

## Grade 7 Literary Nonfiction Mini-Assessment

### Excerpt from *Nature by Design*

This grade 7 mini-assessment is based on an excerpt from the book *Nature by Design* by Bruce Brooks. This text is considered to be worthy of students' time to read and also meets the expectations for text complexity at grade 7. Assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards 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 seven questions that address the Reading Standards below, and one constructed-response question that addresses 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 is 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>RI.7.1</b>	Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
<b>RI.7.2</b>	Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
<b>RI.7.3</b>	Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).
<b>RI.7.4</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
<b>RI.7.5</b>	Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.
<b>RI.7.6</b>	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.
<b>W.7.2</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.7.4</b>	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
<b>W.7.9</b>	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
<b>L.7.1</b>	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
<b>L.7.2</b>	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
<b>L.7.3</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 7 Mini-Assessment – excerpt from *Nature by Design*

Today you will read an excerpt from *Nature by Design*. 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, but you may return to Part A if you wish.

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 the ways 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 passages.

Excerpt from *Nature by Design*, by Bruce Brooks

- 1 One evening, when I was about five, I climbed up a ladder on the outside of a rickety old tobacco barn at sunset. The barn was part of a small farm near the home of a country relative my mother and I visited periodically; though we did not really know the farm’s family, I was allowed to roam, poke around, and conduct sudden studies of anything small and harmless. On this evening, as on most of my jaunts, I was not looking for anything: I was simply climbing with an open mind. But as I balanced on the next-to-the-top rung and inhaled the spicy stink of the tobacco drying inside, I *did* find something under the eaves—something very strange.
- 2 It appeared to be a kind of gray paper sphere, suspended from the dark planks by a thin stalk, like an apple made of ashes hanging on its stem. I studied it closely in the clear light. I saw that the bottom was a little ragged, and open. I could not tell if it had been torn, or if it had been made that way on purpose—for it was clear to me, as I studied it, that this thing had been *made*. This was no fruit or fungus. Its shape, rough but trim; its intricately colored surface with subtle swirls of gray and tan; and most of all the uncanny adhesiveness with which the perfectly tapered stem stuck against the rotten old pine boards—all of these features gave evidence of some intentional design. The troubling thing was figuring out who had designed it, and why.
- 3 I assumed the designer was a human being: someone from the farm, someone wise and skilled in a craft that had so far escaped my curiosity. Even when I saw wasps entering and leaving the thing (during a vigil I kept every evening for two weeks), it did not occur to me that the wasps might have fashioned it for themselves. I assumed it was a man-made “wasp house” placed there expressly for the purpose of attracting a family of wasps, much as the “martin hotel,” a giant birdhouse on a pole near the farmhouse, was maintained to shelter

migrant purple martins who returned every spring. I didn't ask myself why anyone would want to give wasps a bivouac<sup>1</sup>; it seemed no more odd than attracting birds.

- 4 As I grew less wary of the wasps (and they grew less wary of me), and as my confidence on the ladder improved, I moved to the upper rung and peered through the sphere's bottom. I could see that the paper swirled in layers around some secret center the wasps inhabited, and I marveled at the delicate hands of the craftsman who had devised such tiny apertures for their protection.
- 5 I left the area in the late summer, and in my imagination I took the strange structure with me. I envisioned unwrapping it, and in the middle finding – what? A tiny room full of bits of wool for sleeping, and countless manufactured pellets of scientifically determined wasp food? A glowing blue jewel that drew the wasps at twilight, and gave them a cool infusion of energy as they clung to it overnight? My most definite idea was that the wasps lived in a small block of the fine cedar that the craftsman had drilled full of holes, into which they slipped snugly, rather like the bunks aboard submarines in World War II movies.
- 6 As it turned out, I got the chance to discover that my idea of the cedar block had not been wrong by much. We visited our relative again in the winter. We arrived at night, but first thing in the morning I made straight for the farm and its barn. The shadows under the eaves were too dense to let me spot the sphere from far off. I stepped on the bottom rung of the ladder—slick with frost—and climbed carefully up. My hands and feet kept slipping, so my eyes stayed on the rung ahead, and it was not until I was secure at the top that I could look up. The sphere was gone.
- 7 I was crushed. That object had fascinated me like nothing I had come across in my life; I had even grown to love wasps because of it. I sagged on the ladder and watched my breath eddy around the blank eaves. I'm afraid I pitied myself more than the apparently homeless wasps.
- 8 But then something snapped me out of my sense of loss: I recalled that I had watched the farmer taking in the purple martin hotel every November, after the birds left. From its spruce appearance when he brought it out in March, it was clear he had cleaned it and repainted it and kept it out of the weather. Of course he would do the same thing for *this* house, which was even more fragile. I had never mentioned the wasp dwelling to anyone, but now I decided I would go to the farm, introduce myself, and inquire about it. Perhaps I would even be permitted to handle it, or, best of all, learn how to make one myself.
- 9 I scrambled down the ladder, leaping from the third rung and landing in the frosty salad of tobacco leaves and windswept grass that collected at the foot of the barn wall. I looked

