



# PSSA

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

# English Language Arts

## Grade 5

# Item Sampler Scoring Guide

2025–2026



Pennsylvania  
Department of Education

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# INFORMATION ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

## Introduction

### General Introduction

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) provides districts and schools with tools to assist in delivering focused instructional programs aligned with the Pennsylvania Core Standards (PCS). These tools include Academic Standards, Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content (AAEC) documents, assessment handbooks, and content-based online Item Samplers, and a Sampler Guide. The online Item Sampler is intended to be used in conjunction with this Sampler Guide as a useful tool for Pennsylvania educators in preparing local instructional programs by providing samples of test item types and scored student responses. The online Item Sampler and this Sampler Guide are not designed to be used as a pretest, a curriculum, or any other benchmark for operational testing.

The online Item Sampler is available in Braille format. For more information regarding Braille, call (717) 901-2238.

### Pennsylvania Core Standards (PCS)

The online Item Sampler and this Sampler Guide contain examples of test questions designed to assess the Pennsylvania Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content aligned to the PCS.

### What Is Included

The online Item Sampler contains stimulus reading passages with test questions, Conventions of Standard English questions, and a text-dependent analysis (TDA) prompt that have been written to align to the Assessment Anchors, which are based on the PCS. The sample test questions model the types of items that may appear on an operational PSSA. Each sample test question has been through a rigorous review process to ensure alignment with the Assessment Anchors prior to being piloted in an embedded field test within a PSSA assessment and then used operationally on a PSSA assessment. Answer keys, scoring guidelines, and any related stimulus materials are also included. To access the Online Item Sampler, go to <https://portal.te.drcedirect.com/PA>. Select Item Samplers. Then, select the subject and grade levels as needed. Additionally, this Sampler Guide PDF provides sample student responses for each TDA prompt item to demonstrate the range of responses that students provided in response to these items.

## Purpose and Uses

The items in the online Item Sampler may be used<sup>1</sup> as examples for creating assessment items at the classroom level. Classroom teachers may find it beneficial to have students respond to the TDA prompt question in this online Item Sampler. Educators may then use this Sampler Guide as a model to score the responses either independently or together with colleagues within a school or district. This Sampler Guide also includes the *General Description of Scoring Guidelines for ELA TDA Questions* that students will have access to during a PSSA ELA administration. The general description of scoring guidelines may be distributed to students for use during local assessments and may also be used by educators when scoring local assessments.

## Item Format and Scoring Guidelines

**Multiple Choice:** Each test question of this type has four answer choices. Some MC test questions are based on a stimulus reading passage, while Conventions of Standard English MC test questions are independent of a passage. Each correct response to an MC test question is worth one point.

**Evidence-Based Selected-Response:** Each two-part EBSR question is designed to elicit an evidence-based response from a student who has read either a literature or an informational text passage. In Part One, which is similar to an MC question, the student analyzes a passage and chooses the best answer from four answer choices. In Part Two, the student utilizes evidence from the passage to select one or more answers based on the response to Part One. Part Two is different from an MC question in that there may be more than one correct answer. Each EBSR test question is worth either two or three points, and students can receive points for providing a correct response to Part One and/or for providing one or more correct responses in Part Two.

**Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt:** The TDA prompt is a text-dependent analysis prompt based on a passage or passage set that each student has read during the test event. There are three response pages in the paper-and-pencil format and up to 5,000 characters in the online format. Both literature and informational text passages are addressed through this item type. Students use explicit and implicit evidence to make inferences leading to a conclusion or generalization in response to the task stated in the prompt. Students construct a well-written analytical essay to communicate inferences and connections to the evidence using grade-appropriate writing skills. The TDA response is scored using a holistic scoring guideline on a 1–4-point scale.

**Non-score Considerations:** For TDA items, responses can be designated as non-scorable (NS). While every effort is made to score each student response, a response may receive an NS designation if it falls into one of five categories:

**Blank** – Blank, entirely erased, entirely crossed out, or consists entirely of whitespace

**Refusal** – Refusal to respond to the task

**Non-scorable** – In a language other than English, incoherent, illegible, insufficient, unrelated to the passage, or consisting solely or almost solely of text copied from the passage

**Off Topic** – Makes no reference to the item or passage but is not an intentional refusal

**Copied** – Consists of text copied from the item and/or test directions

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<sup>1</sup> The permission to copy and/or use these materials does not extend to commercial purposes.

## **Testing Time and Mode of Test Delivery for the PSSA**

The PSSA is delivered in an online format. The estimated response time for each item type is listed below.

- **Multiple-Choice:** 1.5 minutes
- **Evidence-Based Selected-Response:** 3 to 5 minutes
- **Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt:** 45 minutes

During an official test administration, students are given as much additional time as is necessary to complete the test questions.

