

New York State Passage Selection Resources for Grade 3-8 Assessments

With the transition to the New York P12 Common Core State Standards (CCSS) significant changes have been made to the New York State Testing Program (NYSTP). The 2013 Grade 3-8 Common Core English Language Arts (ELA) Tests will measure the Grade 3-8 CCSS for ELA & Literacy. As such, the tests will approach reading, writing, and language differently from past assessments. To consistently measure the CCSS for ELA with appropriate rigor, the State has developed detailed resources that may also be useful in the classroom.

The CCSS for ELA clearly communicate that students should be capable of analyzing high-quality texts. To measure the CCSS for ELA, it is vitally important to use passages that possess the necessary characteristics that support deep analysis and are worthy of reading outside of an assessment context. In order to ensure the development of high quality tests that measure the CCSS, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) employed a rigorous process to select and review passages for use on the Grades 3-8 Common Core ELA Tests. This process is grounded in a documented set of passage selection guidelines and passage selection review criteria.

Passage Selection Guidelines

The Passage Selection Guidelines provide a framework that allows for the consistent selection of passages that:

- 1) are appropriately complex for the given grade; and
- 2) contain the specific characteristics necessary to measure different standards.

The first section of the Passage Selection Guidelines is dedicated to grade appropriateness. Selecting texts that are adequately complex is a challenging process. To address this, the Passage Selection Guidelines lay out the quantitative

and qualitative strategy that NYSED uses to determine the grade appropriateness of a given text. Qualitative strategy follows the guidance provided in Appendix A of the CCSS.

Overarching Quality Criteria	Yes/ No/ NA	Explain or Describe
1. Passage merits reading because of its place in the canon, craftsmanship, significance, or content?		
2. Passage is relevant and informative (Informational Passages)?		
3. Content in passage is accurate (Informational Passages)?		
4. Content in Passage is told from a point of view, is persuasive, or presents an argument (Informational Passages)?		
5. Passage is appropriately complex?		Quantitative Rationale: Qualitative Rationale:
6. There are compelling reasons (standards-based or other) to accept passage even though it is potentially provocative?		

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- Criteria 1-4 address evidence of WHY the text is worth reading—does it display exceptional craft as a narrative? Is the passage relevant and accurate, and contain a point of view as an informational passage?
- Included in the quantitative rationales would be established measures of text complexity such as Lexile, Flesch-Kincaid, SourceRater, Reading Maturity Metric, and others.

Included in qualitative measures would be measurements of the qualitative dimensions of text complexity.

Criterion #6 addresses the use of authentic passages and requires evidence to include potentially provocative authentic texts. (See Test Guides for English Language Arts for more information.)

The Passage Selection Guidelines also address text characteristics necessary for measuring the CCSS for ELA. Not all passages, or complete texts, are capable of supporting the analytic demands called for by the CCSS for ELAs. Similarly, few passages are capable of supporting the instruction and assessment of all standards. For each standard, specific attention must be paid to determine whether a passage has the characteristics necessary to address each grade specific standard. The Passage Selection Guidelines describe the grade specific text characteristics needed to develop questions that measure any particular

reading standard. When these characteristics are present, the depth of analysis called for in the standards becomes, potentially, measurable.

Passage Review Criteria

NYSED uses the Passage Review Criteria to evaluate each potential passage and determine whether it could be used to measure the CCSS for ELA. Content experts use the Passage Review Criteria to determine whether each passage suggested for testing use is grade appropriate, fair, and possesses the necessary characteristics to assess each standard. Reviewers record their analysis across each of these broad areas for consideration and use their findings to make recommendations. While very few passages, if any, will meet all of the criteria, a passage that makes it onto a State test will be deemed by at least three content experts to be grade appropriate, fair, and of sufficient quality to measure the CCSS with fidelity.

How Instructors can use New York State Passage Protocol Document

This document, while intended for use by assessment developers and reviewers, contains the same criteria for quality that ELA teachers should use when selecting texts for a CCSS-aligned ELA classroom.

When teachers wish to determine the appropriateness of a text for instruction, they will:

1. Evaluate the quality of the text (or portion of the text highlighted for close reading) using the **Overarching Quality Criteria** to determine or confirm that the text is appropriately complex and worth reading.
2. Use the **Suitability for Item Development** section to develop the lesson planning around text-based questions and evidence-based discussions.

3. Consider the section on **Key Ideas and Details** to outline the main themes of a selected literary text (or excerpt of a text) and determine if the themes are clear and developed with support.
4. Use the **Suitability for Item Development** section to determine if the text can support targeted standards. For example, if an 8th grade teacher is targeting R.I.8 and wants to focus on evaluation and delineation of an author's argument, he/she will need a text that contains not only argumentation, but also well-evidenced claims and unsubstantiated or irrelevant claims.

This level of specificity regarding the texts and their relationship to the standards is relevant and useful not only for planning on the lesson and unit level, but also for planning around professional development and necessary changes to teaching practices to implement the CCSS.

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