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<sup>1</sup> Bivouac: A place to camp

down and saw that my left boot had, by no more than an inch, just missed crushing the very thing I was rushing off to seek. There, lying dry and separate on the leaves, was the wasp house.

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## QUESTIONS

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

**PART A:** In paragraph 1, what does the reader learn about the young boy's character that has the greatest influence on the events of the passage?

- A. He is an intelligent person.
- B. He has no fear of strange places.
- C. He is content to be alone.
- D. He has a lot of curiosity.

**PART B:** Which detail from the passage best supports the answer to Part A?

- A. "This was no fruit or fungus."
- B. "The troubling thing was figuring out who had designed it, and why."
- C. "We arrived at night, but first thing in the morning I made straight for the farm and its barn."
- D. "I sagged on the ladder and watched my breath eddy around the blank eaves."

**2. What is the organizational structure of paragraphs 2, 3, 4, and 5?**

- A. Paragraphs 2 and 4 describe what the boy saw; paragraphs 3 and 5 describe what the boy thought about.
- B. Paragraphs 2 and 4 describe the wasp house; paragraphs 3 and 5 describe a bird house.
- C. Paragraphs 2 and 4 describe how the wasps build a house; paragraphs 3 and 5 describe why they build a house.
- D. Paragraphs 2 and 4 describe what the boy understood; paragraphs 3 and 5 describe what the adult man now understands.

**3. In paragraph 2, how does the author’s use of the phrase “like an apple made of ashes” contribute to the meaning of the passage?**

- A. The phrase helps explain the color and weight of the wasp house.
- B. The phrase helps explain the size and shape of the wasp house.
- C. The phrase helps explain how the wasp house was attached to the barn.
- D. The phrase helps explain why the boy found the wasp house interesting.

**4. Why does it seem logical to the narrator that a human being made the wasp house? Choose two reasons that are found in the passage.**

- A. The wasp house has been designed and built in a complicated way.
- B. The center of the wasp house remains an unseen mystery.
- C. The people on the farm put out a birdhouse to attract birds.
- D. The ladder takes people close to where the wasp house is hanging.
- E. The wasp house has been placed near the top of the barn.
- F. The wasps become used to having a nearby visitor watching them.

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

**PART A: Which statement best expresses two central ideas of the passage?**

- A. A young boy explores a neighbor's farm, and he sees a wasp house.
- B. A young boy is feeling bored, and he tries to imagine what the inside of a wasp house looks like.
- C. A young boy looks at a wasp house, and he begins to understand how wasps are like birds.
- D. A young boy is fascinated by a wasp house, and he theorizes about its origin and purpose.
- E. A young boy cannot find a wasp house, and he decides that someone has put it away.

**PART B: Which detail from the passage provides the best support for the answer to Part A?**

- A. Although the narrator does not know the family living next to his country relative very well, they let him walk around their farm.
- B. The narrator becomes more comfortable near the wasps, and the wasps become used to having the narrator observing them.
- C. The compact shape, the color changes on the surface, and the sticky stem holding it in place convince the narrator that the wasp house hadn't just grown but someone had made it.
- D. Although the narrator's visit to his country relative ends in late summer, he does not forget about the wasp house.
- E. The narrator feels better about not finding the wasp house after he remembers that the farmer always took his birdhouse inside for the winter.

