



PSSA

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

English Language Arts

Grade 8

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 used¹ 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

¹ 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 percentage² 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

² 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"> • Effectively addresses all parts of the task demonstrating in-depth analytic 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequately addresses all parts of the task demonstrating sufficient analytic 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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Score Point	Description
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistently addresses some parts of the task demonstrating partial analytic 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimally addresses part(s) of the task demonstrating inadequate analytic 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

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	B-C.2.1.1	D	2	1	7%	15%	12%	66%*
2	B-C.2.1.2	B	2	1	22%	64%*	9%	5%
3	B-C.2.1.3	C	2	1	28%	5%	62%*	5%
4	B-C.3.1.1	D	2	1	9%	17%	14%	60%*
5	B-K.1.1.3	A	2	1	59%*	23%	8%	10%
6	B-V.4.1.1	C	2	1	3%	15%	77%*	5%
7	B-V.4.1.2	A	2	1	70%*	10%	12%	8%
8	B-K.1.1.3	Part One: B Part Two: A,D	3	3	Mean Score: 1.20			
10	D.1.2.4	B	2	1	20%	44%*	20%	16%
11	D.2.1.3	A	2	1	35%*	21%	26%	18%
12	D.2.1.4	D	2	1	10%	21%	24%	45%*

Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt

Sample Number	Alignment	Points	Depth of Knowledge	Mean Score
9	A-K.1.1.1	4	3	2.19

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.

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Text-Dependent Analysis Scoring Guidelines

#9 Item Information

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	A-K.1.1.1
Depth of Knowledge	3
Points Possible	4
Mean Score	2.19

Assessment Anchor:

E08.A-K.1.1—Key Ideas and Details

Specific Assessment Anchor Descriptor addressed by this item:

E08.A-K.1.1.1—Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences, conclusions, and/or generalizations drawn from the text.

Item-Specific Scoring Guideline

Score Point	Description
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively addresses all parts of the task demonstrating in-depth analytic 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

Score Point	Description
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Sample Student Responses

Item 9 – Score Point 4

Student Response

“The shouts, the hands raised high for a pass. The grins, the fist-bumps. The Joy.” In the passage “Trouble” by Barbara Roberts a girl named Nikki tries out for a club basketball team and although getting discouraged at first by the difference of size among the other girls she ends up enjoying herself. Throughout the story the author uses Nikki’s narration about her scrimmage to illustrate her love for playing basketball.

Nikki’s love for the sport of basketball is illustrated by her marveling comments about her scrimmage at her tryout. As her scrimmage starts to get going she marvels “Everything else fell away - my worries about the giraffes, every thought about anything other than what was happening out on that golden wood floor, with the ball in my hands”. Nikki describes her ability to forget about her worries while playing basketball. She describes the court as a “golden wood floor” and her love for the game is shown through these comments as she admires the excitement of getting a pass.

Not only does Nikki’s admiration of basketball show her love for the sport but her focus she is able to gain while playing as well. After playing in her scrimmage for a while Nikki explains “I was in the zone. Flowing with the game, feeling where my teammates were moving like there were strings between us. In this quote the author depicts the amount of focus Nikki has during her scrimmage as well as the unity she feels with her new teammates. Her ability to focus so hard on her game and get into a rhythm with her teammates despite her worries at the start shows her love for the game. Without a love and enjoyment for the game she wouldn’t be able to focus on the game and get past her worries.

Being able to focus past your worries while playing basketball is not the only way to show your love for the sport. In the last paragraphs of the passage the author uses Nikki’s enjoyment of the sport to show us her love of the game. As Nikki dribbles up and prepares to shoot she exclaims “The shouts, the hands raised high for a pass. The grins, the fist-bumps. The Joy. I could have played like that forever.” This quote illustrates Nikki’s enjoyment of playing as she describes the events of her team scoring a point. Nikki talks about her teammates grinning and fist bumping each other and decides she could play like that forever. This final comment shows her enjoyment and love of the game as she believes it is something she could do forever.

The author of “Trouble” Barbara Roberts depicts Nikki’s love of playing basketball through Nikki’s admiration, focus, and enjoyment of the game. The love the author depicts allows Nikki to push past her worries and teach us that even when we are discouraged if we find something we love you can always find a way to do it right. Even if that thing we love is what discourages us.

