ACT® Aspire™

Exemplar Test Items

Reading

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ACT Aspire™ Reading

Introduction

Each ACT Aspire Reading test contains several passages, including literary narratives (prose fiction, memoirs, personal essays) and informational texts (social science, natural science). Within and across grade levels, the passages span a range of complexity levels in order to provide students, teachers, and parents with information about how well students understand texts of increasing difficulty. Students answer a series of multiple choice, technology enhanced (computer-based delivery only, not represented in this item set), and constructed response items in order to assess their abilities to recognize meaning in, reason logically about, and make connections between and among texts. ACT Aspire reading items operate at various Depth of Knowledge levels, or cognitive complexities, and reflect a range of difficulty appropriate for the age group.

All levels of ACT Aspire reading assessments include constructed response tasks that measure the higher order cognitive processes necessary for reading and understanding increasingly complex texts. Constructed response tasks are scored according to rubrics that allow students to receive varying amounts of credit for responses that are correct or partially correct, enabling differentiation between multiple skill levels.

Examples of the types of constructed response tasks in ACT Aspire reading assessments include the following.

- Formulate a conclusion by making connections within a passage and provide support using specific details from the text
- Formulate a conclusion by making connections between a pair of passages and provide support using specific details from both texts
- Identify cause and effect relationships within a passage and provide support using specific details from the text
- Identify similarities and differences between the key ideas of paired passages and provide support using specific details from both texts

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from the article "Biscotti di Prato" by Pamela Sheldon Johns (©2011 by The Art of Eating).

A walk down the narrow, cobbled Via Ricasoli in the center of the small city of Prato, Italy, brings you to the Antonio Mattei bakery, where small groups of people are gathered, reluctant to leave the charming and elegant shop. The marble counters and wooden shelves are laden with the Italian cookies known as biscotti, and the air is rich with the aroma of eggs, sugar, and almonds. As you sink your teeth into the crisp exterior, the biscotti resist only slightly.

Antonio Mattei was a baker in Prato during the Risorgimento, the galvanizing mid-19th-century period of unification of Italy. His good friend Pellegrino Artusi described him as "that good man from Prato . . . he had the genius of his art and was honest and industrious." In 1858, Mattei created a cookie that was baked twice in his wood-burning oven. He found a following for these biscotti, and received important awards from the international fairs held in Florence in 1861, London in 1862, and Paris in 1867, launching the cookie into the greater world.

The word *biscotto*, "cooked twice," comes from the Latin *biscoctus*; a second slow baking is an ancient way to dry bread to preserve it. Mattei had based his recipe on a twice-baked, sourdough-leavened bread flavored with aniseed. At the turn of the last century, it was a food of peasant farmers, who bought it when they entered the city walls on Mondays to sell their wares. The same unsweetened rusks are still sold at the Mattei bakery, while for the biscotti we know today, Mattei developed an egg-based, sweetened dough.

Before Mattei died in 1885, he asked that his son Emilio leave the recipe for his beloved creation unchanged. The promise was kept even when the business was sold to a woman named Italia Ciampolini in 1904 and when it was inherited by Ernesto Pandolfini, an orphan she adopted. He continued to make Mattei's biscotti, and he added new recipes, such as the chewy *brutti buoni*, cookies made with chopped almonds and pine nuts in whipped egg whites, and the glorious filone candito, a brioche loaf filled with candied cherries and covered with a thin layer of almond paste. In 1961, Pandolfini's son Paolo and Paolo's cousin Renzo Guarducci took over, keeping the tradition as originally promised to Mattei.

Since 1991, the bakery has been overseen by Paolo's four children, who compare themselves to the four ingredients used to make biscotti. Francesco, the flour, manages the bakery and is in charge of quality control; Marcella, the almonds, handles the accounting; Elisabetta, the eggs, does the marketing; and Letizia, the sugar, is responsible for the design of the store and packaging. Francesco remembers, "I took my first steps in the rooms above this bakery. I have been breathing these aromas since I was born. My father left this work to me, and I had to continue. It was hard to be a young man with new ideas, but I knew I couldn't change anything." He has, however, introduced a separate label with innovative biscotti recipes and flavors, such as rose, pistachio, andied orange zest, and peperoncino.

