

# Grade 8 Literature Mini-Assessment

## Chapter III of “The Open Boat” by Stephen Crane

This grade 8 mini-assessment is based on an excerpt from the short story “The Open Boat” by Stephen Crane. This text is considered to be a text worthy of students’ time to read and also meets the expectations for text complexity at grade 8. Assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will employ quality, complex texts such as this one.

Questions aligned to the CCSS should be worthy of students’ time to answer and therefore do not focus on minor points of the texts. Questions also may address several standards within the same question because complex texts tend to yield rich assessment questions that call for deep analysis. In this mini-assessment there are selected-response questions and paper/pencil equivalents of technology enhanced items that address the Reading Standards listed below. There is also one constructed-response question that addresses the Reading, Writing, and Language Standards.

We encourage educators to give students the time that they need to read closely and write to the source. While we know that it is helpful to have students complete the mini-assessment in one class period, we encourage educators to allow additional time as necessary.

*Note for teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs): This assessment is designed to measure students’ ability to read and write in English. Therefore, educators will not see the level of scaffolding typically used in instructional materials to support ELLs—these would interfere with the ability to understand their mastery of these skills. If ELL students are receiving instruction in grade-level ELA content, they should be given access to unaltered practice assessment items to gauge their progress. Passages and items should not be modified; however, **additional information about accommodations you may consider when administering this assessment to ELLs is available in the teacher section of this resource.***

The questions align to the following standards:

<b>RL.8.1</b>	Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
<b>RL.8.2</b>	Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.
<b>RL.8.3</b>	Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.
<b>RL.8.4</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.
<b>W.8.2</b>	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
<b>W.8.4</b>	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

<b>W.8.9</b>	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
<b>L.8.1</b>	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
<b>L.8.2</b>	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
<b>L.8.3</b>	Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

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The assessment questions in this document align with the CCSS and reflect the instructional shifts implied by the standards. To learn more about these topics, please go to the following link:

[www.achievethecore.org](http://www.achievethecore.org)

## Grade 8 Mini-Assessment – Chapter III from “The Open Boat”

Today you will read an excerpt from “The Open Boat,” a short story by Stephen Crane. You will then answer several questions based on the text. I will be happy to answer questions about the directions, but I will not help you with the answers to any questions. You will notice as you answer the questions that some of the questions have two parts. You should answer Part A of the question before you answer Part B.

Take as long as you need to read and answer the questions. If you do not finish when class ends, come see me to discuss when you may have additional time.

Now read the passage and answer the questions. I encourage you to write notes in the margin as you read the passage.

### Chapter III from “The Open Boat” by Stephen Crane

- 1 It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him.
- 2 They were a captain, an oiler, a cook, and a correspondent, and they were friends, friends in a more curiously iron-bound degree than may be common. The hurt captain, lying against the water-jar in the bow, spoke always in a low voice and calmly, but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than the motley three of the dinghy. It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heartfelt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat there was this comradeship that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life. But no one said that it was so. No one mentioned it.
- 3 “I wish we had a sail,” remarked the captain. “We might try my overcoat on the end of an oar and give you two boys a chance to rest.” So the cook and the correspondent held the mast and spread wide the overcoat. The oiler steered, and the little boat made good way with her new rig. Sometimes the oiler had to scull sharply to keep a sea from breaking into the boat, but otherwise sailing was a success.
- 4 Meanwhile the lighthouse had been growing slowly larger. It had now almost assumed color, and appeared like a little grey shadow on the sky. The man at the oars could not be prevented from turning his head rather often to try for a glimpse of this little grey shadow.
- 5 At last, from the top of each wave the men in the tossing boat could see land. Even as the lighthouse was an upright shadow on the sky, this land seemed but a long black shadow on the sea. It certainly was thinner than paper. “We must be about opposite New Smyrna,” said the cook, who had coasted this shore often in schooners. “Captain, by the way, I believe they abandoned that life-saving station there about a year ago.”