## **English Language Arts**

The online Item Sampler is composed of 2 passages, 7 passage-based MC questions, 1 EBSR question, 1 TDA prompt, and 3 Conventions of Standard English MC questions.

Each question is accompanied by a table that contains the Assessment Anchor and Eligible Content coding, answer key(s), depth of knowledge, testing data, and annotations.

## Item and Scoring Sampler Format

The online Item Sampler and this Sampler Guide include the test directions and scoring guidelines that appeared in the PSSA English Language Arts assessments. Each MC item contains a table that includes the item alignment, the answer key, the depth of knowledge (DOK) level, points possible, the percentage<sup>2</sup> of students who chose each answer option, and a brief answer-option analysis or rationale. The EBSR item is followed by a table that includes the item alignment, the answer key to Part One of the item, the answer key to Part Two of the item, the DOK level, points possible, the mean student score, and a brief answer-option analysis for each part of the item. The TDA prompt is followed by a table that includes the item alignment, the DOK level, and the mean student score.

**Example Multiple-Choice Item Information Table**

Item-Specific Information	Item Statistics
Alignment:	<i>p</i> -value A:
Answer Key:	<i>p</i> -value B:
Depth of Knowledge:	<i>p</i> -value C:
Points Possible:	<i>p</i> -value D:

Option Annotations
Brief answer-option analysis or rationale.

**Example Evidence-Based Selected-Response Item Information Table**

Category	Answer Key	Item Scoring
Alignment:	Part One:	Points Possible:
Depth of Knowledge:	Part Two:	Mean Score:

Option Annotations
Brief answer-option analysis or rationale.

**Example Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt Information Table**

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	Assigned AAEC
Depth of Knowledge	Assigned DOK
Points Possible	Number of Points
Mean Score	Average Score

<sup>2</sup> All *p*-value percentages listed in the item information tables have been rounded.

**Directions for Text-Dependent Analysis (TDA) Prompts:**

The English Language Arts TDA prompt will ask you to analyze the passage and use evidence from the passage to write an essay.

For the TDA Essay:

- Be sure to read the passage and the TDA prompt carefully.
- Review the Writer's Checklist to help you plan and organize your response.
- You may look back at the passage to help you write your essay.
- Write your essay in the appropriate space in the answer booklet. If you use scratch paper to write a rough-draft essay, be sure to transfer your final essay to the answer booklet.
- Be sure to check that your essay contains evidence from the passage to support your response.
- Be sure to check your essay for errors in capitalization, spelling, sentence formation, punctuation, and word choice.

## **Writer’s Checklist for the Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt**

### PLAN before you write

- Make sure you read the prompt carefully.
- Make sure you have read the entire passage carefully.
- Think about how the prompt relates to the passage.
- Organize your ideas on scratch paper. Use a thought map, outline, or other graphic organizer to plan your essay.

### FOCUS while you write

- Analyze the information from the passage as you write your essay.
- Make sure you use evidence from the passage to support your response.
- Use precise language, a variety of sentence types, and transitions in your essay.
- Organize your paper with an introduction, body, and conclusion.

### PROOFREAD after you write

- I wrote my final essay in the answer booklet.
- I stayed focused on responding to the prompt.
- I used evidence from the passage to support my response.
- I corrected errors in capitalization, spelling, sentence formation, punctuation, and word choice.

## Text-Dependent Analysis Scoring Guidelines

Score Point	Description
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectively addresses all parts of the task demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the text(s)</li> <li>• Effective introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s)</li> <li>• Strong organizational structure that effectively supports the focus and ideas</li> <li>• Thorough analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to effectively support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences</li> <li>• Substantial, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant key details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions</li> <li>• Substantial reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose</li> <li>• Skillful use of transitions to link ideas</li> <li>• Effective use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events</li> <li>• Few errors, if any, are present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present do not interfere with meaning</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequately addresses all parts of the task demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text(s)</li> <li>• Clear introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s)</li> <li>• Appropriate organizational structure that adequately supports the focus and ideas</li> <li>• Clear analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences</li> <li>• Sufficient, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions</li> <li>• Sufficient reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose</li> <li>• Appropriate use of transitions to link ideas</li> <li>• Appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events</li> <li>• Some errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present seldom interfere with meaning</li> </ul>