Annotation

This response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the task. A strong organizational structure effectively supports the focus on Nikki's love of the game and ideas surrounding how the author shows that love. In the effective introduction, the response uses a well-chosen sentence taken from the text (*"The shouts, the hands raised high for a pass. The grins, the fist-bumps. The Joy"*). The quote is followed by a synopsis of the tryouts (*In the passage "Trouble" by Barbara Roberts a girl named Nikki tries out for a club basketball team and although getting discouraged at first by the difference of size among the other girls she ends up enjoying herself*), setting up the controlling idea (*Throughout the story the author uses Nikki's narration about her scrimmage to illustrate her love for playing basketball*). The first body paragraph begins by examining how the scrimmage *"illustrates"* her love of basketball. Thorough analysis is skillfully woven together with well-chosen text (*Nikki's love for the sport of basketball is illustrated by her marveling comments about her scrimmage at her tryout. As her scrimmage starts to get going she marvels "Everything else fell away - my worries about the giraffes, every thought about anything other than what was happening out on that golden wood floor, with the ball in my hands". Nikki describes her ability to forget about her worries while playing basketball. She describes the court as a "golden wood floor" and her love for the game is shown through these comments as she admires the excitement of getting a pass*) to clearly support of the controlling idea. The second body paragraph continues with thorough analysis integrated with text addressing the scrimmage and showing Nikki's love of basketball (*Not only does Nikki's admiration of basketball show her love for the sport but her focus she is able to gain while playing as well*). Next, a pertinent text reference describing Nikki's feelings during the scrimmage (*"I was in the zone. Flowing with the game, feeling where my teammates were moving like there were strings between us*) is connected to thorough analysis showing how Nikki's focus conveys her love of basketball (*the author depicts the amount of focus Nikki has during her scrimmage as well as the unity she feels with her new teammates. Her ability to focus so hard on her game and get into a rythm with her teammates despite her worries at the start shows her love for the game. Without a love and enjoyment for the game she wouldnt be able to focus on the game and get past her worries*). The final body paragraph shows how Nikki's enjoyment during the game conveys her love of basketball (*As Nikki dribbles up . . . "The shouts, the hands raised high for a pass. The grins . . . I could have played like that forever"*), using a quotation that also references the introduction. This is followed by more thorough analysis (*This quote illustrates Nikki's enjoyment of playing as she describes the events of her team scoring a point. Nikki talks about her teammates grinning and fist bumping eachother and decides she could play like that forever. This final comment shows her enjoyment and love of the game as she believes it is something she could do forever*) that, again, reinforces the controlling idea. In the effective conclusion, the response melds elements of Nikki's experience during the scrimmage to reinforce her love of basketball (*The author . . . depicts Nikki's love of playing basketball through Nikki's admiration, focus, and enjoyment of the game*) and provides additional strong analysis and an inspirational generalization (*The love the author depicts allows Nikki to push past her worries and teach us that even when we are discouraged if we find something we love you can always find a way to do it right. Even if that thing we love is what discourages us*) to complete the development. There is a skillful use of transitions to link ideas between and within paragraphs (*In the passage, Throughout the story, As her scrimmage, Not only, In this quote, Without, In the last paragraphs, Even if*) throughout the response, and an effective use of precise language (*discouraged, narration, illustrate, marvels/marveling comments, excitement, admires/admiration, depicts, unity, rythm, enjoyment, describes, events, push past her worries*) is employed to convey experiences and events. The few errors present in spelling (*rythm, teammates, eachother*) and punctuation (missing commas and apostrophes) do not interfere with meaning.

Student Response

The passage Trouble is written by Barbara Carroll Roberts, who displays the main character's strong desire for basketball. Nikki Doyle, a thirteen-year-old girl is trying out to be on a team. She has been playing all throughout middle school, and this was her chance to fulfill her dreams. The author proposes three ways Nikki values these dreams by her deep understanding of the sport, her confidence and determination, and her behavior towards a game. Nikki knows a lot about basketball and this is seen when she describes a girl making a shot. Found on page 32, she says, "One of them stood behind the three-point line and shot with plenty of arc and plenty of spin...". This quote proves that Nikki can observe how people play, and she easily makes out what a player is doing. She understands certain abilities required for a shot, along with the amount of that ability. The author includes Nikki's thoughts to show her knowledge of the sport's material. This means that she cares enough to learn about basketball.