- 6 "Did they?" said the captain.
- 7 The wind slowly died away. The cook and the correspondent were not now obliged to slave in order to hold high the oar. But the waves continued their old impetuous swooping at the dinghy, and the little craft, no longer under way, struggled woundily over them. The oiler or the correspondent took the oars again.
- 8 Shipwrecks are apropos of nothing. If men could only train for them and have them occur when the men had reached pink condition, there would be less drowning at sea. Of the four in the dinghy none had slept any time worth mentioning for two days and two nights previous to embarking in the dinghy, and in the excitement of clambering about the deck of a foundering ship they had also forgotten to eat heartily.
- 9 For these reasons, and for others, neither the oiler nor the correspondent was fond of rowing at this time. The correspondent wondered ingenuously how in the name of all that was sane could there be people who thought it amusing to row a boat. It was not an amusement; it was a diabolical punishment, and even a genius of mental aberrations could never conclude that it was anything but a horror to the muscles and a crime against the back. He mentioned to the boat in general how the amusement of rowing struck him, and the weary-faced oiler smiled in full sympathy. Previously to the foundering, by the way, the oiler had worked double-watch in the engine-room of the ship.
- 10 "Take her easy, now, boys," said the captain. "Don't spend yourselves. If we have to run a surf you'll need all your strength, because we'll sure have to swim for it. Take your time."
- 11 Slowly the land arose from the sea. From a black line it became a line of black and a line of white, trees and sand. Finally, the captain said that he could make out a house on the shore. "That's the house of refuge, sure," said the cook. "They'll see us before long, and come out after us."
- 12 The distant lighthouse reared high. "The keeper ought to be able to make us out now, if he's looking through a glass," said the captain. "He'll notify the life-saving people."
- 13 "None of those other boats could have got ashore to give word of the wreck," said the oiler, in a low voice. "Else the lifeboat would be out hunting us."
- 14 Slowly and beautifully the land loomed out of the sea. The wind came again. It had veered from the north-east to the south-east. Finally, a new sound struck the ears of the men in the boat. It was the low thunder of the surf on the shore. "We'll never be able to make the lighthouse now," said the captain. "Swing her head a little more north, Billie," said he.
- 15 "A little more north, sir," said the oiler.

- 16 Whereupon the little boat turned her nose once more down the wind, and all but the oarsman watched the shore grow. Under the influence of this expansion doubt and direful apprehension was leaving the minds of the men. The management of the boat was still most absorbing, but it could not prevent a quiet cheerfulness. In an hour, perhaps, they would be ashore.
- 17 Their backbones had become thoroughly used to balancing in the boat, and they now rode this wild colt of a dinghy like circus men. The correspondent thought that he had been drenched to the skin, but happening to feel in the top pocket of his coat, he found therein eight cigars. Four of them were soaked with sea-water; four were perfectly scatheless. After a search, somebody produced three dry matches, and thereupon the four waifs rode impudently in their little boat, and with an assurance of an impending rescue shining in their eyes, puffed at the big cigars and judged well and ill of all men. Everybody took a drink of water.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

**QUESTIONS:**

- 1. Choose two ways that the harsh conditions and remote location of the setting contribute to the theme of the passage.**
  - A. They symbolize the characters' desire for freedom and adventure.
  - B. They provide conflict that propels the action and character development in the story.
  - C. They allow the author to focus on the environment rather than character development.
  - D. They permit the author to illustrate the basic principles used to navigate the sea.
  - E. They help explain the need for cooperation among the men.
  - F. They illustrate why some members of the crew struggle more than others.
  
- 2. Paragraph 1 includes these two sentences: "No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it." Paragraph 2 then includes the same sentences. What is the most likely reason that these sentences are repeated in both paragraphs?**
  - A. The sentences show that there is a limited amount of conversation among the crew members.
  - B. The sentences show that there is an unspoken level of tension among the crew members.
  - C. The sentences show that the crew members feel similarly about their situation, and they have formed a strong bond that allows them to leave some thoughts unspoken.
  - D. The sentences show that although the crew members are outwardly optimistic, they have serious doubts about their survival and keep their doubts to themselves.
  
- 3. In Paragraph 9, the correspondent reflects on how he views rowing as opposed to how others may view the activity. What is the intended impact of this reflection?**
  - A. It is meant to make the reader pity the correspondent and his current physical state.
  - B. It is meant to add humor for the reader by injecting the correspondent's wit.
  - C. It is meant to enlighten the reader about what the correspondent's life was like before.
  - D. It is meant to encourage the reader to appreciate the correspondent more than the other characters.