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

**Part A: How does the young boy feel when he first discovers that the wasp house is gone?**

- A. He is very relieved that someone may have moved the wasp house to a safer place.
- B. He is hopeful that the wasps will build another house the next year.
- C. He is extremely disappointed that the wasp house is missing.
- D. He is worried that the wasps do not have a home.

**Part B: Which three quotations from the passage best support the answer to Part A?**

- A. "I was crushed"
- B. "That object had fascinated me"
- C. "like nothing I had come across in my life"
- D. "I had even grown to love wasps"
- E. "I sagged on the ladder"
- F. "I pitied myself"
- G. "the apparently homeless wasps"

**7. (Optional) The passage focuses on the narrator's interest in a particular object—the wasp house. Write an essay describing how the narrator's interest in and understanding of the wasp house progresses over the course of the passage. Be sure to include evidence from the text to support your response. Use the lines on the next page for your essay.**

**Your response will be scored on how well you:**

- **Demonstrate your understanding of the ideas of the text**
- **Use evidence from the text to help develop and support your ideas**
- **Organize your response in a logical manner**
- **Demonstrate an appropriate writing style through the use of precise word choice and varied sentences**
- **Use standard conventions for writing**



## Information for Teachers: Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses of Texts

Regular practice with complex texts is necessary to prepare students for college and career readiness. The excerpt for this mini-assessment is placed at grade 7 for the purpose of this exemplar. This section of the exemplar provides an explanation of the process that was used to place the text at grade 7 for the purpose of illustrating why this text meets the expectations for text complexity in Reading Standard 10. Appendix A to the CCSS 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>2</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

Excerpt from <i>Nature by Design</i>	<b>Quantitative Measure #1</b>	<b>Quantitative Measure #2</b>
	Flesch-Kincaid: 8.2	Lexile: 1140

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.

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>5</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>2</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 <i>Nature by Design</i>	Where to place within the band?					
Category	Notes and comments on text, support for placement in this band	early 6 – mid 6	end 6- early 7	Mid- end 7	Early – mid 8	End 8	NOT suited to band
Structure: (both story structure or form of piece)	This passage is structured chronologically; the narrator relates a story about his discovery of a wasp house. The story has two parts: In the summer, the narrator finds and observes the house, speculating about its origin and purpose; in the winter, the narrator returns to see the house and finds it discarded. This structure should be accessible to seventh graders.						
Language Clarity and Conventions	Although most of the vocabulary can be expected to be accessible to seventh grade students, the sentence structure is rather sophisticated and could prove challenging. There is also some use of figurative and descriptive language that contributes to the complexity of the language in this text.						
Knowledge Demands (life, content, cultural/literary)	To understand the text, it would be important for students to know what a wasp is, but even students in more urban settings are most likely aware that wasps are flying insects. The rural setting is described explicitly enough that no prior knowledge is needed to discern the remoteness of the location of the wasp house or the existence of purple martin houses and their purpose.						
Levels of Meaning (chiefly literary)/ Purpose (chiefly informational)	There is more than one implicit level of meaning in this text, making it somewhat challenging for seventh graders at first. The author details the discovery and the reflections of the young boy to illustrate the boy’s habits of mind and growing knowledge of the world.						
<b>Overall placement: Grade 7</b>	<b>Justification: This text is fairly complex in regard to structure, sentence structure, and levels of meaning. This mini-assessment may be most appropriate for advanced seventh graders early in the year, or all seventh graders later in the year.</b>						