1. The main purpose of the passage is to:

A. explain how Ciampolini transformed an ailing biscotti bakery into a thriving business.
***B**. relate the history of biscotti and of the bakery in which they were created.
C. discuss how the differences among biscotti bakers reflect the national spirit of Italy.
D. describe why Prato was the ideal location for biscotti to have been invented.

2. Beginning with the second paragraph (lines 6–11), the passage shifts from a:

***A**. descriptive scene narrated in present tense to a historical summary narrated largely in past tense.
B. specific description of a tourist destination to a general overview of local cuisine.
C. picture of life in rural Italy to a discussion of how it changed during the Risorgimento.
D. list of the variety of desserts offered at a bakery to an explanation of how one type of dessert is made.

* correct answer

3. **In the passage, the comparison of the four Pandolfini children to the ingredients of biscotti most nearly suggests that, in overseeing the bakery, the four Pandolfini children have:**

   ***A**. played distinct but essential roles.
   B. combined their ideas to create new recipes.
   C. limited their involvement to baking.
   D. retained the business methods used by Mattei.

4. **As it is presented in the passage, Artusi's claim that Antonio Mattei "had the genius of his art" (line 8) most nearly means that Mattei:**

   A. obtained the education necessary to become a baker.
   B. relied on recipes invented by other famous bakers.
   C. was nearing the end of his baking career.
   ***D**. possessed an immense gift for baking.

5. **In the passage, the worldwide recognition that Antonio Mattei's biscotti received is most directly attributed to the:**

   A. strength of Mattei's reputation in Prato.
   ***B**. awards Mattei received at international fairs.
   C. positive reviews of tourists who visited Mattei's bakery.
   D. popularity of Mattei's recipe among farmers from other countries.

6. **According to the passage, the ancient technique of a second slow baking had historically been used to:**

   A. improve bread's flavor.
   B. help bread rise.
   ***C**. preserve bread.
   D. soften bread.

7. **Describe one similarity and one difference between how Antonio Mattei's biscotti were made and how the bread he based his biscotti on was made.**

* correct answer

8. Think about the preceding passage as you read the following excerpt.

The third generation is a notoriously vulnerable juncture for a successful family business. The grandchildren of the founder often reach for far-fetched schemes—a fashion line, a hotel in Dubai—either because they're bored or because all the good jobs are already taken. When I asked Apollonia Poilâne how she intended to distinguish her regime at Poilâne, the bread company founded by her grandfather, she replied that she didn't think that way.

Her conservatism is born partly of reverence for her predecessors and partly of her perfectionism. She said, "My grandfather started this business eighty years ago. We are a local bakery. I am not so much interested in making a mark as in serving our clients with some very good-quality bread, which I pompously think we do. Poilâne bears my name. I am very proud of it, so I don't want to expand in a quirky or funny way that would devalue it."

—Adapted from "Bread Winner" by Lauren Collins (©2012 by Condé Nast)

Francesco Pandolfini in the passage from "Biscotti di Prato" and Apollonia Poilâne in the excerpt from "Bread Winner" both take over leadership of a family bakery. Describe two ways in which their attitudes or approaches toward carrying on the tradition of a family business are similar and two ways in which their attitudes or approaches are different. Use details from both the passage and the excerpt to support your answer.

* correct answer

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from the article "A Capital Capitol" by Gina DeAngelis (©2006 by Carus Publishing Company).

The U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., one of the most recognizable buildings in the world, has been the working site of the U.S. Congress for more than 200 years.

In January 1791, French engineer Pierre L'Enfant was asked to design America's grand capital city. L'Enfant submitted his idea to commissioners in August. It included a grand vista about a mile long, at one end of which would be the city's "Congress House." The U.S. government decided to hold a contest to find the best design for the new country's Capitol. The winner was a physician named William Thornton.

Construction began in 1793, when President George Washington used a silver trowel to lay the cornerstone on Jenkins Hill (known today as Capitol Hill). It was hoped that Congress, which had been meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, could move in by the turn of the century.

By 1796, though, construction already was behind schedule. Worried lawmakers decided to focus on completing the north wing of the Capitol, but parts of that still were unfinished in 1800. Both branches of Congress, the Supreme Court, the District of Columbia courts, and the Library of Congress moved in anyway.

Congress authorized more money for the Capitol in 1803 and appointed architect Benjamin Latrobe to oversee construction. He had the south wing finished by 1811, but by then, the north wing was in need of repair. The War of 1812 (which lasted until 1815) intervened, and Congress refused to worry about the building project. A frustrated Latrobe resigned in 1813.

