

PRACTICE TEST

English Language Arts

Grade 8

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Student Name

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School Name

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District Name



# Grade 8 English Language Arts

## PRACTICE TEST

This practice test contains 8 questions.

### **Directions**

Read each passage and question carefully. Then answer each question as well as you can. You must record all answers in your Practice Test Answer Document.

For most questions, you will mark your answers by filling in the circles in your Practice Test Answer Document. Make sure you darken the circles completely. Do not make any marks outside of the circles. If you need to change an answer, be sure to erase your first answer completely.

Two questions will ask you to write an essay. Write each essay in the space provided in your Practice Test Answer Document. Only essays written within the provided space will be scored.

**Today you will read and answer questions about a story of a man seeking to complete an important mission. When you have finished reading and answering questions, you will write a narrative story using details from your reading.**

Read the passage from *The Seven Keys of Balabad*. Then answer the questions.

from *The Seven Keys of Balabad*

by Paul Haven

- 1 Bahauddin Shah stumbled through the darkened passageway, gripping the cold stone wall for balance and keeping his head low to avoid the rocky ceiling. The sound of his footsteps echoed back at him through the gloom, and his heart thumped beneath his loose-fitting shirt.
- 2 The old man wore a heavy iron key chain around his belt, and it weighed down on him in more ways than one.
- 3 There was so little time!
- 4 Bahauddin held a small lantern in his right hand that threw his shadow onto the dark red wall above him, making his face seem impossibly long and his beard even thicker than it really was, which was pretty thick indeed. The shadow would have scared the living daylights out of anyone who'd seen it, except there was no daylight down there, and certainly nobody living to be scared of it.
- 5 The tunnel twisted and turned. Every once in a while smaller passageways veered off at odd angles into the darkness. Sometimes Bahauddin came out into vast open rooms that rose up into shapeless voids. There were even enormous darkened ponds, wretched and foul-smelling, like the stink of rotten eggs.
- 6 Bahauddin covered his nose with a piece of old cloth and tried to stay focused. A man could easily get lost in the Salt Caverns.
- 7 In fact, that was the whole idea.
- 8 But Bahauddin would not get lost. He knew every corner of this underground world, and his old body pulled him toward the exit like a falcon returning to his master's arm.
- 9 Bahauddin had just turned into a wet, narrow passage and was examining some black marking on the wall when the thud of cannon fire above him jolted him to the ground. Debris rained down from the ceiling as he knelt on the floor, catching his breath.

- 10 His hand groped for the key chain, and he smiled when his fingers felt the cold iron.
- 11 They were all there. All seven of them.
- 12 The blast that had knocked Bahauddin to the ground could not have been more than twenty feet above him. He was nearly at the surface.
- 13 For the first time, Bahauddin allowed himself to think what he would find up there, twelve hours after he had set off on the most important mission of his life. What would be left of his city, his family, the palace?
- 14 "It does not matter," the old man reassured himself, brushing his clothes off in the darkness. "Baladis are survivors. We will rebuild. It just might take some time."
- 15 The outsiders would eventually lose interest, just like all the other outsiders who had come before them, Bahauddin thought.
- 16 Balabad's great defense was that it was impossible to hold on to, and any rational outsider eventually came to the same conclusion. There were vast deserts in the south, impossibly tall mountain ranges in the east, endless plains in the west, and ten thousand feuding tribes in the north, all angry about some long-ago slight, and all willing to drag a foreigner into their squabbles.
- 17 Of course, it usually took a decade or so before the invaders would see that it was not worth sticking around, for invaders do not easily give up.
- 18 Bahauddin reached the end of the narrow passageway and held his lantern above his head. A small shaft ran straight up from the stone ceiling, about the size of a chimney and just big enough for a man to climb through. You would never have seen it had you not known where to look.

*The Seven Keys of Balabad* by Paul Haven. Text copyright © 2009 by Paul Haven. Reprinted by permission of Random House Children's Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

**1 Part A**

How does paragraph 1 help to develop the plot of the passage?

- A. The paragraph creates admiration for Bahauddin Shah by describing his determination.
- B. The paragraph establishes the conflict by explaining the reason Bahauddin Shah is alone in the dark.
- C. The paragraph creates suspense by providing sensory details in the scene.
- D. The paragraph foreshadows later events in the passage by describing the rising action.

**Part B**

Which additional quotation from the passage helps to develop the plot in the same way as paragraph 1?

- A. "He knew every corner of this underground world, and his old body pulled him toward the exit like a falcon returning to his master's arm." (paragraph 8)
- B. "Bahauddin had just turned into a wet, narrow passage and was examining some black marking on the wall when the thud of cannon fire above him jolted him to the ground." (paragraph 9)
- C. ". . . ten thousand feuding tribes in the north, all angry about some long-ago slight, and all willing to drag a foreigner into their squabbles." (paragraph 16)
- D. "Bahauddin reached the end of the narrow passageway and held his lantern above his head." (paragraph 18)

**2 Part A**

Which sentence states a central idea of the passage?

