

MEAP English Language Arts Constructed Response – Reading Fall 2009 Test

by Dr. Deborah Wahlstrom

In Fall 2009 there was an addition to the MEAP Reading test. This addition was an item that required a student to provide a written response to a comprehension question. The descriptors for these items are included in the MEAP Item Descriptors booklets that were posted by the Michigan Department of Education. At all grade levels, the constructed response item is question number 31 in the descriptor booklets.

The actual items are not being released for a couple of reasons. First is that items are expensive to create, field-test, and use. The state saves money when it can use an item more than once. Second, the state is building its own assessment bank – which is pretty hard to fill when you keep using all the items.

One of the things I've mentioned before is that the best way to prepare students for the MEAP test is to teach the grade level content expectations. Wendy Gould (MDE) also shared this in my phone interview with her. She indicated that the constructed response questions could come from any of the reading GLCEs. GLCEs from four reading domains are fair game for the MEAP Reading test and the constructed response option. The four domains include Word Study, Narrative Text, Informational Text, and Comprehension.

Any time we expect students to take a test, in all fairness to them we've got to make certain they understand the format of the test. In this case, students must be able to show they know a GLCE by responding to a prompt in which they have to also give details to support what they say.

Let's take a look at the item descriptors for the constructed response items – to get a feel for what they look like. These are for the Fall 2009 MEAP Reading Test.

<p>31 R.CM.02.02</p> <p>Write a response identifying three differences in the way the two main characters respond in a specific situation.</p>	<p>31 R.NT.05.03</p> <p>Write a response identifying the main character's feeling about a specific event. Provide two details from the text that support the stated feeling.</p>
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<p>31 R.CM.03.02</p> <p>Write a response identifying three major ideas from an article in a science magazine.</p>	<p>31 R.NT.06.02</p> <p>Provide three details from the text that identifies it as science fiction.</p>
<p>31 R.CM.04.01</p> <p>Write a response identifying why objects in the text could be described in a certain, specific way. Use two supporting details from the text.</p>	<p>31 R.CM.07.03</p> <p>Write a response identifying an important lesson learned. Support this lesson with two details from the text.</p>

Listed below are *examples* of the types of questions/prompts that can be used on the MEAP constructed response portion of the test. Here's the good news: These are the types of questions you usually ask when you're discussing passages with students. There is nothing here that is weird, strange, or out-of-bounds for the GLCEs.

1. Describe how the two main characters responded to the situation. Give three details that show the differences.
2. Describe three major ideas from a piece of writing.
3. Describe the problem in the story. Give two details in the description.
4. Describe the setting in the story. Give two details.
5. Describe the characters in the story. Give details.
6. Describe the event in the story. Give details.
7. Identify the genre. Give two details in the story to support your choice.
8. Describe how the story was organized. Give two details.
9. List three facts from the story.

There is another document that I think is useful for you to use, entitled [Sample Reading Constructed Responses, Meap Fall 2005/2006/2007 Released Texts](#). In your schools, you have a reading passage for each grade level (grades 3-8) for the Fall 2005, 2006, and 2007 MEAP tests. This handout provides sample constructed response questions that you can use with those reading passages. I'm not sure who wrote this piece but I did obtain from the MDE website and it is worth a look. By the way, the reason the passages are not included with the questions is because the copyright holders do not always give permission to post the passages on the web, but do give hard-copy permission in the schools.

One of the things you can immediately do is to provide students with an opportunity to write out their thinking for some of the things you discuss in class. So if you're reading the passage

about whales, you can discuss the question, *What are three ways whales are like other mammals?* – and then have students write a few sentences to put their thinking on paper.

Action Steps

1. Review the item descriptors for the reading constructed response items. (I've included them at the top of this paper.) Determine whether or not you agree that basically the items ask students to think about a character, event, situation, setting, etc. and then support their thinking with details and examples from the text.
2. Continue to ask good questions when discussing reading passages with students. Have students write their answers in a short paragraph after discussing them. This provides students with an opportunity to put their own thinking into words.
3. Look for other resources you can use such as the [Sample Reading Constructed Responses](#) prompts that go along with passages you likely already have in your school. These questions also provide a model for asking different levels of prompts, from easier prompts to more challenging ones.
4. Design your own simple scoring guides to help you score the prompts. I've provided examples of what this looks like in another handout, *Simple Scoring Guides for Constructed Response Item Prompts*.

Sources:

Phone Interview with Wendy Gould, English Language Arts Assessment Consultant, Michigan Department of Education, February 8, 2009.

Fall 2009 MEAP Item Descriptors, Michigan Department of Education.

Grade Level Content Expectations for English Language Arts, v.12.05, Michigan Department of Education.

OEAA Update, Issue #44, Michigan Department of Education, May 2008.