as corvids, a group that also includes jays, magpies, jackdaws, and rooks. Corvids have gained respect because of their unique intelligence, a type of creative smarts like no other in the animal kingdom. For starters, corvids are known to solve complex problems, use tools to obtain food, play in a social environment, cache food (or hide it for later), and recognize the faces of human friends and enemies.

The Mother of Invention

- 4 Ravens, crows, and other corvids *need* to be intelligent in order to survive. Corvids mostly eat foods other animals leave behind. As scavengers, they help clean ecosystems by consuming what others don’t want.
- 5 To be a successful scavenger, one also needs a special kind of brains. A scavenger must first identify a food source and then problem-solve to figure out how to obtain that food

—without getting into trouble. A raven can't just fly into a pack of wolves that's devouring an elk. The raven has to think, be patient, and wait for an opportunity to sneak in and steal food from the hungry wolves.

- 6 The corvids' unique intelligence has allowed these birds to flourish in our modern world as well. Crows, ravens, and jays have found great success living among humans in cities and towns across the globe. Stealing from picnics, opening trash bins for food, and picking at roadkill are just a few examples of their successful adaptation to modern life.

Animal Intelligence

- 7 In general, intelligence can be thought of as the *application* of knowledge. In other words, it means taking what you've learned and putting it to use. In this sense, all animals are intelligent to some degree. A creature might know how to find food or how to build a nest for shelter. But what if that food supply disappears? What if there are no more good trees in which to nest?
- 8 The ability to adapt to a changing environment is what sets corvid intelligence apart from other animals. "Intelligent animals are able to figure out and learn solutions to novel problems," says Emily Faun Cory, who studies raven behavior and intelligence at the University of Arizona. "Corvids show remarkable learning ability, creativity, and behavioral flexibility, with an ability to take advantage of other species."
- 9 The animal kingdom is full of intelligent animals. Dolphins, monkeys, parrots, and your pet dog are just a few examples. But corvids have a creative intelligence like no other animal. Well, actually, there is one animal with a similar kind of creative intelligence: *Homo sapiens*.

Big Brains

- 10 To understand how corvids and humans think alike, we need to look a little closer at our brains. Animal intelligence largely depends on a rule that scientists call the "brain-to-body ratio." This rule states that animals with larger brains

compared to the rest of their bodies are generally more intelligent.

11 For example, the human brain is enormous compared to the rest of our body. Our brain weighs up to three pounds (1.4 kilograms) and accounts for nearly 2 percent of our total body weight. Therefore, humans have a very high brain-to-body ratio. Now consider the blue whale, the largest animal on Earth. The blue whale brain can weigh over 16 pounds (7.3 kilograms)! But the blue whale's body-to-brain ratio is very low. That huge brain accounts for less than 0.01 percent of the whale's total body weight. That tiny ratio doesn't make for an especially smart whale.

12 Like humans, corvids have high body-to-brain ratios. The New Caledonia crow lives on a small group of islands in the South Pacific Ocean and is widely regarded as the smartest of all corvids. Its brain accounts for about 2.4 percent of its body weight. That's huge! The New Caledonia crow has a body-to-brain ratio similar to that of a small monkey, another animal with high intelligence.

Great Minds Think Alike

13 Besides the body-to-brain ratio, human and corvid brains don't have much else in common. The structure of each brain is very different. However, both brains function in similar ways.

14 So how did humans and corvids *both* get so smart? The answer can be found in something called convergent evolution. This is when unrelated animals take different evolutionary routes to reach the same result. Look at insects, birds, and bats. These distinctly different animals are all capable of self-powered flight. However, each took a different evolutionary path to be able to fly.

15 The same rule of convergent evolution can be applied to the similarities between the human brain and the corvid brain. "Birds and mammals are very different from each other," says Cory. "The brains are also built very differently. But animals from both groups seem to approach problems in the same manner and remember information in much the same ways."



To feed the ravens at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Amanda Zimmerman hides food inside objects like this lunch box. This challenges the birds to unlock the box, open it, and get to the tasty treat inside.



Text and photographs from "Reasoning Like a Raven" by Charles C. Hofer, *Muse*, September 1, 2016. Copyright © 2016 by Cricket Media. Used with permission of Cricket Media, Inc.

11. What reason does the author provide for why corvids and humans think similarly?

- Ⓐ Animal intelligence is evident in the animal kingdom.
- Ⓑ Corvids have an intelligence that does not compare to other animals.
- Ⓒ Corvids have an ability to adapt to changing environments.
- Ⓓ Animal intelligence is a result of the size of the brain compared to the size of the body.

12. Read the sentence from paragraph 1.

At last, the crow took a long drink of refreshing water, a job well done.

In what way is the sentence important to the paragraph?

