The Pennsylvania System
of School Assessment

Sample Passage-Based Essay

2012–2013
Grade 4
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General Introduction

The Pennsylvania Department of Education provides districts and schools with tools to assist in delivering focused instructional programs aligned with the Pennsylvania Common Core Assessment Anchors. These tools include Assessment Anchor documents, assessment handbooks, and content-based item and scoring samplers. This Item and Scoring Sampler is a useful tool for Pennsylvania educators to use in the preparation of local instructional programs as well as preparing students for the statewide assessment.

What Is Included

This sampler contains a stimulus reading passage with a Passage-Based Essay (PBE) test question that has been written to align to the Assessment Anchors that are based on the Pennsylvania Common Core Standards (PACC). This sampler provides an example of a new type of question that will appear for the first time as an embedded field test item on the 2013 Reading PSSA and be used operationally on the spring 2015 PACC-based ELA PSSA. This sample test question has been through a rigorous review process to ensure alignment with the Assessment Anchors. The PBE question will be included at grades 4 through 8 and may take up to 30 minutes to complete.

Passage-Based Essay: Unlike a writing prompt test item, the Passage-Based Essay test question is a text-dependent analysis, based on a passage or passage-set each student has read during the test event. Both Literature and Informational Texts are addressed through this item type. PBE questions are used to assess a student’s ability to read critically and draw evidence from a passage to support analysis and reflection. Students must also draw on basic writing skills while inferring and synthesizing information from the passage in order to develop a comprehensive, holistic essay response. The demand required of a student’s reading and writing skills in response to a PBE question coincides with the similar demands required for a student to be college- and career-ready. The PBE question is scored using a 4-point holistic scoring guideline. This guideline is included in this document.

Purpose and Uses

This sampler may be used as an example for creating Passage-Based Essay questions at the classroom level, and it may also be copied and used as part of a local instructional program. In addition, classroom teachers may find it beneficial to have students respond to the test question in this sampler. Educators can use the sampler as a guide to score the responses independently or together with colleagues within a school or district.

1 The permission to copy and/or use these materials does not extend to commercial purposes.
Read the following passage about a young person’s first day at a new school. Then answer question 1.

Mystery Club
by Maurissa Guibord

As the school bus rumbled toward home, Marisa thought about the reasons she didn’t want to go to Penmark School. First of all, she’d had to leave all her friends in California to come to Maine. Second, her family needed to move two weeks after the school year started so that Mom could start her new job at the medical center. And third? Well, Marisa couldn’t think of a third, but she figured those two were enough for her first day.

Marisa stared out at the fields rolling by. She sighed and reached into her backpack. At least she had a good mystery to read. But she hadn’t even read a whole sentence from her book before a voice next to her made her jump.

“Hey, I’ve read that one. It’s great.”

Marisa turned to see a girl in a fuzzy purple sweater. “I’m Shelly,” said the girl, and she grinned so hard her gums showed.

Marisa felt herself smiling back. “I’m Marisa,” she said. “We have the same homeroom, right?”

Shelly nodded. Then she pointed to the book Marisa held. “I have to tell you—,” she began.

“No!” Marisa covered her ears with her hands. “Don’t tell me how it ends!”

Shelly laughed. “I was just going to say that I have the next one in that series. You could borrow it.”

“Oh,” said Marisa. “Thanks.”

“Besides,” said Shelly, “you never give away the ending of a mystery. That’s one of the first rules of Mystery Club.”

Marisa wasn’t sure that she had heard right. “Mystery Club?” Shelly leaned across the aisle. “There’s a bunch of us from school who like reading mysteries, solving puzzles, decoding messages, that kind of thing.”

“Could I join?” Marisa asked.

“Sure,” said Shelly. “But to become a member you have to solve a mystery.”

Marisa sat up straight in her seat. “I could try.”

“OK,” said Shelly. “I’ll talk to the others.”

GO ON
Shelly didn’t waste time. The next day at school Marisa found a note on purple paper tucked into her history book:

**Girls’ bathroom: Find the message in the mirror.**

*This must be my mystery—to find a hidden message,* thought Marisa. That shouldn’t be so hard.

In the girls’ bathroom, Marisa looked at the mirror over the sink. It looked like a plain old mirror with a stainless-steel frame. There wasn’t any note stuck to it.

*Well, what did I expect?* Marisa thought. *A big sign written in red crayon?* This was a mystery, after all.

She read the note again. *Find the message in the mirror.* Marisa tried to remember any mirrors she had read about in mystery stories. Sometimes there was something behind a mirror. She tried lifting it away from the wall, but it was fastened tight and didn’t budge.

Maybe the message was reflected in the mirror somehow. Marisa peered into the mirror from every angle. She could see the bathroom stalls, the white-speckled tile floor, and the fluorescent lights on the ceiling. But no message.

She looked again at the note and held both sides up to the mirror. Nothing.

*Think mystery,* she told herself. What about invisible ink? Marisa had heard of using lemon juice to write a message on paper, then heating up the paper to make it show.

What could you use on a mirror? Marisa couldn’t think of a thing. Marisa leaned her forehead against the mirror and sighed.