4. Which two sentences from the story add suspense by showing that some characters have doubts that they will be rescued?
- A. "The hurt captain, lying against the water-jar in the bow, spoke always in a low voice and calmly, but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than the motley three of the dinghy." (Paragraph 2)
  - B. "'We might try my overcoat on the end of an oar and give you two boys a chance to rest.'" (Paragraph 3)
  - C. "'Captain, by the way, I believe they abandoned that life-saving station there about a year ago.'" (Paragraph 5)
  - D. "The cook and the correspondent were not now obliged to slave in order to hold high the oar." (Paragraph 7)
  - E. "Of the four in the dinghy none had slept any time worth mentioning for two days and two nights previous to embarking in the dinghy, and in the excitement of clambering about the deck of a foundering ship they had also forgotten to eat heartily." (Paragraph 8)
  - F. "'None of those other boats could have got ashore to give word of the wreck,' said the oiler, in a low voice." (Paragraph 13)

5. The following question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.

**Part A: In paragraph 17, what does the phrase "impending rescue" mean?**

- A. A rescue occurring against many odds
- B. A rescue organized according to rules
- C. A rescue involving many people
- D. A rescue happening soon

**Part B: Which sentence from the passage provides the best clue for the meaning of the phrase "impending rescue"?**

- A. "For these reasons, and for others, neither the oiler nor the correspondent was fond of rowing at this time." (Paragraph 9)
- B. "'We'll never be able to make the lighthouse now,' said the captain." (Paragraph 14)
- C. "In an hour, perhaps, they would be ashore." (Paragraph 16)
- D. "Their backbones had become thoroughly used to balancing in the boat, and they now rode this wild colt of a dinghy like circus men." (Paragraph 17)



6. The following question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.

**Part A:** From the list of possible conclusions below, choose three conclusions that can be drawn from evidence in the passage and write them in Column 1. Next, in Column 2, write the number of the paragraph that provides evidence for each conclusion you've written in Column 1.

Column 1: Conclusions	Column 2: Number of the paragraph that provides evidence
	Paragraph ____
	Paragraph ____
	Paragraph ____
The oiler has taken charge of the dinghy.	
The men have established a deep respect for the others in the dinghy.	
The captain knows his crew thinks they will die on the sea.	
The men are weakened from a lack of water.	
The men had become friends before embarking in the dinghy.	
Rations are limited but shared equally.	
The men offer encouragement by promoting thoughts of rescue.	

**Part B: Which theme is best supported by the three conclusions in Part A?**

- A. Humans often form stronger relationships with one another when facing adversity together.
- B. The hardest task anyone can face is to overcome fear.
- C. People cannot know or guess what the future holds for them.
- D. Unexpected physical hardship will test the ability of even the strongest friendships to survive.





## Information for Teachers: Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses of the Text

Regular practice with complex texts is necessary to prepare students for college and career readiness, as outlined in Reading Standard 10. The excerpt for this mini-assessment has been placed at grade 8, and the process used to determine this grade level placement is described below. “Appendix A of the Common Core” and the “Supplement to Appendix A: New Research on Text Complexity” lay out a research-based process for selecting complex texts.

1. Place a text or excerpt within a **grade band** based on at least one<sup>1</sup> quantitative measure according to the research-based conversion table provided in the Supplement to Appendix A: New Research on Text Complexity ([www.corestandards.org/resources](http://www.corestandards.org/resources)).
2. Place a text or excerpt at a **grade-level** based on a qualitative analysis.

Quantitative Analysis		
Chapter III from “The Open Boat”	Quantitative Measure #1	Quantitative Measure #2
	FK: 6.3	Lexile: 1180

After gathering the quantitative measures, the next step is to place the quantitative scores in the Conversion Table found in the Supplement to Appendix A ([www.corestandards.org/resources](http://www.corestandards.org/resources)) and determine the **grade band** of the text. *Note: With literature, it is sometimes true that the quantitative measures indicate grade bands that are lower than one would expect. In these rare cases, qualitative reviews will show the text really belongs in a higher grade band. This placement is confirmed in this instance as well by a third index (Reading Maturity), which rates the text as 9.1, meaning grade bands 6/8 – 9/10.* Figure 1 reproduces the conversion table from the Supplement to Appendix A, showing how the initial results from Flesch-Kincaid and the Lexile measure were converted to grade bands.