Nikki also cares about her efforts for the tryout. Her determination and confidence shines through the quotes found on page 33, "So what if these girls were all big? I'd been the best point guard in all of county league. I could do better than these girls, too. I could be one of the best. I had to be. She is encouraging herself no matter the obstacle that stands in her way. She is not allowing herself to give in because of this and decides to keep going. For anyone who loves playing a sport, the most important idea, is to have enough confidence. Nikki knows her worth and will not stop until she overcomes trouble.

During the scrimmage, Nikki was fully focused, happy, and aware of her surroundings. According to page 36, She says, "I was in the zone. Flowing with the game... The grins, the fist-bumps. The joy. I could have played like that forever." Nikki's feelings towards the game present how excited she was, playing on the court. The authors choice of words provides readers with information that helps support this. By the usage of the hyperbole with "forever," Nikki enjoys so much and feels like she can never stop. The quote emphasizes that the character loves not only the game, but also the joy and small victories she encounters with her teammates.

Trouble is a passage regarding Nikki Doyle's desires for basketball. Roberts illustrates different ways to express these desires. Nikki is shown demonstrating her understanding of a player's performance as they shoot, proving her dedication to being on the team, and having a positive attitude when it was time for a scrimmage. Nikki faced a big disadvantage and knew that, yet did not give up due to her love for basketball. The author attempts to spread the message to readers that have the ability to do their very best as well, when it comes to sports and dreams.

Annotation

This response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the task. A strong organizational structure effectively supports the focus and ideas. The introduction begins with a synopsis of the story (*The passage Trouble is written by Barbara Carroll Roberts, who displays the main character's strong desire for basketball. Nikki Doyle, a thirteen-year-old girl is trying out to be on a team. She has been playing all throughout middle school, and this was her chance to fulfill her dreams*). The synopsis connects to an effective controlling idea (*The author proposes three ways Nikki values these dreams by her deep understanding of the sport, her confidence and determination, and her behavior towards a game*) that addresses the task by focusing on three ways the author demonstrates Nikki's love of playing basketball. Beginning with the first way listed in the controlling idea (*deep understanding of the sport*), the response provides strong analysis (*Nikki knows a lot about basketball and this is seen when she describes a girl making a shot*) that is supported with a well-chosen text detail (*Found on page 32, she says, "One of them stood behind the three-point line and shot with plenty of arc and plenty of spin . . ."*) to develop the idea of Nikki's deep understanding of the sport. Additional thorough analysis further develops the idea (*This quote proves that Nikki can observe how people play, and she easily makes out what a player is doing. She understands certain abilities required for a shot, along with the amount of that ability. The author includes Nikki's thoughts to show her knowledge of the sport's material. This means that she cares enough to learn about basketball*) while addressing the task. The next body paragraph begins with strong analysis (*Nikki also cares about her efforts for the tryout. Her determination and confidence shines through the quotes found on page 33*) that addresses the second way given in the controlling idea (*her confidence and determination*). The analysis is, again, supported with well-chosen text (*"So what if these girls were all big? I'd been the best point guard in all of county league. I could do better than these girls, too. I could be one of the best. I had to be*). Additional thorough analysis (*She is encouraging herself no matter the obstacle that stands in her way. She is not allowing herself to give in because of this and decides to keep going. For anyone who loves playing a sport, the most important idea, is to have enough confidence. Nikki knows her worth and will not stop until she overcomes trouble*) demonstrates understanding of both explicit and implicit meanings from the text. In the next body paragraph, strong analysis (*During the scrimmage, Nikki was fully focused, happy, and aware of her surroundings*) addresses the final way listed in the controlling idea (*her behavior towards a game*). Another well-chosen text reference adds to the development (*According to page 36, She says, "I was in the zone. Flowing with the game ... The grins, the fist-bumps. The joy. I could have played like that forever"*) and connects to more strong analysis that further clarifies how the author shows Nikki's love of basketball (*Nikki's feelings towards the game present how excited she was, playing on the court. The authors choice of words provides readers with information that helps support this. By the usage of the hyperbole with "forever," Nikki enjoys so much and feels like she can never stop. The quote emphasizes that the character loves not only the game, but also the joy and small victories she encounters with her teammates*). The effective conclusion begins by recapping ideas from the body paragraphs (*Trouble is a passage regarding Nikki Doyle's desires for basketball. Roberts illustrates different ways to express these desires. Nikki is shown demonstrating her understanding of a player's performance as they shoot, proving her dedication to being on the team, and having a positive attitude when it was time for a scrimmage. Nikki faced a big disadvantage and knew that, yet did not give up due to her love for basketball*) and finishes with analysis that includes a thoughtful generalization (*The author attempts to spread the message to readers that have the ability to do their very best as well, when it comes to sports and dreams*). There is a skillful use of transitions (*The author proposes/includes/attempts, Nikki knows a lot/also cares about, and this is seen when, Found on page, This quote proves, The quote emphasizes, along with, This means that,*