Her breath made a little cloud on the mirror, and on it Marisa could see streaks and smudges where people had touched the glass. She hadn’t noticed those before. Then she realized why she hadn’t. Because they’d been invisible!

Excitedly, Marisa breathed again on the mirror, then again, trying different spots. Finally she clouded up the mirror in one corner. An M, then a C appeared. Mystery Club!

Someone had simply written with a finger on the mirror! It took a few breaths to uncover the message:

```
M.C.
Library
3:00
```

“Hi, Marisa,” said Shelly with her big grin as Marisa arrived exactly at 3:00 on the library steps. “Welcome to Mystery Club. The others are inside.”

Marisa smiled. She thought of two reasons why she liked Penmark School. Shelly—and now Mystery Club. There were probably more, but those were enough for today.
When Shelly tells Marisa about the Mystery Club she is immediately interested and asks, “Could I join?” In order to join Marisa first has to solve a mystery. Write an essay explaining the importance of solving the mystery to both Marisa and the members of the Mystery Club. Use evidence from the passage to support your explanation.
**PASSAGE-BASED ESSAY SCORING GUIDELINE**

**Item #1**

This item will be reported under Category E, Test Dependent Analysis.

**Assessment Anchor:**

E04.E.1–Evidence-Based Analysis of Text

**Specific Assessment Anchor Descriptor addressed by this item:**

E04.E.1.1–Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Score Point</th>
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| **4**       | - Effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating in-depth understanding of the text(s)  
- Effective introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s)  
- Strong organizational structure that effectively supports the focus and ideas  
- Thorough analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to effectively support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences  
- Substantial, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant key details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions  
- Substantial reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose  
- Skillful use of transitions to link ideas  
- Effective use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events  
- Few errors, if any, are present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present do not interfere with meaning |
| **3**       | - Adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient understanding of the text(s)  
- Clear introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s)  
- Appropriate organizational structure that adequately supports the focus and ideas  
- Clear analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences  
- Sufficient, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions  
- Sufficient reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose  
- Appropriate use of transitions to link ideas  
- Appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events  
- Some errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present seldom interfere with meaning |
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<th>Score</th>
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| 2     | Inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial understanding of the text(s)  
|       | Weak introduction, development, and/or conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea somewhat related to the text(s)  
|       | Weak organizational structure that inconsistently supports the focus and ideas  
|       | Weak or inconsistent analysis of explicit and/or implicit meanings from text(s) that somewhat supports claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences  
|       | Vague reference to the text(s) using some details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions  
|       | Weak reference to the main idea(s) and relevant details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose  
|       | Inconsistent use of transitions to link ideas  
|       | Inconsistent use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events  
|       | Errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present may interfere with meaning |
| 1     | Minimally addresses part(s) of the task, demonstrating inadequate understanding of the text(s)  
|       | Minimal evidence of an introduction, development, and/or conclusion  
|       | Minimal evidence of an organizational structure  
|       | Insufficient or no analysis of the text(s); may or may not support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences  
|       | Insufficient reference to the text(s) using few details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions  
|       | Minimal reference to the main idea(s) and/or relevant details of the text(s)  
|       | Few, if any, transitions to link ideas  
|       | Little or no use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s)  
|       | Many errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present often interfere with meaning |
| Non-scorable | BLK (blank) ... No response or written refusal to respond or too brief to determine response  
|       | OT...............Off task/topic  
|       | LOE...............Response in a language other than English  
|       | IL...............Illegible |
1. When Shelly tells Marisa about the Mystery Club she is immediately interested and asks, “Could I join?” In order to join Marisa first has to solve a mystery. Write an essay explaining the importance of solving the mystery to both Marisa and the members of the Mystery Club. Use evidence from the passage to support your explanation.

This is how solving the mystery is important to both Marisa and the club members. It is important for the club members because they need to know if Marisa can solve a mystery and if she has the dedication to do so. When Marisa asks if she can join the Mystery Club, Shelly replies, “But to become a member you have to solve a mystery.” It is also important to them because they all love mystery. So does Marisa. So, if they find that Marisa is worthy and good enough they have another member and friend. They all probably want to give Marisa a chance. They know that Marisa is new and they want
to help her get friends. They will all probably become friends because of their love for mystery. That’s why it was important for the club members that Marisa passes the test before becoming a member of the Mystery Club. It is important for Marisa to solve the mystery because she loves mysteries and will probably make some friends because of it. Marisa is also new and isn’t fond of the school. When Shelly offers to have her be in the Mystery Club, Marisa is excited. Marisa wants friends and the Mystery Club seems like a great way to get them. Marisa also wants to prove that she’s good at solving mysteries by joining. That is why it is important for both Marisa and the club members that Marisa can solve the mystery.
Response Score: 4