**Figure 1: Updated Text Complexity Grade Bands and Associated Ranges from Multiple Measures<sup>7</sup>**

Common Core Band	ATOS	Degrees of Reading Power®	Flesch-Kincaid <sup>d</sup>	The Lexile Framework®	Reading Maturity	SourceRater
2 <sup>nd</sup> – 3 <sup>rd</sup>	2.75 – 5.14	42 – 54	1.98 – 5.34	420 – 820	3.53 – 6.13	0.05 – 2.48
4 <sup>th</sup> – 5 <sup>th</sup>	4.97 – 7.03	52 – 60	4.51 – 7.73	740 – 1010	5.42 – 7.92	0.84 – 5.75
6 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup>	7.00 – 9.98	57 – 67	6.51 – 10.34	925 – 1185	7.04 – 9.57	4.11 – 10.66
9 <sup>th</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup>	9.67 – 12.01	62 – 72	8.32 – 12.12	1050 – 1335	8.41 – 10.81	9.02 – 13.93
11 <sup>th</sup> – CCR	11.20 – 14.10	67 – 74	10.34 – 14.2	1185 – 1385	9.57 – 12.00	12.30 – 14.50

<sup>1</sup> For higher-stakes tests, it is recommended that two corresponding text complexity measures be used to place a text in a grade band. When two measures are used, both placing the text in the same **band**, the results provide additional assurance that the text selected is appropriate for the band.

To find the **grade-level** of the text within the designated grade-band, engage in a systematic analysis of the characteristics of the text. The characteristics that should be analyzed during a qualitative analysis can be found in Appendix A of the CCSS. ([www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org))

Qualitative Analysis	Excerpt from “The Open Boat”	Where to place within the band?					
Category	Notes and comments on text, support for placement in this band	Too low for grade band	early to mid-6	mid 6 to early 7	mid 7 to early 8	mid to end 8	Too high for grade band
Structure (both story structure or form of piece)	The structure is explicit and chronological, but students have to orient themselves quickly to the situation (the men have become stranded at sea) for the structure to become clear.						
Language Clarity and Conventions	Much of the vocabulary used is sophisticated, as is the sentence structure. Words such as <i>motley</i> , <i>direful</i> , <i>aberrations</i> , <i>diabolical</i> , and <i>embarking</i> will prove challenging for many students. There is strong context for many of these words, but the sentence structure might prove difficult to navigate in some instances, with the result that the context for the vocabulary may not be readily accessible.						
Knowledge Demands (life, content, cultural/literary)	There is no prior knowledge needed to gain access to the text. Students in middle school should be familiar with the idea that being stranded at sea is dangerous and frightening, facts also established by some of the details in the text.						
Levels of Meaning (chiefly literary)/ Purpose (chiefly informational)	There are multiple themes in this text, including: Adversity brings people together; nature owns the dominance over humans; and people can handle bad situations better together than they can separately. Perhaps the most obvious theme is the first, as it is explicitly stated in the first paragraph. Due to multiple themes, this text is considered complex.						
Overall placement: Grade 8	The multiple themes, challenging vocabulary, and complex sentence structure make this text most appropriate for grade 8.						

## Question Annotations & Correct Answer and Distractor Rationales

Question Number	Correct Answer(s)	Standards	Rationales for Answer Options
1	B, E	RL.8.2, RL.8.1	<p>A. Although correspondent notes that this is “the best experience of my life” and the narrator implies this is a shared sentiment, the author does not use the harsh conditions and remote location to symbolize a desire for freedom and adventure.</p> <p>B. This is a correct answer. The harsh conditions and remote location propel the action and allow for character development because the narrator describes the actions and reactions to the various difficulties that arise (large waves, lack of wind, not being able to get to the spot in the distance, etc.).</p> <p>C. Although the environment plays a major role in the story, the author focuses much more on the characters’ reactions to the events caused by the environment.</p> <p>D. Although the author includes details about wind and directions because the setting is the sea, he does not do so to explain the basic principles of navigation.</p> <p>E. This is a correct answer. Because the conditions are harsh and there is no one around to help the men, they must cooperate to survive and be rescued. This is one of the major themes of the text.</p> <p>F. Although the captain is injured and the correspondent is inexperienced in dealing with the harsh conditions presented by the sea, the setting is meant to show how the situation brings the men together rather than showing that some are stronger or weaker than others.</p>