# PSSA ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GRADE 5

Score Point	Description
<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inconsistently addresses some parts of the task demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text(s)</li> <li>• Weak introduction, development, and/or conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea somewhat related to the text(s)</li> <li>• Weak organizational structure that inconsistently supports the focus and ideas</li> <li>• Weak or inconsistent analysis of explicit and/or implicit meanings from text(s) that somewhat supports claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences</li> <li>• Vague reference to the text(s) using some details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions</li> <li>• Weak reference to the main idea(s) and relevant details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose</li> <li>• Inconsistent use of transitions to link ideas</li> <li>• Inconsistent use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events</li> <li>• Errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present may interfere with meaning</li> </ul>
<b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimally addresses part(s) of the task demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text(s)</li> <li>• Minimal evidence of an introduction, development, and/or conclusion</li> <li>• Minimal evidence of an organizational structure</li> <li>• Insufficient or no analysis of the text(s); may or may not support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences</li> <li>• Insufficient reference to the text(s) using few details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions</li> <li>• Minimal reference to the main idea(s) and/or relevant details of the text(s)</li> <li>• Few, if any, transitions to link ideas</li> <li>• Little or no use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s)</li> <li>• Many errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present often interfere with meaning</li> </ul>

## English Language Arts—Summary Data

### Multiple-Choice and Evidence-Based Selected-Response Questions

An asterisk (\*) indicates the key.

Sample Number	Alignment	Answer Key	Depth of Knowledge	Points	p-value A	p-value B	p-value C	p-value D
1	A-V.4.1.1	A	1	1	59%*	12%	22%	7%
2	A-V.4.1.2	C	2	1	16%	11%	65%*	8%
3	A-C.2.1.1	C	3	1	16%	13%	62%*	9%
4	A-C.2.1.1	D	2	1	18%	15%	16%	51%*
5	A-K.1.1.1	B	2	1	20%	52%*	13%	15%
6	A-K.1.1.2	D	3	1	19%	12%	16%	53%*
7	A-V.4.1.1	B	2	1	35%	36%*	22%	7%
8	A-K.1.1.2	Part One: A Part Two: D	3	2	Mean Score: 1.01			
10	D.2.1.4	B	2	1	26%	36%*	19%	19%
11	D.1.2.4	D	1	1	32%	17%	17%	34%*
12	D.2.1.2	C	2	1	18%	28%	42%*	12%

### Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt

Sample Number	Alignment	Points	Depth of Knowledge	Mean Score
9	A-K.1.1.3	4	3	1.95

## English Language Arts Test Directions

Read these directions carefully before beginning the assessment. To look at these directions again, select the ? **[Help]** button and choose the **Test Directions** tab.

This section of the test has Conventions of Standard English questions that include multiple-choice questions, reading passage multiple-choice questions, and reading passage evidence-based selected-response questions. Each multiple-choice question has four answer choices. Each evidence-based selected-response question has two parts and will ask you to select one or more answers in each part.

### Answering Questions

Read each question carefully and choose your answer or enter your response.

1. For Conventions of Standard English multiple-choice questions, first, find the answer to the question. Then, select the correct answer using the **Pointer** tool.
  - Only one of the answer choices provided is correct.
  - To change an answer, use the **Pointer** tool to choose a different answer.
  - Select the **Flag** button if you are not sure of the answer to a question. It will mark the question so you know to go back and answer the question later.
2. For reading passage multiple-choice questions, first, read the passage carefully. Then read each question carefully and choose your answer or enter your response. Find the answer to the question. Then, select the correct answer using the **Pointer** tool.
  - Only one of the answer choices provided is correct.
  - To change an answer, use the **Pointer** tool to choose a different answer.
  - Select the **Flag** button if you are not sure of the answer to a question. It will mark the question so you know to go back and answer the question later.
3. For reading passage evidence-based selected-response questions, first, find the answer to **Part One**. Then, select the correct answer using the **Pointer** tool. **Next**, find the evidence in **Part Two** based on your answer to **Part One** and select each answer using the **Pointer** tool.
  - Only one of the answers provided in **Part One** is correct. **Part Two** will tell you how many correct answers there are.
  - To change an answer in **Part One**, use the **Pointer** tool to choose a different answer.
  - To remove a choice in **Part Two**, use the **Pointer** tool to click on the answer a second time.

4. For the text-dependent analysis prompt, use the keyboard and other online tools to enter your response in the areas provided.
  - An example of the scoring guidelines that professional scorers will use to evaluate your responses to the text-dependent analysis prompt can be found by selecting the ? [Help] button and choosing the **Scoring Guidelines** tab. You may refer to the **Scoring Guidelines** at any time while responding to the text-dependent analysis prompt.
5. Use tools such as the **Cross-Off**, **Highlighter**, **Notepad**, **Magnifier**, and **Line Guide** to assist you during the test.

### Navigation

1. Only one question at a time will appear on the screen. Use the **Next** and **Back** buttons to move from question to question or page to page.
2. When you have answered all the questions, select the **Review/End Test** button at the top-right of the screen.
  - Select questions from the list that appears on the screen to check your work.
  - When you have finished and have checked your answers, follow the directions on the screen to exit.