Annotation

because, For anyone who, During, According to, not only, but also, yet) to link ideas, and an effective use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*scrimmage, illustrate, displays, desire/desires, fulfill, dreams, proposes, values, deep understanding, confidence, shines, determination, obstacle, allowing, encouraging, describes, observe, ability/abilities, required, knowledge, efforts, worth, overcomes, aware, hyperbole, emphasizes, small victories, encounters, illustrates, express, dedication, positive attitude, disadvantage*) conveys experiences and events. The few errors present in spelling (*gaurd*) and punctuation (missing commas) do not interfere with meaning.

Student Response

In the story “Trouble” a girl named Nikki is trying out for an elite level 8th grade club Basketball team. Nikki is met with lots of emotions that show her love for basketball while trying out some of which are being nervous, relief, and excitement. All of these emotions are illustrated really well by the author of “Trouble”.

The first emotion Nikki feels in the story is being nervous. When Nikki first arrives to the gym she sees all of the girls trying out for the team, they are really tall while Nikki is on the shorter side. In conversation between the two friends “I turned to Adria behind me and nodded toward the shoulder blade girl. ‘Maybe she’s in the wrong gym,’ Adria said, her voice barely a whisper ‘Let’s hope’.” (Barbara Carroll Roberts 5-7). This shows how nervous Nikki is about the height the other girls are and is nervous that she won’t make the team because she isn’t tall enough and this makes her wonder if she is good enough to keep playing the game of basketball that she loves. Thus, Nikki being nervous is a good example of the author showing Nikki’s emotions for basketball really well.

Likewise, Nikki being nervous shows the reader how Nikkie feels relief in the story. When Nikki gets a peek at the gym she sees the other girls taking shots and she feels relieved. Nikki thought, “A few girls trotted onto the court to put up shots. Not particularly good-looking shots, I was happy to see” (Barbara Carroll Roberts 9). This shows how when Nikki sees the other girls who are way bigger than her shoot and miss it gives Nikki a feeling of relief because it assures her that she will make the team and she feels relieved because she knows that she will be able to play basketball the game she loves for this new team. Therefore, Nikki feels another emotion that shows her love for basketball.

Additionally, Nikki feels excitement to play basketball. By the end of the tryout when the girls were scrimmaging Nikki started to feel really excited to play basketball with her tryout teammates. Nikki feeling, “I was in the zone. Flowing with the game, feeling where my teammates were moving like there were strings between us, seeing the whole floor, all the girls, like a pattern, like a dance” (Barbara Carroll Roberts 69). When Nikki is playing a game with her team mates she is really excited when she plays because she loves the game. Thus, Nikki shows excitement when she is playing basketball which shows her love for it.

Lastly, all three of the emotions Nikki shows in the story show how she loves the game of basketball and is always willing to play it no matter what she is feeling.