2	C	RL.8.2, RL.8.3, RL.8.1	<p>A. The author is not trying to show limited conversation among the crew by repeating words. Instead, he is showing that the crew members all share the same sentiment and do not need or want to recognize it verbally.</p> <p>B. Although the crew members are in a difficult situation, there is no evidence of tension among them. Instead, they are all very cooperative with one another.</p> <p>C. This is the correct answer. The author repeats the words to show that the crew members have bonded so strongly that they do not have to voice their thoughts for the others to know them. They are now a “brotherhood.”</p> <p>D. The crew members are not overly doubtful about their rescue, nor are they hesitant to voice their concern.</p>
3	A	RL.8.3, RL.8.1	<p>A. This is the correct answer. The author further explains in Paragraph 9 that rowing is, “diabolical punishment, and even a genius of mental aberrations could never conclude that it was anything but a horror to the muscles and a crime against the back.” This certainly makes it seem like rowing is terribly unpleasant, and given that the correspondent has been doing it for two days, the reader is intended to feel sorry for him and recognize that he is exhausted.</p> <p>B. Although the correspondent finds it slightly amusing that some people row for pleasure, the author isn’t trying to add humor but rather demonstrate the irony of the situation.</p> <p>C. The statements made about rowing do not provide insight into the correspondent’s life before becoming stranded on the ocean.</p> <p>D. Although the reader is likely to feel pity for the correspondent, it is clear that all of the crew members have to struggle toward land, fighting exhaustion all the while.</p>

4	C, F	RL.8.3, RL.8.1	<p>A. Although the captain is injured and speaks in a low voice, he is calm and recognizes that his crew is “more ready and swiftly obedient,” demonstrating his confidence in them. These thoughts and actions do not demonstrate doubt.</p> <p>B. Although the captain recognizes that they have no sail, he perseveres to make things easier for his crew by inventing a way to move the vessel forward toward rescue. This action does not demonstrate doubt.</p> <p>C. This is a correct answer. When the cook acknowledges that the life-saving station is no longer on the island, even though he does so with no emotions, it is clear that he worries that no one will be there to save them.</p> <p>D. Although the cook and the correspondent take time to rest, it does not indicate that they are doubtful of rescue; they are simply exhausted.</p> <p>E. Although the crew has had little sleep and is hungry, this sentence does not illustrate any doubt on their part.</p> <p>F. This is a correct answer. The oiler acknowledges, even if it is to only himself, since he uses a “low voice,” that it is doubtful that anyone has received news of their plight so it is unlikely anyone is on the way to rescue them.</p>
5 Part A	D	RL.8.4, RL.8.1	<p>A. Although the crew is fighting against many odds, they still feel a rescue will happen soon.</p> <p>B. Although the crew follows common social rules of behavior until they are rescued soon, the rescue effort itself is not organized since it appears no one else knows they are on the life boat.</p> <p>C. Although the rescue might “involve many people,” the term “impending rescue” means “a rescue happening soon.”</p> <p>D. This is the correct answer. The crew is optimistic that they will be rescued quickly, a rescue will be “happening soon.”</p>
5 Part B	C		<p>A. This sentence offers no support for the meaning of “impending.”</p> <p>B. This sentence offers no support for the meaning of “impending.” In fact, it implies that the rescue has been postponed.</p> <p>C. This is the correct answer. The term, “in an hour” suggests that the crew feels the “impending” rescue is going to happen very quickly.</p> <p>D. This sentence offers no support for the meaning of “impending.” In fact, the crew’s condition makes it clear that the rescue is taking a long time.</p>