### Helpful Hints

- There is no time limit to finish the test.
- If you need to take a break from the assessment, select the **Pause Test** button. Select the **Resume** button to continue. If you are away from the assessment for more than 20 minutes, you will need to log back in.
- To see your progress on the test, select the **Review/End Test** button. You may go to any question by selecting it from the list that appears on the screen.
- Select the ? [Help] button to find more information.

# PSSA ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GRADE 5

## Text-Dependent Analysis Scoring Guidelines

### #9 Item Information

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	A-K.1.1.3
Depth of Knowledge	3
Points Possible	4
Mean Score	1.95

### Assessment Anchor:

E05.A-K.1—Key Ideas and Details

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

E05.A-K.1.1.3—Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story, drama, or poem, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

### Item-Specific Scoring Guideline

Score Point	Description
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effectively addresses all parts of the task demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the text(s)</li> <li>Effective introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s)</li> <li>Strong organizational structure that effectively supports the focus and ideas</li> <li>Thorough analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to effectively support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences</li> <li>Substantial, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant key details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions</li> <li>Substantial reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose</li> <li>Skillful use of transitions to link ideas</li> <li>Effective use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events</li> <li>Few errors, if any, are present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present do not interfere with meaning</li> </ul>

Score Point	Description
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequately addresses all parts of the task demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text(s)</li> <li>• Clear introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s)</li> <li>• Appropriate organizational structure that adequately supports the focus and ideas</li> <li>• Clear analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences</li> <li>• Sufficient, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions</li> <li>• Sufficient reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose</li> <li>• Appropriate use of transitions to link ideas</li> <li>• Appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events</li> <li>• Some errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present seldom interfere with meaning</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inconsistently addresses some parts of the task demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text(s)</li> <li>• Weak introduction, development, and/or conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea somewhat related to the text(s)</li> <li>• Weak organizational structure that inconsistently supports the focus and ideas</li> <li>• Weak or inconsistent analysis of explicit and/or implicit meanings from text(s) that somewhat supports claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences</li> <li>• Vague reference to the text(s) using some details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions</li> <li>• Weak reference to the main idea(s) and relevant details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose</li> <li>• Inconsistent use of transitions to link ideas</li> <li>• Inconsistent use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events</li> <li>• Errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present may interfere with meaning</li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimally addresses part(s) of the task demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text(s)</li> <li>• Minimal evidence of an introduction, development, and/or conclusion</li> <li>• Minimal evidence of an organizational structure</li> <li>• Insufficient or no analysis of the text(s); may or may not support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences</li> <li>• Insufficient reference to the text(s) using few details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions</li> <li>• Minimal reference to the main idea(s) and/or relevant details of the text(s)</li> <li>• Few, if any, transitions to link ideas</li> <li>• Little or no use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s)</li> <li>• Many errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present often interfere with meaning</li> </ul>

## Sample Student Responses

Item 9 – Score Point 4

## Student Response

“The Lilac Tree” is about a girl who tries to keep her things safe from her siblings, but it doesn’t work. Then, her mother gives her a chest so that her things will finally be safe. In this short story, Elsa’s feelings change from content, to horror, to satisfaction, in response to the events of her things being hidden, stolen and finally safe again.

At the beginning of the story, Shannahan writes, “As Maggie marched toward the house, Elsa smiled to herself. “I’ve been looking everywhere for you,” Maggie had said. Well Maggie didn’t know about this new hiding place, high in the leafy lilac bush, whose thick, gnarled branches grew up to the second floor of their house, all the way to the edge of Elsa and Maggie’s bedroom window.” The reader can infer that Maggie is very happy about her secret and glad that Maggie doesn’t know where she has been hiding her treasures. This proves that Elsa’s feelings change based on the situation because if Maggie did know where her stuff was, she wouldn’t be in such a good mood.

In paragraph two, it says, “Empty! The diary, the bundle of notes, the autograph book, and even the last two oatmeal cookies were gone! Elsa’s stomach tightened into a sickening knot. Tears filled her eyes, blurring her vision as she dropped to the ground.” This shows that Elsa is upset by the loss of her treasures because she is crying. This connects back to how her feelings change based on the event because Elsa would not be so petrified if her things were safe.

At the end of the story, it states, “This was my chest when I was a little girl,” said Mom, “And it was my mother’s before that. It seems that all of us needed a private place of our own. Elsa smiled up at her mother and slipped the key into her pocket.” Based on this, Elsa is now content that she has a safe place to keep her things. This is important because she would not feel this way if her things were gone and unprotected.

All of this evidence proves that Elsa’s feelings of content, horror, and satisfaction are changing in response to her things hidden, stolen, and safe. It is, therefore, important to respect someone’s privacy.

