

Grade 8 Literature Mini-Assessment

Paired Poems “I Hear America Singing” by Walt Whitman and “I, Too, Sing America” by Langston Hughes

This grade 8 mini-assessment is based two poems, “I Hear America Singing” by Walt Whitman and “I, Too, Sing America” by Langston Hughes. These texts are considered to be worthy of students’ time to read and also meet the expectations for text complexity at grade 8. Assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will employ quality, complex texts such as these.

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 eight selected-response questions and two items with paper/pencil equivalent of technology enhanced parts that address the Reading Standards listed below. There is also one constructed-response item that address 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:

RL.8.1	Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
RL.8.2	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.
RL.8.3	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.
RL.8.4	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.
RL.8.5	Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

RL.8.6	Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.
RL.8.9	Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new.
W.8.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
W.8.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
W.8.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
L.8.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
L.8.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
L.8.3	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

Grade 8 Mini-Assessment – Paired Poems “I Hear America Singing” by Walt Whitman and “I, Too, Sing America” by Langston Hughes

Today you will read two poems, “I Hear America Singing” by Walt Whitman and “I, Too, Sing America” by Langston Hughes. You will then answer several questions based on these texts. 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 passages and answer the questions. I encourage you to write notes in the margin as you read the passages.

Text 1: “I Hear America Singing” by Walt Whitman

1 I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,

Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe

and strong,

The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,

5 The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off

work,

The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the

deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,

The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing

10 as he stands,

The wood-cutter’s song, the ploughboy’s on his way in the

morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,

The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at

work, or of the girl sewing or washing,

15 Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young
fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Text 2: "I, Too, Sing America" by Langston Hughes

1 I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

5 But I laugh,

And eat well,

And grow strong.

Tomorrow,

I'll be at the table

10 When company comes.

Nobody'll dare

Say to me,

"Eat in the kitchen,"

Then.

15 Besides,

They'll see how beautiful I am

And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

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

Part A: Which excerpt from Text 1, “I Hear America Singing,” best conveys its overall theme?

- A. “The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,”
- B. “The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,”
- C. “Each singing what belongs to him or her and to no one else,”
- D. “The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly”

Part B: How does the idea of carols help develop the theme of Text 1?

- A. The beauty of America grows as each worker contributes his or her own carol.
- B. As each American worker sings a new carol, he or she becomes more effective at his or her job.
- C. As each carol is introduced, more opportunities open up for Americans.
- D. The American worker grows more powerful as he shares his or her own carol.

2. How does the structure of the poem contribute to its overall meaning?

- A. The gradual increase in line length accentuates the important role that women play in creating America’s strength.
- B. The inconsistent line length emphasizes the novelty of each worker’s contribution to America.
- C. The repeated references to songs develop the idea that each worker performs a similar function in American society.
- D. The list of a wide variety of workers highlights the unique contribution each worker makes to America.

3. How does the description of the songs as “strong” in Line 3 of Text 1 impact the meaning of the poem?

- A. It emphasizes the greatness of America, created through individual workers.
- B. It highlights the joy that American laborers feel as they complete their daily tasks.
- C. It reveals the belief that America is only powerful as long as each worker contributes.
- D. It demonstrates a hope for a brighter future, felt by American laborers when they finish their work.

4. In Text 1, reread lines 1–2 and 15–18. From these sets of lines, circle 3 words that contribute to a joyous tone.

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

Part A: Which theme is conveyed in Text 2, Hughes’s poem?

- A. America must celebrate all of its members, not just a select group.
- B. All people in America share similar experiences and lead similar lives.
- C. Americans must make the effort to spend more time with their loved ones.
- D. To Americans, health and happiness should be of greatest importance.

Part B: Which excerpt from Text 2 best demonstrates this theme?

- A. I am the darker brother.
- B. But I laugh,/And eat well,
- C. Tomorrow,/ I’ll be at the table
- D. I, too, am America.