In August 1814, an invading British force set fire to the Capitol, the White House, and other government buildings. A timely rainstorm saved the city from complete destruction, but Congress was forced to meet for a time in a cramped hotel. From 1815 to 1819, the Senate and the House gathered in a brick structure where the Supreme Court building stands today.

Congress begged the efficient Latrobe to return, which he did, until he resigned again in 1817. His replacement, Charles Bulfinch, designed a beautiful copper-covered dome for the central section of the Capitol. The building finally was completed in 1826, more than 30 years after construction began. Of course by then the United States had grown, so Congress again needed more space.

Another competition to expand the Capitol in 1850 resulted in a five-way tie. President Millard Fillmore chose Thomas U. Walter to supervise construction. Bulfinch's dome was dwarfed by the enormous new wings, so Walter came up with a design for a huge dome and displayed a drawing of it in his office. Congressmen who visited there were so impressed that in 1855, they voted to replace the original dome with Walter's grand design.

Though the outbreak of the Civil War (1861-1865) briefly interrupted construction, President Abraham Lincoln, inaugurated in 1861 beneath the half-completed dome, refused to stop the project. In December 1863, the final section of the 19-foot-tall Statue of Freedom was hoisted into place. Three years later, the building, with its great domed Rotunda that is so recognizable today, was completed.

* correct answer

1. **Which of the following statements best describes the main purpose of the passage?**

   ***A**. To provide an overview of the stages through which the Capitol was designed and built
   B. To describe the places Congress met during times when the Capitol couldn't be used
   C. To analyze the interactions between the people who designed the Capitol and those who built it
   D. To argue for the continued restoration and maintenance of the Capitol

2. **The passage suggests that compared to how much the War of 1812 slowed the construction of the Capitol, the Civil War slowed construction of the Capitol:**

   ***A**. much less.
   B. to an equal degree.
   C. slightly more.
   D. much more.

3. **The passage indicates that L'Enfant contributed to the U.S. capital city by designing the:**

   ***A**. general layout of the city.
   B. interior of the wings of the Capitol.
   C. structure of the first dome of the Capitol.
   D. Supreme Court building.

4. **According to the passage, why did Walter design a new Capitol dome?**

   A. The original dome was disliked by several members of Congress.
   ***B**. The size of the new wings of the Capitol made the original dome seem too small.
   C. The original dome had been damaged and had become a safety hazard.
   D. President Fillmore had asked Walter to design a new dome.

5. **The passage most strongly suggests that Latrobe resigned in 1813 from his duties overseeing construction of the Capitol because:**

   A. he wanted to find a new project since the construction was nearly complete.
   B. Bulfinch had been appointed to take over some of Latrobe's tasks, which made Latrobe angry.
   C. the British army had damaged the Capitol, which led to work on it being stopped indefinitely.
   ***D**. he was unhappy with Congress's lack of interest in the Capitol project during the war.

6. **What reason, if any, does the passage give for why the north wing of the Capitol was in need of repair in 1811?**

   A. Poor workmanship had resulted in weak floors.
   B. Fire and water had damaged the walls.
   C. Damage caused by dust had occurred during construction of the south wing.
   ***D**. The passage doesn't provide a reason why the north wing needed repair in 1811.

* correct answer

7. Think about the preceding passage as you read the following excerpt.

Thornton's design, however brilliant, was not perfect. Although the Capitol's exterior was magnificent, Thornton lacked the architect's ability to picture an interior in three dimensions. Thus, when professional builders examined his plans, it became clear that its columns were spaced too widely and that the staircases lacked sufficient headroom. The conference room's interior colonnade, Thomas Jefferson objected, "will obstruct the view of the members: and if taken away, the ceiling is too wide to support itself." Key sections of the building lacked sufficient light and air. The president's office had no ventilation at all, while the Senate chamber was allotted only three windows.

However, elements of Thornton's design remain, including the original western facade of the wings, the stately Law Library Door at the southeast corner of the old North Wing and much of the eastern facade. "He established for all time what the Capitol was to be. Everything that came later had to follow Thornton's design," says architectural historian William Allen.