## Annotation

This response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is strong and effectively supports the focus and ideas. The effective introduction includes analysis (*about a girl who tries to keep her things safe from her siblings, but it doesn't work. Then, her mother gives her a chest so that her things will finally be safe*) and establishes the effective controlling idea (*Elsa's feelings change from content, to horror, to satisfaction, in response to the events of her things being hidden, stolen and finally safe again*) which is focused on the task. The first body paragraph leads with a text reference (*"As Maggie marched toward the house, Elsa smiled to herself. 'I've been looking everywhere for you, ' Maggie had said. Well Maggie didn't know about this new hiding place, high in the leafy lilac bush, whose thick, gnarled branches grew up to the second floor of their house, all the way to the edge of Elsa and Maggie's bedroom window"*) that is followed by perceptive analysis (*The reader can infer that Maggie is very happy about her secret and glad that Maggie doesn't know where she has been hiding her treasures. This proves that Elsa's feelings change based on the situation because if Maggie did know where her stuff was, she wouldn't be in such a good mood*). The next body paragraph also begins with well-chosen text (*"Empty! The diary, the bundle of notes, the autograph book, and even the last two oatmeal cookies were gone! Elsa's stomach tightened into a sickening knot. Tears filled her eyes, blurring her vision as she dropped to the ground"*) that is followed by thorough analysis (*This shows that Elsa is upset by the loss of her treasures because she is crying. This connects back to how her feelings change based on the event because Elsa would not be so petrified if her things were safe*). The final body paragraph maintains the pattern, beginning with well-chosen text (*"This was my chest when I was a little girl," said Mom, 'And it was my mother's before that. It seems that all of us needed a private place of our own. Elsa smiled up at her mother and slipped the key into her pocket"*) and then including thorough analysis (*Based on this, Elsa is now content that she has a safe place to keep her things. This is important because she would not feel this way if her things were gone and unprotected*) to address the final change in Elsa's feelings. The effective conclusion reinforces the introduction (*All of this evidence proves that Elsa's feelings of content, horror, and satisfaction are changing in response to her things hidden, stolen, and safe*) and includes a relevant generalization (*It is, therefore, important to respect someone's privacy*) that demonstrates a thorough understanding of explicit and implicit meaning from the text. Transitions (*but, Then, so, In this short story, from, in response to, At the beginning of the story, The reader can infer that, This proves that, because, In paragraph two, This shows that, This connects back to, At the end of the story, Based on this, This is important because, All of this evidence proves, therefore*) are skillfully used to link ideas, and precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*content, horror, satisfaction, hidden, stolen, finally, safe, infer, secret, hiding, treasures, proves, situation, upset, loss, crying, connects, petrified, important, unprotected, evidence, therefore, respect, privacy*) are employed to convey events. The few errors present do not interfere with meaning.

**Student Response**

Throughout the passage, “The Lilac Tree” a girl named Elsa seeks privacy away from her sisters and mother. Though, Elsa’s emotions change throughout the story and she has a hard time controlling her feelings, due to realizing her stuff she hid from her sisters had been taken. That leads her to a mix of emotions.

First, Elsa feels happy to herself due to having built a place where she could be alone. I know this because, in the passage Elsa says “There,” “now nobody will find my things.” Elsa smiles to herself, later showing that she feels amused. Next, Maggie one of Elsa’s sisters, walks up to her. Then, Maggie says, “I’ve been looking everywhere for you.” That sparks Elsa’s memories and she remembers how much Maggie snoops around her stuff, and she reluctantly walked with Maggie till she reached her family’s kitchen for dinner. Once she got there she mumbled, “I just wish I could be alone sometimes and have a place all to myself.” That shows that Elsa is now annoyed, but also upset. Then, for a while Elsa had been delighted in the privacy of her secret hiding place, but that changes when Elsa realizes that her hiding place was being exposed because of winter. The passage states her worry, and how she said, “I need to find a new place to hide my things.” After that, Elsa climbs up to her hiding spot later to realize that her things were missing! Elsa then yells, “Empty!” She became nervous and upset making her cry. Though, soon after that Elsa realizes what must’ve happened and storms into the kitchen and screams “Maggie!” “Maggie!” That shows that Elsa’s emotions became a sick horror and then an angry roor. Then, Elsa’s mom comes in and comforts her, and tells her to wait in her room. When Elsa’s mom comes back with her things Elsa became realieved. Though, that wasn’t all that Elsa’s mother brought in, because she also brought Elsa a wooden chest with a key so she can keep her things in there Elsa soon became lightend with joy and smiled, showing she was happy again. Throughout the passage, “The Lilac Tree” I can definately say that Elsa felt a mix of emotions. In all, though I learned about the importance of privacy but also emotions that a person might feel as well.