<b>6 Part A</b>	Conclusions	Paragraph Providing Evidence	RL.8.2, RL.8.1	<p>Correct answers: “Then men have established a deep respect for others in the dinghy,” (paragraph 1 or 2) “The men offer encouragement by promoting thoughts of rescue,” (paragraph 11 or 12) and “Rations are limited but shared equally” (paragraph 17) all support the theme that “humans often form stronger relationships when facing adversity together.”</p> <p>Incorrect answers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The oiler has taken charge of the dinghy” is an incorrect answer, as it is clear the captain is still in charge despite his injuries. Although the oiler plays an important role in rowing, he’s one of several.</li> <li>• “The captain knows that his crew thinks they will die on the sea” is an incorrect answer, as actually crew seems hopeful that they will be rescued.</li> <li>• “The men are weakened from a lack of water” is an incorrect answer. Although it is clear that the water supply is limited (they are each allowed only a sip at the end of the story), the men are still strong enough to row. The narrator attributes their fatigue to the fact that they had to leave the foundering boat quickly and didn’t get to eat first.</li> <li>• “The men had become friends before embarking in the dinghy” is an incorrect answer, as there is no evidence they had any relationship other than being crew mates (cook, oiler, and captain) or traveling together (correspondent).</li> </ul>
	The men have established a deep respect for others in the dinghy.	Paragraph 1 or 2		
	The men offer encouragement by promoting thoughts of rescue.	Paragraph 11 or 12		
	Rations are limited but shared equally.	Paragraph 17		
<b>6 Part B</b>	A			<p>A. This is the correct answer. The conclusions in Part A (a strong relationship has formed, the men encourage one other, and the rations are shared) all support the theme that humans form strong relationships when dealing with trials and tribulations together.</p> <p>B. Although the men seem worried about their situation, they outwardly seem confident and are not working to overcome their fears. This is not a theme of the passage.</p> <p>C. Although the men are unsure of rescue, the theme addresses the strong relationship formed. The theme does not focus on the fact the men don’t know how the situation will end.</p> <p>D. Although the men face some physical hardship, it only brings them closer. It does not test the strength of their friendships.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>7</b> <b>(Optional Writing Prompt)</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">See bullets for top-score response</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">W.8.2, W.8.4, W.8.9, RL.8.2, RL.8.1, L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.3</p>	<p>A good student response will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• throughout the passage, the men work together; the captain provides direction; the others row and steer</li> <li>• Paragraph 1 says the men are “friends in a more curiously iron-bound degree than may be common”</li> <li>• the men’s obedience to the captain is “personal and heartfelt”</li> <li>• there is “devotion” and “comradeship”</li> <li>• this deep friendship makes the correspondent believe that the shipwreck is “the best experience of his life”</li> <li>• their relationship supports the theme that a life-or-death situation forges a strong bond, or that people can do more together than they can alone</li> <li>• Their relationship shapes the plot by showing that, by working together, they go from being adrift at sea to within sight of land. The sea threatens them, “breaking into the boat” in paragraph 2, “swooping at the dinghy” in paragraph 6, but the men work without complaint until they achieve the goal of finding land.</li> </ul>
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## Using the Mini-Assessments with English Language Learners (ELLs)

### Mini-Assessment Design and English Language Learners

Each mini-assessment is designed using the best practices of test design. English Language Learners will benefit from the opportunity to independently practice answering questions about grade-level complex texts.

Prior to delivering the mini-assessment, teachers should read through each item. If there is language in the question stems specific to the standards (e.g., plot, theme, point of view), make sure that students have been introduced to these concepts prior to taking the assessment. Teachers should not pre-teach specific vocabulary words tested in the assessment (e.g., words students are asked to define) and should only pre-teach language that would impede students from understanding what the question is asking.

The mini-assessments attend to the needs of all learners, and ELLs specifically, by including texts that:

- *Are brief and engaging:* Texts vary in length, but no individual text is more than three pages long.
- *Embed student-friendly definitions:* Footnotes are included for technical terms or words that are above grade level when those words are not surrounded by context that would help students determine meaning.

Informational text sets, such as those included in the mini-assessment, specifically attend to the needs of ELLs by:

- *Building student knowledge:* Mini-assessments often include multiple texts or stimuli on the same topic:
  - For sets with two texts or stimuli, the first text is generally broader, providing a foundation in the content and introducing key vocabulary, and the second text provides more detail or contrast on the same topic. This allows ELLs to dig into the features of the passage being assessed rather than being inundated with dissimilar content and vocabulary.
  - For sets with more than two texts or stimuli, there is an “anchor” text that provides introductory information on the topic.