- Ⓐ The crow achieves the goal.
- Ⓑ The crow will still need to eat.
- Ⓒ The author adds a twist to the plot.
- Ⓓ The author provides an unclear picture.

13. Read the sentence from paragraph 2.

When Aesop first told his famous fable some 2,500 years ago, the crow and its close cousin, the raven, were already well known around the world for their crafty smarts.

What is the meaning of the phrase crafty smarts as it is used in the sentence?

- Ⓐ competence
 - Ⓑ inspiration
 - Ⓒ productiveness
 - Ⓓ resourcefulness
14. Which quotation should be included in an accurate summary?
- Ⓐ "Ravens, crows, and other corvids *need* to be intelligent in order to survive." (paragraph 4)
 - Ⓑ "Corvids mostly eat foods other animals leave behind." (paragraph 4)
 - Ⓒ "Stealing from picnics, opening trash bins for food, and picking at roadkill are just a few examples of their successful adaptation to modern life." (paragraph 6)
 - Ⓓ "Besides the body-to-brain ratio, human and corvid brains don't have much else in common." (paragraph 13)

15. Which quotation from the passage supports the idea that the author believes corvids are capable of higher-level thinking?

Ⓐ "As scavengers, they help clean ecosystems by consuming what others don't want." (paragraph 4)

Ⓑ "The animal kingdom is full of intelligent animals." (paragraph 9)

Ⓒ "The structure of each brain is very different." (paragraph 13)

Ⓓ "But animals from both groups seem to approach problems in the same manner and remember information in much the same ways." (paragraph 15)

16. Which word could replace flourish as it is used in paragraph 6 while maintaining a similar connotation?

Ⓐ benefit

Ⓑ expand

Ⓒ spiral

Ⓓ thrive

17. Which quotation from the passage supports the claim that corvids are intelligent?

Ⓐ “For starters, corvids are known to solve complex problems, use tools to obtain food, play in a social environment, cache food (or hide it for later), and recognize the faces of human friends and enemies.” (paragraph 3)

Ⓑ “Crows, ravens, and jays have found great success living among humans in cities and towns across the globe.” (paragraph 6)

Ⓒ “The New Caledonia crow has a body-to-brain ratio similar to that of a small monkey, another animal with high intelligence.” (paragraph 12)

Ⓓ “‘Birds and mammals are very different from each other,’ says Cory. ‘The brains are also built very differently. But animals from both groups seem to approach problems in the same manner and remember information in much the same ways.’” (paragraph 15)

18. What is an advantage of using the photograph in the passage?

Ⓐ building suspense

Ⓑ creating confusion

Ⓒ promoting creativity

Ⓓ informing the reader

- 19.** What is the meaning of the word *Homo sapiens* as it is used in paragraph 9?
- Ⓐ corvid
 - Ⓑ human
 - Ⓒ hunter
 - Ⓓ whale
- 20.** What is the purpose of the section “Big Brains” as it relates to the passage?
- Ⓐ It reinforces the creative intelligence of corvids by offering a scientific explanation for their intelligence.
 - Ⓑ It emphasizes the creative intelligence of corvids by comparing it to the intelligence of other animals.
 - Ⓒ It illustrates the creative intelligence of corvids by providing statistics on the intelligence of humans and corvids.
 - Ⓓ It demonstrates the creative intelligence of corvids by contrasting it to the intelligence of the blue whale.

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**Grade 8 ELA Sample Test Items
Paper-Pencil Answer Key Document**

Passage	Sequence	Key	Standard	Possible Points
Excerpt from Donald and Dorothy	1	C	L.8.4	1
Excerpt from Donald and Dorothy	2	D	RL.8.3	1
Excerpt from Donald and Dorothy	3	C, F, G	RL.8.2	2
Excerpt from Donald and Dorothy	4	D	L.8.6	1
Excerpt from Donald and Dorothy	5	A	RL.8.6	1
Excerpt from Donald and Dorothy	6	A	RL.8.3	1
Excerpt from Donald and Dorothy	7	C	RL.8.4	1
Excerpt from Donald and Dorothy	8	C	RL.8.4	1
Excerpt from Donald and Dorothy	9	A	RL.8.1	1
Excerpt from Donald and Dorothy	10	A	RL.8.4	1
Reasoning Like a Raven	11	D	RI.8.1	1
Reasoning Like a Raven	12	A	RI.8.5	1
Reasoning Like a Raven	13	D	L.8.5	1
Reasoning Like a Raven	14	A	RI.8.2	1
Reasoning Like a Raven	15	D	RI.8.1	1
Reasoning Like a Raven	16	D	L.8.5	1
Reasoning Like a Raven	17	A	RI.8.8	1
Reasoning Like a Raven	18	D	RI.8.7	1
Reasoning Like a Raven	19	B	L.8.4	1
Reasoning Like a Raven	20	A	RI.8.6	1