## Annotation

This response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is strong and effectively supports the focus. The introduction begins with an explanation of the story's conflict (*Throughout the passage, "The Lilac Tree" a girl named Elsa seeks privacy away from her sisters and mother*) and then includes thorough and insightful analysis (*Though, Elsa's emotions change throughout the story and she has a hard time controlling her feelings, due to realizing her stuff she hid from her sisters had been taken. That leads her to a mix of emotions*). The next paragraph begins with a strong inference (*First, Elsa feels happy to herself due to having built a place where she could be alone*) that is supported with well-chosen text (*Elsa says "There," "now nobody will find my things." Elsa smiles to herself*) and followed by a second inference (*later showing that she feels amused*). The response blends thorough analysis and inferences with another text reference (*Then, Maggie says, "I've been looking everywhere for you." That sparks Elsa's memories and she remembers how much Maggie snoops around her stuff, and she reluctantly walked with Maggie till she reached her family's kitchen for dinner. Once she got there she mumbled, "I just wish I could be alone sometimes and have a place all to myself"*), all of which is extended with additional thorough analysis (*That shows that Elsa is now annoyed, but also upset. Then, for a while Elsa had been delighted in the privacy of her secret hiding place, but that changes when Elsa realizes that her hiding place was being exposed because of winter*). The response then combines more insightful analysis with well-chosen text (*The passage states her worry, and how she said, "I need to find a new place to hide my things." After that, Elsa climbs up to her hiding spot later to realize that her things were missing! Elsa then yells, "Empty!" She became nervous and upset making her cry. Though, soon after that Elsa realizes what must've happened and storms into the kitchen and screams "Maggie!" "Maggie!"*). This pattern of thorough analysis combined with text references specifically selected to explain the events in the passage (*That shows that Elsa's emotions became a sick horror and then an angry roor. Then, Elsa's mom comes in and comforts her, and tells her to wait in her room. When Elsa's mom comes back with her things Elsa became realieved. Though, that wasn't all that Elsa's mother brought in, because she also brought Elsa a wooden chest with a key so she can keep her things in there Elsa soon became lightend with joy and smiled, showing she was happy again*) continues to support the writer's purpose. Finally, strong analysis and an insightful generalization complete the response (*Throughout the passage, "The Lilac Tree" I can definately say that Elsa felt a mix of emotions. In all, though I learned about the importance of privacy but also emotions that a person might feel as well*). The response's skillful use of transitions (*Though, and, due to, First, I know this because, Next, Then, Once she got there, That shows that, but, The passage states, After that, soon after, When, because, In all*) links ideas throughout the response and an effective use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*seeks privacy, emotions, hard time controlling her feelings, realizing, mix of emotions, due to, built, alone, amused, sparks, memories, remembers, snoops, reluctantly, annoyed, upset, delighted, secret, hiding, exposed, worry, nervous, upset, sick horror, angry roor, comforts, realieved, lightend, joy, smiled, definately, mix of emotions, importance of privacy*) explains the topic and conveys events. The few errors present in spelling (*roor, realieved, lightend, definately*) and punctuation (missing or misplaced commas) do not interfere with meaning.

**Student Response**

In the passage “The Lilac Tree” Elsa enjoys her privacy, but her sister wants to know her secrets and Elsa’s mood changes from that.

The author states, “As Maggie marched toward the house, Elsa smiled to herself. “I’ve been looking everywhere for you” Maggie had said. Well Maggie didn’t know about this new hiding place.” With that information, I can see that Elsa was delighted because Maggie didn’t know about her hiding place. Showing, that Elsa’s mood was more positive when people don’t know or see what she was hiding.

To add on, the text states “Empty! The diary, the bundle of notes, the autograph book, and even the last two oatmeal cookies were gone!” “Maggie! Maaa-ggie” screamed Elsa as she burst into the kitchen.” Now that Maggie had seen what Elsa was keeping from her, she was furious. That means to me that Elsa’s feelings turned for the worst because Maggie found her secrets again.

In addition, near the end of the passage, Elsa’s Mom had gifted her a treasure chest. Not only the chest though, but Elsa’s Mom also talked to Maggie about going through Elsa’s stuff and she agreed to stop. Elsa was ecstatic, she didn’t have to hide her things from her sisters. That’s how the story ended, Elsa was in a great mood and was excited to use her new treasure chest.

To sum up, Elsa was in a good mood, then angry, then good again, because she had privacy from her sisters.