Annotation

This response adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text. An appropriate organizational structure adequately supports the response's focus on Nikki's emotions during the story's events. The introduction clearly addresses the prompt (*Nikki is met with lots of emotions that show her love for basketball*) and lays out a three-part controlling idea (*some of which are being nervous, relief, and excitement*) that connects to the emotions that Nikki shows. In the first body paragraph, the response focuses on Nikki *being nervous*. A relevant text reference (*When Nikki first arrives to the gym she sees all of the girls trying out for the team, they are really tall while Nikki is on the shorter side. In conversation between the two friends "I turned to Adria behind me and nodded toward the shoulder blade girl. 'Maybe she's in the wrong gym,' Adria said, her voice barely a whisper 'Let's hope'."*) provides support for the clear analysis that follows (*This shows how nervous Nikki is about the height the other girls are and is nervous that she won't make the team because she isn't tall enough and this makes her wonder if she is good enough to keep playing the game of basketball that she loves*). More clear analysis addressing Nikki's nervousness (*Thus, Nikki being nervous is a good example of the author showing Nikki's emotions for basketball really well*) extends the development. The second body paragraph begins with clear analysis addressing Nikki's feeling of *relief* (*Likewise, Nikki being nervous shows the reader how Nikkie feels relief in the story*). This is supported with additional relevant text support (*When Nikki gets a peek at the gym she sees the other girls taking shots and she feels relieved. Nikki thought, "A few girls trotted onto the court to put up shots. Not particularly good-looking shots, I was happy to see"*). The development of the *relief* idea wraps up with more analysis (*This shows how when Nikki sees the other girls who are way bigger than her shoot and miss it gives Nikki a feeling of relief because it assures her that she will make the team and she feels relieved because she knows that she will be able to play basketball the game she loves for this new team. Therefore, Nikki feels another emotion that shows her love for basketball*). The last body paragraph focuses on the third emotion from the controlling idea, *excitement* (*Additionally, Nikki feels excitement to play basketball. By the end of the tryout . . . Nikki started to fell really excited to play basketball with her tryout teammates*). A relevant text quote supports the focus (*"I was in the zone. Flowing with the game . . . moving like there were strings between us . . . like a dance"*) and connects to additional clear analysis (*When Nikki is playing a game with her team mates she is really excited when she plays because she loves the game. Thus, Nikki shows excitement when she is playing basketball which shows her love for it*). The clear conclusion ties back to the introduction (*Lastly, all three of the emotions Nikki shows in the story show how she loves the game of basketball*) and completes the response by asserting that Nikki will continue to play basketball, sometimes in spite of her emotions (*and is always willing to play at it no matter what she is feeling*), due to her love of the game. There is an appropriate use of transitions to link ideas both between and within the paragraphs (*that show, while, All of these, The first, In conversation, This shows/makes, if, Thus, Likewise, because, Therefore, Additionally, By the end, Lastly, and, no matter*). There is also an appropriate use of precise language (*elite, being nervous, relief, excitement, emotions, illustrated, conversation between, height, tall enough, good enough, example, peek, assures, always willing*) to convey experiences and events. Errors present in usage (*fell* for "feel," *team mates* for "teammates"), spelling (*teammates*), and punctuation (missing commas) seldom interfere with meaning.

Student Response

The passage by Barbara Caroll Roberts, entitled “Trouble” revolves around a thirteen-year-old girl who loves playing basketball, Nikki, who is trying out for a basketball team. She is intimidated by the others trying out due to the height difference. In the passage “Trouble”, the author shows Nikki’s love of playing basketball throughout the passage by including her conversations, actions, and thoughts.

To start off, the author shows Nikki’s love for basketball through her conversations. Near the beginning of the passage, Nikki notices a girl about nine or ten inches taller than her in front in the line for tryouts. She turns to her best friend trying out with her, Adria, and indicates to the girl in front of her, “Maybe she’s in the wrong gym, Adria said, her voice barely a whisper” (Roberts). Nikki responds with “Let’s hope (Roberts).” Nikki is worried about the tall girl, later known as Kate, in front of her due to the height difference. She believes that she is at a disadvantage. Because of that, she hopes that the girl in front of her is in the wrong gym so that she has a chance in the team.

Next, Roberts shows Nikki’s love for basketball through her actions. It was time to practice in tryouts and it was Nikki’s turn to grab a ball. “I sprinted down the court, my dribble low and crisp, my eyes up, the way Adria’s dad had taught me, I jumped to make a layup ... (Roberts).” The way all her actions were described can be imagined in the readers head. Nikki didn’t run down the court, she sprinted. Roberts didn’t just say she dribbled her ball but her dribble was low and crisp. It shows how Nikki knows what she is doing, and how much work she put into those skills.

Lastly, thoughts of Nikki show her love for basketball shown by the author. After the drills and layups they did, it was time to scrimmage to actually play basketball. Nikki was paired up with Kate and a few other girls. There are many occurrences where Nikki is shown to enjoy herself in the game like “I was in the zone ...” or when she said “The grins, the fist-bump. The joy ... I could have played like that forever (Roberts).” Nikki is focused in the game. She later finds out that Kate is a unselfish person and a teamworker. After that, she just enjoys playing, in the moment and focuses on what she loves.