— Adapted from "A Capital Vision From a Self-Taught Architect" by Fergus M. Bordewich (©2008 by Smithsonian Institution)

Explain what new information this excerpt from "A Capital Vision From a Self-Taught Architect" adds to the discussion, begun in the passage from "A Capital Capitol," of the problems involved in building the U.S. Capitol. Using both the passage and the excerpt, provide three pieces of evidence to support your answer.

* correct answer

ACT Aspire Grade 6 Reading

LITERARY NARRATIVE: This passage is adapted from the novel *White Fang* by Jack London (©1905 by Jack London).

He was different from his brothers and sisters. Their hair already betrayed the reddish hue inherited from their mother, the she-wolf; while he alone, in this particular, took after his father. He was the one little gray cub of the litter. He had bred true to the straight wolf-stock—in fact, he had bred true, physically, to old One Eye himself, with but a single exception, and that was he had two eyes to his father's one.

The gray cub's eyes had not been open long, yet already he could see with steady clearness. And while his eyes were still closed, he had felt, tasted, and smelled. He knew his two brothers and his two sisters very well.

He had begun to romp with them in a feeble, awkward way, and even to squabble, his little throat vibrating with a queer rasping noise (the forerunner of the growl), as he worked himself into a passion. And long before his eyes had opened, he had learned by touch, taste, and smell to know his mother—a fount of warmth and liquid food and tenderness. She possessed a gentle, caressing tongue that soothed him when it passed over his soft little body, and that impelled him to snuggle close against her and to doze off to sleep.

Most of the first month of his life had been passed thus in sleeping; but now he could see quite well, and he stayed awake for longer periods of time, and he was coming to learn his world quite well. His world was gloomy; but he did not know that, for he knew no other world. It was dim-lighted; but his eyes had never had to adjust themselves to any other light. His world was very small. Its limits were the walls of the lair; but as he had no knowledge of the wide world outside, he was never oppressed by the narrow confines of his existence.

But he had early discovered that one wall of his world was different from the rest. This was the mouth of the cave and the source of light. He had discovered that it was different from the other walls long before he had any thoughts of his own, any conscious volitions. It had been an irresistible attraction before ever his eyes opened and looked upon it. The light from it had beat upon his sealed lids, and the eyes and the optic nerves had pulsated to little, sparklike flashes, warm-colored and strangely pleasing. The life of his body, and of every fibre of his body, the life that was the very substance of his body and that was apart from his own personal life, had yearned toward this light and urged his body toward it in the same way that the cunning chemistry of a plant urges it toward the sun.

1. From whose point of view is the passage told?

A. Old One Eye
B. The gray cub
***C**. An unnamed narrator who mainly describes the feelings and actions of the gray cub
D. An unnamed narrator who describes the thoughts and feelings of each character equally

2. What is the main purpose of the first paragraph?

***A**. To introduce the gray cub and show how he is unique from his siblings
B. To describe the relationship between the gray cub and his mother
C. To describe a litter of cubs and show how they feel about the gray cub
D. To introduce a conflict between the gray cub and Old One Eye

3. As it is used in line 1, what does the word *betrayed* most nearly mean?

A. Tricked
B. Misled
***C**. Revealed
D. Failed

* correct answer

4. **According to the passage, what is the one difference between the gray cub and his father?**

   A. The gray cub has some red hair.
   B. The gray cub is a wolf.
   C. The gray cub lives in a cave.
   ***D**. The gray cub has two eyes.

5. **Based on the passage, what does the author most nearly mean when he says that the gray cub is "never oppressed by the narrow confines of his existence" (lines 18-19)?**

   A. The gray cub is curious about the outside world.
   B. The gray cub feels trapped in one area of the cave.
   C. The gray cub feels neglected by his brothers and sisters.
   ***D**. The gray cub is content in his lair.

6. **What is the primary purpose of the comparison in the last sentence of the passage (lines 24-27)?**

   ***A**. To describe the strong attraction the gray cub has to light
   B. To support the idea that the gray cub depends on his mother for survival
   C. To support the idea that the gray cub will never leave the cave
   D. To explain a scientific concept about plants

7. **The passage states that the gray cub "had early discovered that one wall of his world was different from the rest" (line 20). Explain how the gray cub feels about this discovery. Use two details from the passage to support your answer.**

8. **Think about the preceding passage as you read the following excerpt.**

   The excerpt is narrated by Black Beauty, a horse.