- A. Bahauddin Shah is lost in a vast underground cave, and he is frightened.
- B. Bahauddin Shah is the guardian of an important secret that will allow the people of his city to survive after a destructive attack.
- C. The Salt Caverns are a secret underground hiding place for the citizens of the city, and Bahauddin Shah is the only one who can open the caverns.
- D. Outsiders who come to conquer Bahauddin Shah's city soon realize they are in very hostile territory.

**Part B**

Which detail from the passage **best** states the central idea?

- A. "The sound of his footsteps echoed back at him through the gloom, and his heart thumped beneath his loose-fitting shirt." (paragraph 1)
- B. "Baladis are survivors. We will rebuild. It just might take some time." (paragraph 14)
- C. "Balabad's great defense was that it was impossible to hold on to, and any rational outsider eventually came to the same conclusion." (paragraph 16)
- D. "You would never have seen it had you not known where to look." (paragraph 18)

This question is a text-based essay question. Write your essay in the space provided in your Practice Test Answer Document. Your essay should:

- Present and develop a narrative that uses details from the passage.
- Include correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

3 Write a continuation of the story of Bahauddin Shah using details from the passage. Describe what you think might happen after Bahauddin Shah climbs out of the Salt Caverns. What obstacles might he face, and what actions might he take to overcome them?

**Read the two passages about the experiences of a boy and a girl in school. Then answer the questions that follow.**

The following passage from “Celeste’s Heart” is about a young girl attending school in Argentina.

from “Celeste’s Heart”

by Aida Bortnik

- 1 Celeste went to a school that had two yards. In the front yard they held official ceremonies. In the back yard the Teacher made them stand in line, one behind the other at arm’s distance, keeping the arm stretched out straight in front, the body’s weight on both legs, and in silence. One whole hour. Once for two whole hours. All right, not hours. But two breaks passed, and the bell rang four times before they were allowed back into the classroom. And the girls from the other classes, who played and laughed during the first break as if nothing had happened, stopped playing during the second break. They stood with their backs to the wall and watched them. They watched the straight line, one behind the other at arm’s length, in the middle of the school yard. And no one laughed. And when the Teacher clapped her hands to indicate that the punishment was over, Celeste was the only one who didn’t stretch, who didn’t complain, who didn’t rub her arm, who didn’t march smartly back into the classroom. When they sat down, she stared quietly at the Teacher. She stared at her in the same way she used to stare at the new words on the blackboard, the ones whose meaning she didn’t know, whose exact purpose she ignored.
- 2 That evening, as she was putting her younger brother to bed, he asked once again: “When am I going to go to school?” But that evening she didn’t laugh, and she didn’t think up an answer. She sat down and hugged him for a while, as she used to do every time she realized how little he was, how little he knew. And she hugged him harder because she suddenly imagined him in the middle of the school yard, with his arm stretched out measuring the distance, the body tense, feeling cold and angry and afraid, in a line in which all the others were as small as he was.
- 3 And the next time the Teacher got mad at the class, Celeste knew what she had to do.
- 4 She didn’t lift her arm.
- 5 The Teacher repeated the order, looking at her somewhat surprised. But Celeste wouldn’t lift her arm. The Teacher came up to her and asked her, almost with concern, what was the matter. And Celeste told her. She told

- her that afterward the arm hurt. And that they were all cold and afraid. And that one didn't go to school to be hurt, cold, and afraid.
- 6 Celeste couldn't hear herself, but she could see her Teacher's face as she spoke. And it seemed like a strange face, a terribly strange face. And her friends told her afterwards that she had spoken in a very loud voice, not shouting, just a very loud voice. Like when one recited a poem full of big words, standing on a platform, in the school's front yard. Like when one knows one is taking part in a solemn ceremony and important things are spoken of, things that happened a long time ago, but things one remembers because they made the world a better place to live than it was before.
- 7 And almost every girl in the class put down her arm. And they walked back into the classroom. And the Teacher wrote a note in red ink in Celeste's exercise book. And when her father asked her what she had done, and she told him, her father stood there staring at her for a long while, but as if he couldn't see her, as if he were staring at something inside her or beyond her. And then he smiled and signed the book without saying anything. And while she blotted his signature with blotting paper, he patted her head, very gently, as if Celeste's head were something very very fragile that a heavy hand could break.
- 8 That night Celeste couldn't sleep because of an odd feeling inside her. A feeling that had started when she had refused to lift her arm, standing with the others in the line, a feeling of something growing inside her breast. It burned a bit, but it wasn't painful. And she thought that if one's arms and legs and other parts of one's body grew, the things inside had to grow too. And yet legs and arms grow without one being aware, evenly and bit by bit. But the heart probably grows like this: by jumps. And she thought it seemed like a logical thing: the heart grows when one does something one hasn't done before, when one learns something one didn't know before, when one feels something different and better for the first time. And the odd sensation felt good. And she promised herself that her heart would keep growing. And growing. And growing.