In conclusion, Barbara Caroll Roberts shows Nikki’s love of basketball in “Trouble” by describing her actions, conversations, and thoughts. Later, Nikki ends up befriendng Kate and just enjoying her self with something she loves to do.

Annotation

This response adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text. An appropriate organizational structure adequately supports the response's focus on three ways the author shows Nikki's love of basketball. The clear introduction opens with an engaging synopsis of Nikki's basketball tryouts (*Nikki . . . is trying out for a basketball team. She is intimidated by the others trying out due to the height difference*) that is followed by a clear three-point controlling idea (*the author shows Nikki's love of playing basketball throughout the passage by including her conversations, actions, and thoughts*). In the first body paragraph, the response focuses on the first point from the controlling idea, *conversations*. A relevant text reference (*Nikki notices a girl about nine or ten inches taller than her in front in the line for tryouts. She turns to her best friend trying out with her, Adria, and indicates to the girl in front of her, "Maybe she's in the wrong gym, Adria said, her voice barely a whisper"*) is employed to support the clear analysis (*Nikki is worried about the tall girl, later known as Kate, in front of her due to the height difference. She believes that she is at a disadvantage. Because of that, she hopes that the girl in front of her is in the wrong gym so that she has a chance in the team*) that follows. The next body paragraph begins with a text reference addressing the second point (*actions*) from the controlling idea (*it was Nikki's turn to grab a ball. "I sprinted down the court, my dribble low and crisp, my eyes up. . . . I jumped to make a layup*). This idea is followed by clear analysis (*The way all her actions were described can be imagined in the readers head. Nikki didn't run down the court, she sprinted. Roberts didn't just say she dribbled her ball but her dribble was low and crisp. It shows how Nikki knows what she is doing, and how much work she put into those skills*) that clarifies the focus on Nikki's actions. The last body paragraph covers the last point from the controlling idea, *thoughts*. Relevant text and clear analysis again work together to provide a clear understanding of how Nikki's thoughts show her love of basketball (*After the drills and layups they did, it was time to scrimmage . . . Nikki was paired up with Kate . . . There are many ocurrences where Nikki is shown to enjoy herself in the game like "I was in the zone ..." or when she said "The grins, the fist-bump . . . I could have played like that forever"*). Additional clear analysis addressing Nikki's thoughts completes the paragraph's development (*Nikki is focused in the game. She later finds out that Kate is a unselfish person and a teamworker. After that, she just enjoys playing, in the moment and focuses on what she loves*). The clear conclusion ties back to the controlling idea (*In conclusion, Barbara Caroll Roberts shows Nikki's love of basketball in "Trouble" by describing her actions, conversations, and thoughts. Later, Nikki ends up befriendng Kate and just enjoying her self with something she loves to do*), providing cohesion and completing the essay. There is an appropriate use of transitions to link ideas (*In/ throughout the passage, To start off, Near the beginning, later/ Later, Because of that, Next, It shows, Lastly, After/ After that, in the moment, In conclusion, by*) throughout the response. There is also an appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*revolves, intimidated, height difference, conversations, actions, thoughts, disadvantage, imagined, skills, ocurrences, teamworker, befriendng*) to convey experiences and events. Some errors are present in usage (*then* for "than," *in* for "on," *a* for "an," *teamworker* for "team worker," *her self* for "herself,"), spelling (*ocurrences*), and punctuation (missing commas and apostrophe), but they seldom interfere with meaning.

Student Response

We know Nikki likes basketball because of what she say's in her thoughts. One way we know she likes basketball is when she said "I could be better than these girls, too. I could be one of the best. I had to be". This show's us how much she likes the game by showing us how determind she is to play and be the best. The second reson is "Okay, how many of you want to play varsity ball in high school?" When Coach Duval asked that question Nikki raised her hand. This show's how she love's playing basketball because she want's to do better and continu playing the game on a higher levil. The third reson is at the end when she say's "The grins, the fist-bumps. The joy. I could have played like that forever". The reson I use this as evidence is because this show's us how much she liked the game and how she could do it for ever. This are some resoun's why I think Nikki like's basketball.