## Annotation

This response adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is appropriate and adequately supports the response's focus. There is a clear introduction identifying the controlling idea (*Elsa enjoys her privacy, but her sister wants to know her secrets and Elsa's mood changes from that*). The first body paragraph begins with a relevant text reference (*"As Maggie marched toward the house, Elsa smiled to herself. "I've been looking everywhere for you" Maggie had said. Well Maggie didn't know about this new hiding place"*) that is followed by clear analysis (*With that information, I can see that Elsa was delighted because Maggie didn't know about her hiding place. Showing, that Elsa's mood was more positive when people don't know or see what she was hiding*). The next body paragraph adds another relevant text reference (*"Empty! The diary, the bundle of notes, the autograph book, and even the last two oatmeal cookies were gone"*), which is, again, followed by clear analysis (*Now that Maggie had seen what Elsa was keeping from her, she was furious. That means to me that Elsa's feelings turned for the worst because Maggie found her secrets again*). The final body paragraph includes analysis interspersed with relevant text (*Elsa's Mom had gifted her a treasure chest. Not only the chest though, but Elsa's Mom also talked to Maggie about going through Elsa's stuff and she agreed to stop. Elsa was extatic, she didn't have to hide her things from her sisters. That's how the story ended, Elsa was in a great mood and was excited to use her new treasure chest*), demonstrating clear understanding of the passage. The conclusion reiterates the changes in Elsa's feelings and ties back to the introduction (*To sum up, Elsa was in a good mood, then angry, then good again, because she had privacy from her sisters*). There is an appropriate use of transitions (*but, and, The author states, With that information, because, Showing, To add on, Now, That means to me, In addition, Not only, also, That's how, To sum up, then*) to link ideas and an appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*privacy, secrets, mood, delighted, hiding place, positive, keeping, furious, turned for the worst, gifted, treasure chest, extatic, angry*) to convey experiences and events. The errors present in spelling (*furious, extatic*) seldom interfere with meaning.

## Student Response

Elsa’s feelings changed throughout the passage because at the beginning of the story Elsa is happy because she had found a knew hidding place for some of her belongings.

Toward the middle of the story, Elsa started to feel worried since the leaves were starting to fall from the lilac tree because fall was aproching. So, she went out to the lilac tree one day after school to find hidding place for her belongings. When she found that all her things in the lilac tree were gone, she started crying because she was so angry and sad.

By the end of the passage Elsa was excited because her mom had talked to Maggie, Elsa’s little sister, and Maggie promised not to snoop around in Elsa’s things. When her mom came up to talk to Elsa she had a wooden chest with a key to keep her belongings in so Maggie couldn’t get to her stuff.

That is how Elsa’s feelings change throughout the passage.

## Annotation

This response adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is appropriate and supports the response’s focus on Elsa’s feelings changing. The adequate introduction clearly addresses the task (*Elsa’s feelings changed throughout the passage because*) and addresses Elsa’s feelings at the beginning of the story by means of clear analysis (*at the beginning of the story Elsa is happy because she had found a knew hidding place for some of her belongings*). The next paragraph consists of analysis interwoven with relevant text references (*Toward the middle of the story, Elsa started to feel worried since the leaves were starting to fall from the lilac tree because fall was aproching. So, she went out to the lilac tree one day after school. . . . When she found that all her things in the lilac tree were gone, she started crying because she was so angry and sad*) to track Elsa’s feelings as the story progresses. The response continues analyzing and paraphrasing text selections relevant to Elsa’s changing feelings at the end of the story (*By the end of the passage Elsa was excited . . . Maggie promised not to snoop around in Elsa’s things. . . . Maggie couldn’t get to her stuff*). While the response’s conclusion is perfunctory (*That is how Elsa’s feelings change throughout the passage*), it does connect to both the task and the text and complete the response. The response demonstrates an appropriate use of transitions (*because, Toward the middle, since, So, When, By the end of the passage, That is how*) as well as an appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*happy, knew [new] hidding place, worried, leaves were starting to fall, lilac tree, fall, aproching, crying, so angry and sad, excited, promised, snoop, wooden chest with a key*). The errors present in usage (*knew* for “new”), spelling (*aproching, hidding*), and punctuation (missing comma) seldom interfere with meaning. While this response seems at points like a retelling, the analysis, which is combined with clear inferences and sufficiently supported with accurate and direct references to the text, is consistent with a score of 3.

## Item 9 – Score Point 2

**Student Response**

In the text “The Lilac Tree by Marilyn Shannahan” a girl named Elsa is trying to get privacy from her sister Maggie.

In the begining, Elsa wanted to have some peace and quit all the time from her sister, also Elsa had secret hiding places in the house because Maggie likes to be nosie and Elsa did not like that.

Second, in the middle of the text Elsa felt mad because her stuff that was in her lilac tree was gone, and she knew it was Maggie.

At the end, Elsa was still mad at Maggie but her mom came into her room and got her stuff back and Elsa was right all along, but she felt bad about Maggie because she was tring to say sorry.

The conclousion is, to teach the inportance of giving people space and privacy.