6. In Text 2, how does the shift in setting from the kitchen to the table in Stanza 2 to Stanza 3 mainly impact the poem?

- A. It reveals the speaker’s decision to develop deeper friendships.
- B. It reflects the speaker’s determination and desire for progress.
- C. It proves that the ideals and values of the nation have already changed.
- D. It warns that humans must strive to make fewer demands of one another.

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

Part A: In Stanza 2 and in Stanza 4 of Hughes's poem, the speaker uses the word "they." Who is the "they" that the speaker refers to?

- A. his family and friends
- B. his enemies and rivals
- C. people who are different from him
- D. people who are from other countries

Part B: Why is it important that the speaker does not define exactly who "they" are?

- A. It protects the speaker's relationships by not offending one specific group.
- B. It keeps readers interested in the poem by maintaining their curiosity.
- C. It holds the focus of the poem on its subject, which is the speaker himself.
- D. It invites people everywhere to be part of the speaker's concept of America.

8. Beside each aspect of the poem "I, Too, Sing America," write its corresponding effect.

Aspects

1. Use of simple language and short lines

→ _____

2. Use of transitional words (*But, Tomorrow, Besides*)

→ _____

3. Use of similar language in the first and last lines (*I, too, sing America/I, too, am America*)

→ _____

4. Use of varying numbers of lines in each stanza

→ _____

Effects

Emphasizes the central idea of the poem

Reflects the speaker's feelings of individuality and independence

Heightens the impact of each individual word or phrase

Foreshadows differences between the speaker's present reality and his intended future

- 9. Choose two statements that explain how the point of view of the speaker of Text 1 compares or contrasts with that of Text 2.**
- A. Whitman’s speaker speaks from a point of view of one who feels valued as an American, while Hughes’ speaker does not.
 - B. Whitman’s speaker mainly discusses the challenges of being an American, while Hughes’s speaker mainly discusses the benefits of being an American
 - C. Whitman’s speaker and Hughes’s speaker describe the lives of both American men and women.
 - D. Whitman’s speaker does not voice concerns about American life, Hughes’s speaker does.
 - E. Whitman’s speaker describes the steps Americans have taken to achieve success, while Hughes’s speaker does not.
 - F. Whitman’s speaker believes only positive things about life in America, while Hughes’s speaker has an entirely negative view about life in America.
- 10. How do the authors use the structure of the poems to contribute to the meaning of Text 1 and Text 2?**
- A. In both poems, the poets avoid traditional rhyme scheme to highlight the important role that freedom has in American life.
 - B. Whitman gradually increases the length of his lines to emphasize the growing importance of the American worker, while Hughes varies the line length to call attention to the experience in the kitchen.
 - C. Both poets use repeated words and phrases to describe American independence.
 - D. Hughes uses short lines to tell a simple story, while Whitman uses longer lines to celebrate the complex role of the American worker.

11. Langston Hughes cited Walt Whitman as one of his greatest influences, and some believe that Hughes wrote “I, Too, Sing America” in response to Whitman’s “I Hear America Singing.” Using textual evidence from both poems to support your answer, describe how Hughes’s poem builds on Whitman’s poem. Consider aspects such as structure, theme, word choice, etc., as you craft your response.

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**

Lined paper with 20 horizontal lines.

Information for Teachers: Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses of the Texts

Regular practice with complex texts is necessary to prepare students for college and career readiness, as outlined in Reading Standard 10. The texts for this mini-assessment have 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 one¹ 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).

Note: Given the unconventional punctuation of non-prose texts like poetry, quantitative measures cannot accurately determine the grade level of a text, and so are omitted below. In these cases, texts are placed based on qualitative analysis.

2. Place a text or excerpt at a **grade-level** based on a qualitative analysis.

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) and determine the **grade band** of the text.

Figure 1 reproduces the conversion table from the Supplement to Appendix A, showing how the results from various measures can be converted to grade bands.