Annotation

This response inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text. A weak organizational structure, including a weak introduction, weak development, and a weak conclusion, inconsistently supports the focus and ideas. The response opens with the controlling idea (*We know Nikki likes basketball because of what she say's in her thoughts*). Next, the response combines a text reference (*One way we know she likes basketball is when she said "I could be better than these girls, too. I could be one of the best. I had to be."*) and an inference (*This show's us how much she likes the game by showing us how determind she is to play and be the best*) to address the first example of Nikki's thoughts. The next example addressing Nikki's thoughts, again, begins with text support (*The second reson is "Okay, how many of you want to play varsity ball in high school?" When Coach Duval asked that question Nikki raised her hand*) that is followed by a weak inference (*This show's how she love's playing basketball because she want's to do better and continu playing the game on a higher levil*). The final example of Nikki's thoughts follows the same pattern, beginning with text (*The third reson is at the end when she say's "The grins, the fist-bumps. The joy. I could have played like that forever"*) that is followed by an inference (*The reson I use this as evidence is because this show's us how much she liked the game and how she could do it for ever*). A basic concluding statement (*This are some resoun's why I think Nikki like's basketball*) completes the response's weak development. There is a very basic use of transitions (*One way, This show's, The second/third reson, The reson I use this as evidence is because, This are some resoun's why*) and an inconsistent use of precise language (*thoughts, determind, higher levil*). Errors present in usage (*for ever* for "forever," *This* for "these"), spelling (*determind, reson/resoun's, continu, levil*), and punctuation (incorrect apostrophes, missing commas, and misplaced quotation marks) sometimes interfere with meaning.

Student Response

In the story “Trouble”, the author show Nikki’s love for basketball when she realizes she did’nt need to worry and just needed to play her game.

Nikki showed her love for basketball when she said, “I was in the zone. Flowing with the game, feeling where my teammates were moving like there were strings between us.” You can tell she loves basketball because she feels at peace, and once she gets on the court all of her worries about not being as good as everyone else goes away.

Annotation

This response inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text. A weak organizational structure, with a weak development, and a weak conclusion, inconsistently supports the focus and ideas. The response begins with a weak inference that addresses the task (*the author show Nikki’s love for basketball when she realizes she did’nt need to worry and just needed to play her game*) and functions as a very basic controlling idea. The body paragraph begins with a text reference (*“I was in the zone. Flowing with the game, feeling where my teammates were moving like there were strings between us”*). This is followed by weak analysis (*You can tell she loves basketball because she feels at peace, and once she gets on the court all of her worries about not being as good as everyone else goes away*) to complete the response’s weak development. There is an inconsistent use of transitions (*when she realizes/ said, because*) and precise language (*realizes, worry/worries, play her game, at peace*). The errors present in usage (*show* for “shows”), spelling (*teammates*), and punctuation (misplaced apostrophe) seldom interfere with meaning. Holistically, the response receives a score of 2 due to the inferences that go beyond a strictly literal interpretation of the text.

Item 9 – Score Point 1

Student Response

The author shows Nikki's love for basketball is by showing that she still tried out even with all her disadvantages. It states after she tried out and practice "could of played like that forever

Annotation

This response minimally addresses part of the task, demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text. There is minimal evidence of an organizational structure, with a minimal introduction, minimal development, and no discernible conclusion. The response minimally addresses the task (*The author shows Nikki's love for basketball is by showing that*) and then employs a vague inference (*she still tried out even with all her disadvantages*) in a weak attempt at development. Next, an insufficient reference to the text extends the response (*It states after she tried out and practice "could of played like that forever*), but it is also vague and does not support the inference. There are a few transitions (*by showing that, even with, It states*) and a minimal use of precise language (*disadvantages, tried out, practice*). The errors present in usage (*of* for "have"), spelling (*disadvantages, practice*), and punctuation (missing closing quotation mark) seldom interfere with meaning.

Item 9 – Score Point 1

Student Response

In the passage *Trouble*, Barbara carroll Roberts explains how a girl thinks she's in trouble because she is small.

Annotation

This response minimally addresses part of the task, demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text. There is minimal evidence of an organizational structure with no evident introduction, development, or conclusion. The response addresses the task in minimal, simplistic terms (*In the passage *Trouble*, Barbara carroll Roberts explains how a girl thinks she's in trouble*), adding a very minimal inference (*because she is small*) to complete the very brief response. There is one transition used (*because*) and little or no use of precise language (*explans*). The errors present in spelling (*explans*) and capitalization (*carroll* should be capitalized) do not interfere with meaning but are still significant, given the length of the response.

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