**Annotation**

This response inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure and development are weak. The introduction is somewhat vague (*In the text “The Lilac Tree by Marilyn Shannahan” a girl named Elsa is trying to get privacy from her sister Maggie*). The first body paragraph includes an inference that is supported by loosely connected text references (*In the begining, Elsa wanted to have some peace and quit all the time from her sister, also Elsa had secret hiding places in the house because Maggie likes to be nosie and Elsa did not like that*). The next paragraph is similar, combining weak inferences and vague text references (*Second, in the middle of the text Elsa felt mad because her stuff that was in her lilac tree was gone, and she knew it was Maggie*). In the final body paragraph, the response continues to mix inferences with vague text references (*At the end, Elsa was still mad at Maggie but her mom came into her room and got her stuff back and Elsa was right all along, but she felt bad about Maggie because she was tring to say sorry*) to complete the body of the response. The conclusion consists of an inferential and relevant generalization (*The conclousion is, to teach the inportance of giving people space and privacy*) demonstrating an understanding that extends beyond a literal interpretation of the text. Overall, the inferences and selected text references, despite being somewhat weak and vague, do indicate an understanding of both the passage and task. There is an appropriate use of transitions by the student (*In the begining, and, also, because, Second, At the end, but, The conclousion is*) and precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*privacy, peace and quit [quiet], secret hiding places, nosie, lilac tree, right all along, sorry, inportance, space and privacy*); however, the strength of these elements is not enough to warrant a higher score. The errors present in usage (*quit* for “quiet”), spelling (*begining, nosie, tring, conclousion, inportance*), and punctuation (missing commas) sometimes interfere with meaning.

**Student Response**

First Elsa feels good and happy, because she is in her privicy place. Then Maggie comes and discovers her privicy place. Then she goes to her mom and she is upset, because Maggie found her privicy spot was. so then her mom gives her a chest to store her privete stuff.

**Annotation**

This response inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is overall weak, with no clear introduction or conclusion and weak development. The response consists of a brief passage retelling of the passage that combines weak inferences and vague text references (*First Elsa feels good and happy, because she is in her privicy place. Then Maggie comes and discovers her privicy place. Then she goes to her mom and she is upset, because Maggie found her privicy spot was. so then her mom gives her a chest to store her privete stuff*). The response uses transitions inconsistently (*because, Then, and, so*) and while there is some use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*privicy, discovers, upset, chest, privete*), it only weakly conveys experiences and events. The errors present in spelling (*privicy, privete*), capitalization (*so*), and punctuation (missing and misplaced commas) do not seriously interfere with meaning. Holistically, the inferences, which address changes in Elsa’s feelings in response to the events, demonstrate an understanding of the passage that goes beyond the strictly literal; thus, a score of 2 is appropriate.

## Item 9 – Score Point 1

**Student Response**

In the story “The Lilac Tree” Elsa hides her secret stuff. The passage “The Lilac” is about Elsa trying to find privacy away from her sisters. Elsa wants privacy away from her very curious sisters. She keeps hiding it in different places. Maggie keeps looking through Elsa’s stuff. Elsa reads in the tree every summer. Maggie apologizes and she promised not to look through her stuff.

**Annotation**

This response minimally addresses part of the task, demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text. There is minimal evidence of an organizational structure. The response consists of a brief, literal retelling of the story, including some events associated with changes in Elsa’s feelings. However, the response does not analyze how her feelings change in response to the events (*In the story “The Lilac Tree” Elsa hides her secret stuff. The passage “The Lilac” is about Elsa trying to find privacy away from her sisters. Elsa wants privacy away from her very curious sisters. She keeps hiding it in different places. Maggie keeps looking through Elsa’s stuff. Elsa reads in the tree every summer. Maggie apologizes and she promised not to look through her stuff*), resulting in a mostly literal interpretation of the text. There is only one transition (*and*) and little use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*hides, secret, privacy, curious, apologizes, promised*). Any errors present do not interfere with meaning. Based on the mostly literal understanding of the passage, this response earns a score of 1.

**Student Response**

The passage the lilac tree is about two siblings Elsa and Maggie. Elsa wants to hide her belongings from her sibling so she hides them in a lilac tree. Then when fall comes the leaves fall off the lilac tree and reaveals her belongings.

**Annotation**

This response minimally addresses part of the task, demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text. There is minimal evidence of an organizational structure; the response lacks an introduction, development, and a conclusion. The response consists of a simplified, partial synopsis of the text (*The passage the lilac tree is about two siblings Elsa and Maggie. Elsa wants to hide her belongings from her sibling so she hides them in a lilac tree. Then when fall comes the leaves fall off the lilac tree and reaveals her belongings*). The response fails to address how Elsa's feelings change due to the events in the passage. Transition use is minimal (*so, Then*), and there is little use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*siblings, lilac tree, leaves, reaveals, belongings*). The few errors present in spelling (*reaveals*) and punctuation (missing commas) do not interfere with meaning. The response does not use details from the passage that include an event that precipitates a change in Elsa's feelings; therefore, a score of 1 is appropriate.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# **PSSA Grade 5 English Language Arts Item Sampler Scoring Guide**

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