## Question Annotations & Correct Answer and Distractor Rationales

Question Number	Correct Answer(s)	Standards	Rationales for Answer Options
1 Part A	D	RI.7.3, RI.7.1	<p><b>A.</b> Although events in the text reveal that the young boy is intelligent, that aspect of his character is not introduced in paragraph 1, nor does the boy’s intelligence influence the events as much as his curiosity does.</p> <p><b>B.</b> Although paragraph 1 illustrates that the young boy is not afraid to explore strange places, that characteristic has less influence on the events in the text than the boy’s curiosity does.</p> <p><b>C.</b> Although paragraph 1 suggests that the young boy is content to be alone, that fact does not influence the events of the text.</p> <p><b>D.</b> This is the correct response. The boy’s curiosity, introduced in paragraph 1 as “I was allowed to roam, poke around, and conduct sudden studies of anything small and harmless,” causes him to find the house, spend two weeks observing and speculating about it, keep thinking about it after he leaves the farm, and return eagerly to it when he arrives at the farm in the winter.</p>
1 Part B	B		<p><b>A.</b> This distractor plausibly links to the idea that the young boy is intelligent (Option A in Part A), but it does not illustrate his curiosity.</p> <p><b>B.</b> This is the correct response. With this quotation, the reader sees the boy’s curiosity at work.</p> <p><b>C.</b> This distractor plausibly links to the idea that the boy is content to be alone (Option C in Part A), but it does not support the fact that the boy is curious.</p> <p><b>D.</b> This distractor plausibly links to the boy’s lack of fear (Option B in Part A), but it does not provide evidence for curiosity.</p>
2	A	RI.7.5, RI.7.1	<p><b>A.</b> This is the correct response. The author structures this section of the passage by alternating the boy’s descriptions of the wasp house with his youthful reflections about the meaning of what he has seen.</p> <p><b>B.</b> Although paragraphs 2 – 4 contain an analogy the boy draws between a bird house and a wasp house, this comparison is not the structure of the paragraphs.</p> <p><b>C.</b> Although paragraphs 2 – 4 contain information about what the wasp house looks like and speculation about who built it, the paragraphs are not structured around these ideas.</p> <p><b>D.</b> Although much of the passage makes explicit and implicit comparisons between what the young boy thinks and what the adult man knows, the paragraphs are not structured around these ideas.</p>

3	B	RI.7.4, RI.7.1	<p><b>A.</b> Although in a different context a simile based on an apple might help explain an object’s color and weight, the context of the passage makes it clear that describing color and weight is not the purpose of the phrase; the wasp house is gray in color and light in weight.</p> <p><b>B.</b> This is the correct response. The simile helps the reader understand that the wasp house is round like an apple and about the same size.</p> <p><b>C.</b> Although the author continues the phrase by referring to the way the wasp house is hanging from the eaves, the specific phrase about the apple suggests its shape and size, not the method by which it is attached to the barn.</p> <p><b>D.</b> Although it is clear from the context that the boy found the wasp house fascinating, the fascination came from the special properties of the house, not the fact that it was the shape and size of an apple.</p>
4	A and C	RI.7.3, RI.7.6, RI.7.1	<p><b>A.</b> This is a correct response. The narrator notes that the intricate shape, the colored surface, and the adhesiveness of the wasp house illustrate that it did not grow but was made.</p> <p><b>B.</b> Although the passage later indicates that the young boy used his imagination to speculate about the mystery in the interior of the wasp house, this fact does not logically support the idea that the house was made rather than grew.</p> <p><b>C.</b> This is a correct response. The boy reasons logically that because people put out houses for birds, they likely put out this house for wasps.</p> <p><b>D.</b> Although it is true that the boy climbs the ladder and finds himself very near the wasp house, this fact does not logically support the idea that the house was constructed on purpose.</p> <p><b>E.</b> Although the wasp house is located high up in the eaves of a barn, this fact does not provide logical evidence that the wasp house did not grow like a fruit or fungus.</p> <p><b>F.</b> Although the boy reports that the wasps grew used to having him nearby, just as he grew used to the wasps, this fact does not logically support the idea that the house did not grow by itself.</p>