The response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating an in-depth, analytic understanding of the text. The student analyzes both explicit meanings ("But to become a member you have to solve a mystery") and implicit meanings ("if they find that Marisa is worthy and good enough they have another member and friend") from the text, effectively supporting the main idea (solving a mystery and making friends). Substantial, accurate, and direct references to the text ("they all love mystery" and "When Shelly offers to have her be in the Mystery Club Marisa is excited") support the explanation of the importance of solving the mystery to both Marisa and the members of the Mystery Club. The student uses a strong organizational structure, including an introductory statement, that supports the focus and ideas expressed in the response. Precise language ("dedication," "worthy," "fond") is effectively used to explain the topic and convey events. Few errors in sentence formation, grammar, usage, and conventions are present. The student confuses “there” with “their,” but this does not interfere with meaning.
The mystery is important to Marisa and the members of the mystery club because she loves mysteries and wants to prove to Shelly and the other club members that she can solve a mystery. The club wants to get more members. The importance of the mystery to Marisa is that if she figures it out, she could be excepted into the mystery club and make more friends like Shelly. I know this because she is new at school, so she might need friends.

The mystery is important to the group members because if she cannot figure out the mystery, then she will not come at 3:00 to the library and will not be in the mystery club. And they want her to join the club to help solve mysteries. Now you know some reasons why the mystery was important to Marisa and the mystery club.
Response Score: 3

The response adequately explains the importance of solving the mystery to both Marisa and the members of the Mystery Club, thus demonstrating sufficient understanding of the text. The student analyzes both explicit and implicit meanings from the text to support the main idea (solving a mystery and making friends). Direct reference to the text (“make more friends like Shelly” and “come at 3:00 to the library”) is provided to support the explanation. Additional relevant details, examples, or quotes would strengthen the analysis. The student employs an appropriate organizational structure by first explaining the importance of solving the mystery to Marisa and then explaining the importance of solving the mystery to the members of the Mystery Club. The response also includes an introductory statement explaining the importance of solving the mystery to Marisa and the club members, ideas grouped in a logical order, and a concluding statement related to the topic and purpose. Appropriate use of language and transitions (e.g., “so,” “then,” “Now”) is evident throughout the response. Minor errors in sentence formation (the first sentence is overcoordinated), spelling (“excepted,” “shool”), and conventions do not interfere with meaning.
E04.E.1.1 Response Score: 2

1. When Shelly tells Marisa about the Mystery Club she is immediately interested and asks, “Could I join?” In order to join Marisa first has to solve a mystery. Write an essay explaining the importance of solving the mystery to both Marisa and the members of the Mystery Club. Use evidence from the passage to support your explanation.

Solving the mystery was important because if she never solved the mystery she would never have been in the Mystery Club because in the story Shelly said to Marissa, “You will have to solve the mystery and if you don’t you will not be in the club”. Another reason is if Marissa solved the mystery she would be better friends with Shelly because they would spend more time together.
Response Score: 2

The response addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial understanding of the text. There is more focus on the importance of solving the mystery to Marisa than on the importance of solving it to the members of the Mystery Club. The student includes a weak reference to the main idea (solving a mystery and making friends) as well as other text references (“You will have to solve the mystery and if you don’t you will not be in the club” and “she would be better friends with Shelly”). However, the analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from the text to support claims, ideas, and inferences is weak. The response would be strengthened by clear reference to the main idea and an explanation of relevant key details to support the writer’s purpose, thus demonstrating analysis. A weak organizational structure is present. The response lacks an introduction, and the ideas within the body are not developed. There is inconsistent use of precise language throughout the response. Inconsistent use of transitions links ideas weakly. Errors are present in sentence formation (e.g., the opening sentence is a run-on) as well as in usage ("would of never") and spelling (the spelling of Marisa is inconsistent throughout the response). The errors that are present sometimes interfere with meaning.
1. When Shelly tells Marisa about the Mystery Club she is immediately interested and asks, “Could I join?” In order to join Marisa first has to solve a mystery. Write an essay explaining the importance of solving the mystery to both Marisa and the members of the Mystery Club. Use evidence from the passage to support your explanation.

When Shelly tells Marisa about the Mystery Club she said, “Could I join?

First, when Shelly tells Marisa about the Mystery she really wanted to come because her best friend was going.

Next, she really wanted to go because she was wondering about what was the mystery club about. Then she really said that because she wants to know about what it was like if it was a dance club or a party club. Last, Shelly and Marisa went to the Mystery Club because they said that it was fun.
Response Score: 1

The response minimally addresses part of the task (the student touches on the idea of being friends with Shelly), demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the text. Minimal reference to the main idea (solving a mystery and making friends) is evident, and the response does not demonstrate analysis of the text. References to the text (“could I join”) are insufficient and disconnected. Some details provided are inaccurate (Marisa wants to go to the Mystery Club “because her best friend was going”) or not text based (“if it was a dance club or a party club”) and therefore do not support the explanation. There is minimal evidence of an organizational structure. The response lacks an introduction and conclusion. The ideas within the body are not developed and lack focus and coherence. The response lacks precise language or vocabulary drawn from the text. Some transitions are employed (“first,” “next,” “then,” “last”); however, they neither clearly link ideas nor support the explanation. Errors in sentence formation, grammar, and usage are present.
Acknowledgements

“Mystery Club” copyright © 2008 by Highlights for Children, Inc., Columbus, Ohio.
Sample Passage-Based Essay