- *Containing ideas that lend themselves to discussion from a variety of perspectives:* Often these pairs or sets of texts present multiple perspectives on the same topic.

The mini-assessments attend to the needs of all learners, and ELLs specifically, by including questions that:

- *Feature a variety of academic words:*
  - Each mini-assessment contains at least one vocabulary item. Items assessing vocabulary test one of the following:
    - The meaning of Tier 2 academic words in context.
    - The meaning of a figurative word/phrase in context.
    - The impact of word choice on meaning and/or tone.
  - MOST vocabulary items test Tier 2 words.
  - All tested words are chosen because:
    - They are central to the meaning of the text.
    - They are surrounded by sufficient context to allow students to determine meaning.
- *Highlight “juicy” sentences that feature grade-appropriate complex structures, vocabulary, and language features:* Most mini-assessments include at least one item assessing Reading for Literature or Reading: Informational text standard 5. These items point students to analyze the structure of the text. While standard 5 items specifically focus on the structure of the text, other items require the analysis of language features, vocabulary, and relationships between ideas, all of which build student understanding of texts.
- *Provide graphic organizers to help students capture and reflect on new knowledge:* Most mini-assessments include at least one item mimicking a “technology enhanced item.” These items include things like tables and charts.
- *Provide writing activities that allow students to use new vocabulary and demonstrate knowledge of new concepts:* Most mini-assessments include an optional writing prompt that allows students to write about the text(s).

### **Administration Guidelines for ELLs**

When assessing ELL students, appropriate accommodations may be considered. Modifications to the assessment itself should not be made. According to the *Accommodations Manual: How to Select, Administer, and Evaluate Use of Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment of English Language Learners, First Edition*:

- “Modifications refer to practices or materials that change, lower, or reduce state-required learning expectations. Modifications may change the underlying construct of an assessment.”
- “Accommodations are accessibility supports [that] do not reduce learning expectations. They meet specific needs of students in instruction and assessment and enable educators to know that measures of a student’s work produce valid results.”

Teachers **may** choose to make accommodations that meet the unique needs of ELLs. Prior to delivering any practice assessment, especially if the mini-assessment is to be used in a more formal setting (e.g., as part of a district benchmark assessment), teachers should research what accommodations will be available to students during their state’s summative assessment. For example, some states allow ELLs to use a bilingual dictionary during an assessment; other states do not allow this. Ensure your ELLs are practicing with the accommodations they can expect to see on the summative. Some examples of appropriate accommodations include:

- Reading the directions aloud to students multiple times.
- Providing student directions in student native language.
- Allowing students additional time to complete the mini-assessments.
- Exposing students to item types prior to the assessment.
- Reading the scoring expectations for the writing prompt aloud to students.

Because the goal of literacy mini-assessments is to measure grade-level literacy as students progress toward college- and career-readiness, teachers must be careful **not** to make modifications that may be commonly used in classroom instruction. Examples of modifications that should **not** be used include:

- Reading passages aloud for students.
- Adding student glossaries of unfamiliar terms.
- Pre-teaching tested vocabulary words.

**In any testing setting, teachers must be careful to choose accommodations that suit the needs of each individual student.**

## Additional Resources for Assessment and CCSS

**Shift 1 – Complexity:** *Regular practice with complex text and its academic language*

- See Appendix B for examples of informational and literary complex texts:  
[http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix\\_B.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf)
- See the Text Complexity Collection on [www.achievethecore.org](http://www.achievethecore.org)

**Shift 2 – Evidence:** *Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational*

- See Close Reading Exemplars for ways to engage students in close reading on  
<http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/close-reading-exemplars>
- See the Basal Alignment Project for examples of text-dependent questions:  
<http://www.achievethecore.org/basal-alignment-project>

**Shift 3 – Knowledge:** *Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction*

- See Appendix B for examples of informational and literary complex texts:  
[http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix\\_B.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf)

**Sample Scoring Rubric for Text-Based Writing**

**Prompts:** [http://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Scoring\\_Rubric\\_for\\_Text-Based\\_Writing\\_Prompts.pdf](http://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Scoring_Rubric_for_Text-Based_Writing_Prompts.pdf)