"Celeste's Heart" by Aida Bortnik (translated by Alberto Manguel), from *Sudden Fiction Latino: Short-Short Stories from the United States and Latin America*. Copyright © by Alberto Manguel. Reprinted by permission of Schavelzon Graham Agencia Literaria, S.L.

In “Principals and Principles,” writer Daniel Handler recalls a time when he was a young boy in school.

## Principals and Principles

by Daniel Handler

- 1 In San Francisco the weather never gets hot, and when it does it lasts only three days. On the first day, the hot weather is a surprise, and everyone wanders around carrying their sweaters. On the second day, everyone enjoys the heat. And on the third day, the cold weather returns and is just as surprising, and everyone wanders around shivering.
- 2 One of these three-day heat waves arrived when I was in seventh grade, and on the first day everyone was grumpy because we had all dressed for fog and gloom and now had to drag our sweaters all over the school. We all agreed that the next day we’d dress for warm weather, but just as the day ended, the principal made an announcement over the loudspeaker. “Students at Herbert Hoover Middle School are not allowed to wear shorts,” she said, in the tone of voice she always used—a tone of voice that sounded friendly but was actually unbearably wicked.
- 3 Everyone groaned—everyone but me. “She can’t do that,” I said, and reached into the back of my binder. On the first day of school, we’d all received a pamphlet: “Student Rights and Responsibilities.” For some reason I’d saved it, and I read one of our rights out loud: “Students have the right to free dress.” I convinced everyone to wear shorts the next day in order to protest the wicked principal’s unfair cancellation of one of our rights.
- 4 The next day was wonderful because we were all dressed for the heat and nobody had to drag their sweaters around, but of course, I was sent to the principal’s office—someone had ratted on me. (To this day, I suspect Nancy Cutler, but I can’t prove it.) She asked me if I had told everyone to wear shorts. I said yes. She said shorts were distracting to some of the teachers. I said that free dress was one of our rights. She said that shorts led students to have water fights. I said that free dress was one of our rights. She said that she was the principal and she was in charge. I said that free dress was one of our rights. She kept pointing at me. I kept pointing at the pamphlet. The principal was one of those people who yelled at you until you cried, but I forced myself not to cry, biting my lip and blinking very, very fast, until at last she gave up and I was allowed to return to my classmates, who applauded me. In celebration, we all wore shorts the next day, too, even though we knew the cold weather would return, and it did, and we were shivering and miserable.

- 5 In eighth grade we got a new version of the pamphlet. Instead of “Students have the right to free dress,” it read, “Students have the responsibility to dress appropriately.” I threw it away.
- 6 If you stand up for your rights, you can count on the fact that the wicked people will find sneaky ways to change the rules. But you should stand up for your rights anyway, because there aren’t enough sunny days in the world, and everyone should enjoy them.

“Principals and Principles” by Daniel Handler, from *Guys Write for Guys Read*. Copyright © 2005 by Daniel Handler. Reprinted by permission of Charlotte Sheedy Literary Agency on behalf of the author.

4 Based on paragraphs 6 and 7 of “Celeste’s Heart,” how do Celeste’s classmates **most likely** feel after her speech?

- A. fearful
- B. amused
- C. confused
- D. appreciative

5 Read the description from paragraph 7 of “Celeste’s Heart” in the box.

And then he smiled and signed the book without saying anything.

What do the father’s actions in the description **mainly** represent?

- A. his loyalty
- B. his strength
- C. his approval
- D. his gratitude

- 6 In paragraph 5 of “Principals and Principles,” what is the **main** reason the author is upset by the new version of the pamphlet?
- A. He must remember the new dress code.
  - B. He will be unable to dress how he wants.
  - C. He thinks the principal is being impatient.
  - D. He believes the principal used her authority unfairly.
- 7 Based on “Principals and Principles,” which of the following sentences **best** describes the author both as a student and as an adult?
- A. He treats others with care.
  - B. He avoids conflict in his life.
  - C. He takes the advice of others.
  - D. He is motivated by his values.

This question is a text-based essay question. Write your essay in the space provided in your Practice Test Answer Document. Your essay should:

- Present and develop a central idea.
- Provide evidence/details from the passage(s).
- Include correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

8 Write an essay explaining how the themes in “Celeste’s Heart” and “Principals and Principles” are similar. Be sure to use information from **both** passages to develop your essay.

**MASSACHUSETTS COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

Grade 8 English Language Arts  
Practice Test Answer Document

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

District Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Last Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

First Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

**MARKING INSTRUCTIONS**

- Use a No. 2 pencil only.
- Do not use ink, ballpoint, or felt-tip pens.
- Make solid marks that fill the circles completely.
- Erase cleanly any marks you wish to change.
- Do not make any stray marks on this form.
- Do not fold, tear, or damage this form.

1. Part A Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ

Part B Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ

2. Part A Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ

Part B Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ











