

Grade 8 Constructed Response Questions (2017) Teacher Version

The practice items were selected from two sources: the practice performance task classroom activity questions, and the SBAC practice test items. Both sources can provide additional practice for students with writing responses and comparing their answers to the exemplars supplied by SBAC.



Grade 8 ELA

Read the text and answer questions 1–9. **Antoine of Oregon**

A Story of the Oregon Trail
by James Otis

Susan rode with me, as she had from the beginning of the journey. Nothing of note happened to us, unless I should set down that this day was stormy, and on that day the sun shone, until we came into the valley of the North Fork of the Platte, through a pass which is known as Ash Hollow.

There we drove down a dry ravine on our winding way to the river bottoms, stopping now and then to gather a store of wild currants and gooseberries which grew in abundance.

Near the mouth of the ravine we came upon a small log cabin, which had evidently been built by trappers, but the emigrants on their way into the Oregon country had converted it into a post office, by sticking here and there, in the crevices of the logs, letters to be forwarded to their friends in the States. Hung on the wall where all might see it, was a general notice requesting any who passed on their way to the Missouri River to take these missives, and deposit them in the nearest regular post office.

The little cabin had an odd appearance, and Susan confessed that, almost for the first time since leaving Independence, she was growing homesick, solely because of seeing this post office.

After crossing the stream we came upon a party of emigrants from Ohio, having only four wagons drawn by ten yoke of oxen, and driving six cows.

Truly it was a small company to set out on so long a march, and when the leader begged that they be allowed to join us, I could not object, understanding that unless the strangers had someone of experience to guide them, the chances were strongly against their arriving at the Columbia River.

There was in the company a girl of about Susan's age, whose name was Mary Parker, and from that time I had two companions as I rode in advance of the train.

I could have found no fault with these new members of our company, for they obeyed my orders without question from the oldest man to the youngest child.

Mary Parker was a companionable girl, and she and Susan often cheered me on the long

way, for even when the rain was coming down in torrents, drenching them to the skin, they rode by my side, laughing and singing.

On the twenty-fourth day of June we arrived at Fort Laramie, in the midst of a heavy storm. We had traveled six hundred sixty-seven miles since leaving Independence, if our course had been the most direct; but allowing for the distances some of us had ridden in search of cattle or here and there off the trail looking for a camping place it must have been that we made at least a hundred miles more.

Fort Laramie is on the west side of a stream known as Laramie's Fork and about two miles from the Platte River. It is a trading post belonging to the North American Fur Company, and built of adobe, by which I mean sun dried bricks, with walls not less than two feet thick and twelve or fourteen feet high.

This fort, if it can be called such, is simply a wall enclosing an open square of twenty-five yards each way, along the sides of which are the dwellings, storerooms, blacksmith shops, carpenter shops, and offices all fronting inside, while from the outside can be seen only two gates, one of which faces the north and the other the south.

Just south of the fort is a wall enclosing about an acre of land, which is used as a stable or corral, while a short distance farther on is a cultivated field, the scanty crops of which give good evidence that the soil is not suitable for farming.

About a mile below Fort Laramie, and having much the same appearance as that fortification, although not so large, is Fort John, which is in possession of the St. Louis Fur Company.

We were given quarters inside Fort Laramie, which was much to our liking.

Then, when we set off once more, it was with greater cheerfulness and increased hope, for the way could not have been improved nor made more pleasant.

Ten days after we celebrated the independence of this country we encamped near the Narrows, within sight of the snow-capped Wind River Mountains, and then it was that our company got some idea of what a herd of buffaloes looked like.

When we broke camp in the morning it seemed as if the entire land was covered with the animals. They were in such throngs that the sound of their hoofs was like the rumbling of distant thunder.

One could compare the scene to nothing more than to an ocean of dark water surrounding us on every side, pitching and tossing as if under the influence of a strong wind.

It was such a sight as I had seen more than once, but to my companions it was terrifying at the same time that it commanded their closest attention.

"Antoine of Oregon" by James Otis, from
<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/43897/pg43897.txt>. In the public domain.

Item	Grade	Claim	Target	DOK	Standard(s)
#2	8	1	2	3	RL.2

Evidence Statement

The student will determine or summarize a theme or central idea of a text using supporting evidence.