Figure 1: Updated Text Complexity Grade Bands and Associated Ranges from Multiple Measures⁷

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

¹ 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)

Qualitative Analysis	“I Hear America Singing”	Where to place within the 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
Category	Notes and comments on text, support for placement in this band						
Structure (both story structure or form of piece)	Although Whitman introduces the idea of America “singing” and then lists various laborers and their respective songs, the structure of this poem is complex in that the reader must determine the relationship between the workers and the song and how those aspects support the theme.						
Language Clarity and Conventions	Whitman employs explicit, easy to understand conventionality throughout the poem, though students may initially be challenged with the more complex meaning of “singing.” The vocabulary is largely contemporary and familiar, although some of the roles (<i>mason, ploughboy</i>) may be unfamiliar.						
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 American pride and the everyman concept.						
Levels of Meaning (chiefly literary)/ Purpose (chiefly informational)	There are multiple themes in this text, including: America is a great tapestry comprised of many individuals; there is pride to be earned through hard work; and together, we are greater than the sum of our parts. These multiple themes increase the complexity of the text.						
Overall placement: Grade 8	The multiple themes of varying complexity and unfamiliar usage of “singing” make this text most appropriate for grade 8.						

Qualitative Analysis	“I, Too, Sing America”	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)	This poem includes two time periods, the speaker’s current situation (<i>They send me to eat in the kitchen/When company comes</i>), and the speaker’s anticipated future (<i>Tomorrow/I’ll be at the table</i>). The speaker’s anticipated future is foreshadowed in stanza 2 (<i>But I laugh/And eat well/And grow strong.</i>)						
Language Clarity and Conventions	Hughes’s conventionality is largely explicit and straightforward throughout this poem; however, students must understand that he uses “brother” to mean another member of the human race. The vocabulary is contemporary and familiar.						
Knowledge Demands (life, content, cultural/literary)	This poem explores several themes including segregation, hope, and the negative aspects of American history. Additionally, this poem incorporates several ideas from Whitman’s poem “I Hear America Singing” that will help ground students in the idea of “I, too, sing America.” While the specific experience described in the poem may be unfamiliar, students may be able to relate to feeling ostracized.						
Levels of Meaning (chiefly literary)/ Purpose (chiefly informational)	There are multiple themes in this text, including: America has a shameful history of segregation and prejudice; and even those disenfranchised by American policies have hope in her future. These themes are revealed over the course of the poem. These multiple themes increase the complexity of the text.						
Overall placement: Grade 8	The multiple themes of revealed over the course of the poem and knowledge demands based on the Whitman poem 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, Part A	C	RL.8.1, RL.8.2	<p>A. This line focuses on the specific task one worker completes, which, while a part of the American experience, does not represent the theme of the shared beauty of America.</p> <p>B. This line focuses on the daily experience of one worker, which is a part of, but not the entire, American experience.</p> <p>C. This is the correct answer. This excerpt captures the theme that the beauty of America is built on the unique contributions of individual workers.</p> <p>D. This excerpt focuses on times of day rather than the everyday contributions workers make as they create the American experience.</p>
1, Part A	A		<p>A. This is the correct answer. The “strong melodious songs” of each American contribute to the beauty of the country.</p> <p>B. Although Whitman describes each American singing, the songs reflect the beauty of the many contributing voices. They do not demonstrate the skills of individual workers.</p> <p>C. Although the concept of America as a land of opportunity is a familiar theme, it is not present in this poem.</p> <p>D. Although each American sings his or her own song, the songs do not reflect the worker’s strength.</p>
2	D	RL.8.1, RL.8.5	<p>A. There is little variation in line length throughout the poem. Additionally, although women are mentioned at the end of the poem, their roles are not emphasized to reflect a particular significance.</p> <p>B. Although the jobs listed in the poem are varied, there is little variation in line length throughout the poem.</p> <p>C. Although there are repeated song references throughout the poem, each worker performs a unique function in American society.</p> <p>D. This is the correct answer. The varied list of professions emphasizes the individuality of each citizen.</p>
3	A	RL.8.1, RL.8.4	<p>A. This is the correct answer. The characterization of the mechanics’ songs as “strong” suggests a powerful America built by its workers.</p> <p>B. Although “singing” suggests a joyful feeling, “strong” describes the songs, not the emotions of the laborers.</p> <p>C. Although “strong” suggests power, the poem focuses on the collective work of the individual laborers rather than what would happen if the laborers ceased.</p> <p>D. “Strong” focuses on the greatness the laborers are building now, rather than their hope for the future.</p>