   The first place that I can well remember was a large pleasant meadow with a pond of clear water in it. Some shady trees leaned over it, and rushes and water-lilies grew at the deep end. Over the hedge on one side we looked into a plowed field, and on the other we looked over a gate at our master's house, which stood by the roadside; at the top of the meadow was a grove of fir trees, and at the bottom a running brook overhung by a steep bank.

   While I was young I lived upon my mother's milk, as I could not eat grass. In the daytime I ran by her side, and at night I lay down close by her. When it was hot we used to stand by the pond in the shade of the trees, and when it was cold we had a nice warm shed near the grove.

   —Adapted from *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell (©1911 by Barse & Hopkins)

   Identify one way in which the gray cub's life in the passage from *White Fang* differs from the horse's life in the excerpt from *Black Beauty*. Use one detail from the passage and one detail from the excerpt to support your answer.

* correct answer

Citizen Scientists

The student treks through a field, hoping to find a milkweed plant. Finally, she spots one. She closely examines the plant and finds a monarch caterpillar munching on milkweed leaves, its favorite food. She pulls out her notebook and jots down her location. Once home from her expedition, she enters the location of the milkweed plant and monarch caterpillar on the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project website. She is now part of a global community of citizen scientists.

Citizen science provides amateur scientists, including students, with the opportunity to assist professional scientists with collecting data. Currently, there are citizen science projects all over the world. These projects include counting bird populations, measuring snowfall, or even determining how much city light affects people's ability to stargaze. No matter what information these amateur scientists collect, they become valuable members of the scientific community.

The Monarch Larva Monitoring Project is a great example of citizen science in action. The goal of the project is to better understand how the monarch population changes over time. Monarch butterflies spend their winters in Mexico, and then in the spring fly almost 3,000 miles to the northern United States and Canada. During the trip north, these butterflies lay eggs on milkweed plants. The eggs eventually hatch and become caterpillars, which are the larva of the monarch butterfly. Since researchers couldn't possibly find all of the monarch caterpillars by themselves, they rely on the help of citizen scientists.

Recently, climate change, predators, and the destruction of milkweed plants have all threatened the monarch butterfly. Scientists track the locations and quantities of the monarch population in order to discover new ways to protect this butterfly. By assisting with this research, citizen scientists are ensuring that future generations can enjoy the monarch, one of the most beautiful butterflies in the world.

1. What is the main purpose of the passage?

***A.** To inform readers about citizen science and the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project
B. To entertain readers with stories of catching butterflies
C. To persuade readers to help professional scientists save the monarch butterfly
D. To explain why butterflies migrate north in the spring

2. What is the main purpose of the first paragraph?

A. To persuade readers to become citizen scientists
B. To inform readers about what monarch larvae eat
***C.** To provide readers with an example of citizen science
D. To describe the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project website

3. Which of the following quotations includes an opinion?

A. "She closely examines the plant and finds a monarch caterpillar munching on milkweed leaves, its favorite food" (lines 1–2).
B. "Monarch butterflies spend their winters in Mexico, and then in the spring fly almost 3,000 miles to the northern United States and Canada" (lines 12–14).
C. "The eggs eventually hatch and become caterpillars, which are the larva of the monarch butterfly" (lines 14–15).
***D.** "By assisting with this research, citizen scientists are ensuring that future generations can enjoy the monarch, one of the most beautiful butterflies in the world" (lines 19–20).

* correct answer

4. **Based on the passage, what do measuring snowfall and counting monarch larva have in common?**

   A. Both are recorded on the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project website.
   B. Both assure that future generations can become citizen scientists.
   ***C**. Both are examples of citizen science projects.
   D. Both are tasks done exclusively by professional scientists.

5. **According to the passage, during which season do monarch butterflies lay their eggs?**

   A. Fall
   B. Winter
   ***C**. Spring
   D. Summer

6. **According to the passage, why do researchers rely on citizen scientists for the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project?**

   A. Researchers want to join the community of citizen scientists.
   ***B**. Researchers need help finding the caterpillars because there are so many of them.
   C. Researchers need help understanding where monarch butterflies spend the winter.
   D. Researchers want to determine how much city light affects stargazing.

7. **As it is used in line 18, what does the word *track* most nearly mean?**

   A. A course for racing
   ***B**. To record the path of
   C. A footprint
   D. To travel over

8. **Explain why scientists are interested in studying the monarch butterfly. Provide two details from the passage to support your answer.**

* correct answer