What is the author's message about the Oregon Trail? Use details from the text to support your answer.

Type your answer in this box.

Score	Rationale	Exemplar
2	<p><u>A response:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives sufficient evidence of the ability to determine/summarize the theme/central idea/message, or to analyze the development of the central idea • Includes specific examples/details that make clear reference to the text • Adequately explains the theme/central idea/message or analysis with clearly relevant information based on the text 	<p>The author's message is about even though the journey may be tough, with great people around, you can make it in the end and can have a great reward. In the text, it states that Susan and Mary Parker were great companions and cheered her on. It also says that they were glad to have quarters in Fort Laramie. They faced many roadblocks traveling to Fort Laramie, including storms and being homesick, but made to the camp and pleased to be there. They felt rewarded for their tough journey.</p>
1	<p><u>A response:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives limited evidence of the ability to determine/summarize the theme/central idea/message, or to analyze the development of the central idea • Includes vague/limited examples/details that make reference to the text • Explains the theme/central idea/message or analysis with vague/limited information based on the text 	<p>The authors message is that the Oregon Trail is hard and heart-breaking. Some people may even die. People can also get homesick, but it is nice when you have friends to keep you company.</p>
0	<p>A response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives no evidence of the ability to determine/summarize the theme/central idea/message, or to analyze the development of the central idea <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives the theme/central idea/message or analysis, but includes no examples or no examples/details that make reference to the text <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives the theme/central idea/message or analysis, but includes no explanation or relevant information from the text 	<p>The authors message is that its a hard trail to go on.</p>

Item	Grade	Claim	Target	DOK	Standard(s)
#8	8	1	4	4	RL.3

Evidence Statement

The student will make an inference about a literary text or texts and identify details within the text or texts that support that inference.

What inference can be made about the narrator's feelings toward the new traveling companions? Support your answer with details from the text.

Type your answer in this box.

Score	Rationale	Exemplar
2	<p><u>A response:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives sufficient evidence of the ability to make a clear inference/conclusion • Includes specific examples/details that make clear reference to the text • Adequately explains inference/conclusion with clearly relevant information based on the text 	<p>I think that the narrator is glad to have traveling companions. In the text it says, "Mary Parker was a companionable girl, and she and Susan often cheered me on the long way, for even when the rain was coming down in torrents, drenching them to the skin, tthey rode by me side by side, laughing and singing." I also think that the narroroator feels that he needs to help his traveling companions. I know this beacuse in the text, he said,"Truly it was a small company set out on so long a march, and when the leader beggged that they be allowed to join us, I could not object, understanding that unless the strangers had someone of experience to guide them, the chances were strongly against them arriving at the Columbia River."</p>
1	<p><u>A response:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives limited evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion • Includes vague/limited examples/details that make reference to the text • Explains inference/conclusion with vague/limited information based on the text 	<p>The narrators loves the new traveling companions, I know this because he says," I could have found no fault with these new members of our company, for they obeyed my oreders without a question from the oldest man to the youngest child."</p>
0	<p><u>A response:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives no evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives an inference /conclusion but includes no examples or no examples/ details that make reference to the text <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives an inference/conclusion but includes no explanation or relevant information from the text explanation, but includes no explanation or no relevant information from the text 	<p>They were frightened by them and did not feel comfortable in their current surrounding with the animals often startling them and making it a stressful enviornment.</p>

Read the text and answer questions 10–15.

Master of Beautiful Music
by Ellen Seiden

The following text describes the music camp run by world famous violinist Itzhak Perlman and his wife, Toby.

From personal experience, Mr. Perlman advises students that in order to succeed in music, art, or anything outside of "normal" activities, "First of all, you have to love what you do. That's number one. And number two, you have to have some sort of discipline. I always felt I was more successful when I had a routine . . . routine is much easier. You spend a certain time of the day doing A and a certain time of the day doing B. In music, for example, no matter how much of a gift you have, practicing is very important, so if you're serious, you have to practice. Being programmed, in some ways, is very, very effective. And as long as you program in some free time, just to rest, then you're O.K. Whatever the extracurricular activities, dancing or sports or music, if you're programmed up to the gills, as a result—at least I found this in my case—you can lose enjoyment."