Question Number	Correct Answer(s)	Standards	Rationales for Answer Options
4	Possible CAs: singing blithe party robust friendly melodious	RL.8.1, RL.8.4	<p>Singing – “Singing” evokes a celebratory feeling.</p> <p>Blithe – “Blithe” means happy and without worry.</p> <p>Party – As with “singing,” “party” suggests a celebratory occasion.</p> <p>Robust – “Robust” means strong and healthy, impressive and successful, which are all reasons for joy.</p> <p>Friendly – “Friendly” suggests close, positive relationships.</p> <p>Melodious – “Melodious” means “pleasant sounding,” which evokes a harmonious feeling.</p>
5, Part A	A	RL.8.1, RL.8.2	<p>A. This is the correct answer. Hughes relays the experience of black Americans, often omitted from consideration when describing the American experience.</p> <p>B. Hughes describes how black Americans do not experience life in America the same way as white Americans, not how their lives are similar.</p> <p>C. Although Hughes uses the term “brother,” it is meant to emphasize humanity rather than family members.</p> <p>D. The phrase “...eat well/ and grow strong” represents the speaker’s behavior as he hopes for equality rather than a desire for health and happiness.</p>
5, Part B	D		<p>A. Although this line speaks to a connectedness through the word “brother,” it also emphasizes a separation through the word “darker.”</p> <p>B. This line focuses on the actions of the speaker, as opposed to the larger American society.</p> <p>C. Although this line indicated the speaker’s hope for the future, it does not reflect the speaker’s current belief.</p> <p>D. This is the correct answer. The inclusion of the speaker in “America” is emphasized through the word “too.”</p>
6	B	RL.8.1, RL.8.3	<p>A. The speaker’s movement to the kitchen was not his choice, so his movement to the table does not indicate a decision to develop relationships.</p> <p>B. This is the correct answer. “Tomorrow” indicates the speaker’s desire for progress to be included “at the table” instead of forced into the kitchen.</p> <p>C. The word “tomorrow” indicates that change has not yet happened.</p> <p>D. As opposed to warning against asking more of society, moving to the kitchen actually reflects the speaker making a demand of society to be more inclusive.</p>

Question Number	Correct Answer(s)	Standards	Rationales for Answer Options
7, Part A	C	RL.8.1, RL.8.4	<p>A. "They" indicates others who are separate from the speaker, as opposed to those closest to him.</p> <p>B. Though enemies and rivals would be different from the speaker, the word "they" does not imply the other characters wish the speaker ill, just that they are different.</p> <p>C. This is the correct answer. "They" indicate people who are different from the speaker, as evidenced by them removing him from the table.</p> <p>D. The opening and closing lines of the poem suggests that both the speaker and "they" are Americans.</p>
7, Part B	C		<p>A. Rather than trying to mask the group's identity, the word "they" allows the speaker to focus on himself and his message.</p> <p>B. Although the ambiguous "they" may generate curiosity, the purpose of the pronoun is to direct attention back to the speaker.</p> <p>C. This is the correct answer. By not specifying who "they" are, the reader's attention remains on the speaker.</p> <p>D. "They" is exclusive; rather than invite others in, it divides Americans into distinct groups.</p>
8	See right column	RL.8.1, RL.8.5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Use of simple language and short lines</i> → Heightens the impact of each individual word or phrase The carefully selected, simple language emphasizes the straightforward nature of the speaker's message. 2. <i>Use of transitional words (But, Tomorrow, Besides)</i> → Foreshadows differences between the speaker's present reality and his intended future The use of transitional words throughout the poem focuses the reader on what is, but also, and what could be. 3. <i>Use of similar language in the first and last lines (I, too, sing America/I, too, am America)</i> → Emphasizes the central idea of the poem By beginning and concluding with this key message, the reader cannot escape the speaker's perspective. 4. <i>Use of varying numbers of lines in each stanza</i> → Reflects the speaker's feelings of individuality and independence The varying stanza length show that the speaker feels that he is offers a unique contribution to the American "song," and he wants his contribution counted.