5 Part A	D	RI.7.2, RI.7.1	<p><b>A.</b> Although this statement is true, neither of the ideas it expresses is central to the passage. The primary focus of the passage is on the boy’s curiosity and imagination regarding the wasp house.</p> <p><b>B.</b> Although the passage contains an account of the boy speculating about the inside of the wasp house, there is no evidence in the passage that the boy is bored, nor is the speculation about the center of the house one of the central ideas of the passage; the passage focuses primarily on the boy’s fascination with the wasp house and his efforts to understand it.</p> <p><b>C.</b> Although the boy draws an analogy between bird houses and wasp houses to try to understand what he is seeing, this analogy is not one of the central ideas of the passage; the central ideas are the boy’s extended curiosity about the wasp house and his speculation about it.</p> <p><b>D.</b> This is the correct response. The two central ideas in the passage are that the boy’s curiosity makes him fascinated with the wasp house, and he attempts to understand where it has come from and how it functions.</p> <p><b>E.</b> Although at the end of the passage the boy discovers that the wasp house is missing and theorizes that it has been put away from the winter, these ideas are not the central ideas in the passage; they are details that support the central ideas that boy is absorbed by the wasp house and trying to gain an understanding of it.</p>
5 Part B	C		<p><b>A.</b> This distractor plausibly links to Options A and B in Part A, but it does not support the central ideas of the passage.</p> <p><b>B.</b> This distractor plausibly links to Options A and C in Part A, but it does not support the central ideas of the passage.</p> <p><b>C.</b> This is the correct response. It is a detail that helps develop the central ideas of the boy’s fascination with the wasp house and his desire to understand it.</p> <p><b>D.</b> This distractor plausibly links to Options A and E in Part A, but it does not support the central ideas of the passage.</p> <p><b>E.</b> This distractor plausibly links to Option E in Part A, but it does not support the central ideas of the passage.</p>
6 Part A	C	RI.7.3, RI.7.1	<p><b>A.</b> Although eventually the boy theorizes that the wasp house has been moved to a safe place for the winter, initially he is disappointed, not glad.</p> <p><b>B.</b> Although the boy later learns that the wasp house has been discarded, there is no evidence in the passage to support the idea that he is hopeful that a new house will appear next year.</p> <p><b>C.</b> This is the correct response. The context makes it clear that the boy’s initial reaction is one of overwhelming disappointment when he sees that the house is gone.</p> <p><b>D.</b> Although the boy is admiring of the wasps, paragraph 7 makes it clear that his first reaction is one of disappointment, not worry, when he learns that the house is missing.</p>

<p><b>6 Part B</b></p>	<p><b>A, E, and F</b></p>		<p><b>A.</b> This is a correct response. The author uses “crushed” to indicate a feeling of disappointment.</p> <p><b>B.</b> This distractor plausibly links to Option D in Part A. Although it is true that the wasp house greatly fascinated the boy, this fact does not support the idea that the boy was disappointed when the house was gone.</p> <p><b>C.</b> This distractor plausibly links to Option D in Part A. Although this phrase also supports the fascination the wasp house held for the boy, it does not support the sense of disappointment the boy felt when the house was gone.</p> <p><b>D.</b> This distractor plausibly links to Option A in Part A. Although other details in the passage makes this statement convincing, it does not support the correct response to Part A of this question—that the boy was disappointed when the house was gone.</p> <p><b>E.</b> This is a correct response. The physical detail of sagging or slumping on the ladder is meant to illustrate the extent of the boy’s disappointment.</p> <p><b>F.</b> This is a correct response. The statement that the boy pitied himself reinforces the sense of disappointment the boy feels when he sees that the house is no longer there.</p> <p><b>G.</b> This distractor also plausibly links to Option D in Part A. Although with this phrase the author contrasts the apparent plight of the wasps to the disappointment the boy is feeling, the phrase by itself does not provide textual evidence that the boy was feeling disappointed when he discovered that the house was gone.</p>
<p><b>7</b></p> <p><b>Optional writing prompt</b></p>	<p><b>See right column</b></p>	<p><b>W.7.2, W.7.4, W.7.9, RI.7.3, RI.7.1, L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3</b></p>	<p>A good student response will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of how the boy views the wasp house at first: He is mystified by it, referring to it as “something very strange,” “a gray paper sphere,” and “this thing” (paragraphs 1 and 2).</li> <li>• A description of how the boy comes to view the house during the two weeks he studies it: He learns the purpose of the house, and it becomes less strange to him: He sees “wasps entering and leaving the thing.” As he visits it daily, the house becomes even more familiar to him, as he studies it carefully and wonders how the craftsman made it.</li> <li>• A description of how the boy views the house when he is far away from it: Once he leaves the farm, he focuses on the parts of the house he still does not understand. He especially wonders what the wasp house is like at its center. By the time he returns to the farm, he is practically obsessed with the wasp house and is “crushed” not to find it in its place. He wants so badly to know more about the house that he decides to ask the farmer to teach him to make one.</li> <li>• A description of how the boy views the house at the end of the passage: Now his understanding of the house takes a leap forward, as he sees that the farmer does not handle the wasp house like he cleans the purple martin houses after all, and that the house has been discarded by the wasps.</li> </ul>

## 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 implementation

### **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)