Question Number	Correct Answer(s)	Standards	Rationales for Answer Options
9	A, D	RL.8.1, RL.8.6	<p>A. This is a correct answer. Whitman’s speaker celebrates the individuality of Americans, while Hughes’s speaker is margined by other Americans (“they”).</p> <p>B. Whitman’s speaker does not discuss the challenges of being American, but Hughes’s speaker does.</p> <p>C. Although Whitman’s speaker describes the lives of men and women, Hughes’s speaker focuses only on himself.</p> <p>D. This is a correct answer. Whitman’s speaker focuses on positive aspects of being an American while Hughes’s speaker articulates his concerns about segregation.</p> <p>E. While Whitman’s speaker highlights a list of workers, neither Whitman nor Hughes’s speaker discuss the steps that workers took to achieve success.</p> <p>F. While Whitman’s speaker does represent a positive view of the American experience, Hughes’s speaker does have hope for the future.</p>
10	A	RL.8.1, RL.8.5	<p>A. This is the correct answer. Both Whitman and Hughes use free verse to emphasize freedom.</p> <p>B. The lines in Whitman’s poem vary little in length, but Hughes’s lines do vary.</p> <p>C. Although both poets use repetition, Whitman uses it to highlight the unique contributions of each worker, while Hughes uses it to highlight inequities in American society.</p> <p>D. Whitman does use long lines, but each worker has a simple job to contribute. Additionally, while Hughes does use short lines, his simple story has a complex meaning.</p>

Question Number	Correct Answer(s)	Standards	Rationales for Answer Options
11	See right column	W.8.2, W.8.4, W.8.9, RL.8.1, RL.8.9, L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.3	<p>Top-Score Response would address some or all of the following ideas:</p> <p>How Hughes’s description of separation/exclusion (“I am the darker brother,” “They send me to eat in the kitchen,” “They’ll see how beautiful I am/And be ashamed—”) shows a different perspective/side of life than Whitman’s description of equality/inclusion (“I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,” “Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else”).</p> <p>AND/OR</p> <p>How Whitman’s idea of diversity in America (all the people’s different careers—“mechanics,” “carpenter,” “shoemaker,” etc.) attempts to address all citizens collectively, while Hughes’s poem instead shows the divisions among race/class, as Hughes’s speaker is likely a worker/servant in a higher-class household (“They send me to eat in the kitchen/When company comes,”).</p> <p>AND/OR</p> <p>How Whitman’s speaker shows people who have arrived at the American dream (all characters “Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs”), while Hughes’s speaker shows people who struggle to be included in this dream (“They’ll see how beautiful I am/And be ashamed”) and whose singing does not seem to be acknowledged (“I, too, am America”).</p> <p>AND/OR</p> <p>How both authors use free verse structure to share different perspectives of the freedoms Americans experience.</p>

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
- See the Text Complexity Collection on 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

Sample Scoring Rubric for Text-Based Writing Prompts:

http://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Scoring_Rubric_for_Text-Based_Writing_Prompts.pdf