Young, musically talented students can put into practice what Mr. Perlman preaches when they attend the noteworthy, nurturing summer program founded in 1995 by his wife, Toby, also an accomplished violinist. At the Perlman Music Program in East Hampton, New York, led by a handpicked, caring faculty, tomorrow's professional musicians from the ages of eleven to eighteen play to their heart's content.

Special features make this two-week August sleep-away program different and unusual. As Mrs. Perlman, the artistic director, explained to me, "One of the unique aspects of our program is that we are small, only thirty-five students, and small means intimate. I always know what's going on with each child." She continued, "Second, the playing level is very high, but it's highly noncompetitive." Instead of auditioning for seats in the orchestra according to ability, as is tradition, "Our kids are seated in the section randomly. Often the smallest gets to sit in front," she said, laughing. Participants know there is no penalty for musical problems, and that Toby's motto, "If you don't do well, it doesn't mean it's your fault," rules.

"We care about the total child. We try to create a healthy, happy, normal environment during their stay. It doesn't mean they don't work really hard, but there's a lot of talking that goes on. They come to us and suddenly they're a part of a community, a family, and they find out that many of the feelings they have are shared by other kids. It's very nice."

The students, who come from all over the world, attend a weekly dinner at the Perlmans' house, themed to discuss such issues as dealing with stage fright. All students must also

sing in the chorus, where they harmonize and experience a different form of musical expression. Time for recreational sports and arts and crafts rounds out the program.

The children are at first awed by, and then come to accept, the active involvement of famous musicians in their training. Often, Itzhak Perlman and other masters such as violinist/violist/conductor Pinchas Zukerman and pianist Emanuel Ax drop in to work with the students. Itzhak Perlman explained, "Not many children have that camp experience, not only to be taught by world-class artists, but also to participate in playing and performing with them. We also have an orchestra made up of all the kids, and I try to conduct and coach them." Invited to attend rehearsals, people who live in the community during the summer, such as Steven Spielberg and his family, stop by to listen. Mr. Spielberg became the first major contributor to future expansion plans for the Perlman Music Program.

Mrs. Perlman said, "At the end of the session, we have two concerts. One is an evening of orchestral and choral music, and then we have a chamber music marathon. It starts at 11:00 in the morning on the last day, and the playing goes on until we finish!"

Intensely proud of her program, Toby Perlman enthusiastically states that "It's like a fairy tale program, it's so wonderful. No matter what I say about it, I can't put into words what it feels like, tastes like, and smells like when you're there. Everybody who comes to visit gets it. They're there for a minute and a half and they want to stay forever. We're lucky to have such a wonderful faculty and wonderful kids."

Reflecting on his own training and lengthy career as a professional musician, Mr. Perlman believes that he, too, has earned the right to some time off every now and then. "I can take vacation from music for a while when I just want to relax," he said and chuckled. But he did caution, "The important thing is not to go on vacation while you do your music, or while you do anything else in the arts. Once I play, I have to be, and I am, really committed to it. Your audience can sense this . . . it has to be really given, it has to be felt across the stage. One should not be a passenger in music, getting on the notes and riding them. One has to always feel that one is re-creating something, that there's a spontaneity all the time. The main challenge for a musician is to play something for the five hundredth time and make your audience think that you're playing it for the first time."

A modest man, Itzhak Perlman remarked on himself and his tremendous talent, "I don't think there's anything unusual. People say 'You're amazing,' but I say that I do whatever I am capable of doing. The important thing is to know what you're capable of and do it. That's all."

Excerpt from *Master of Beautiful Music* by Ellen Seiden. Copyright © 2000 by Carus Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission of Carus Publishing Company.

Item	Grade	Claim	Target	DOK	Standard(s)
#11	8	1	9	3	RI.2

Evidence Statement

The student will summarize a central idea in a text using supporting evidence.

Summarize the author's message about the Perlmans' dedication to the camp. Use evidence from the text to support your summary.

Type your answer in this box.

Score	Rationale	Exemplar
2	<p>A response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives sufficient evidence of the ability to determine/summarize the author's message/claim/point/central idea, or to explain the support for a central idea • Includes specific examples/details that make clear reference to the text • Adequately explains the author's message/claim/point/central idea or explanation with clearly relevant information based on the text 	<p>The Perlmans' dedication to the camp is one that is filled with passion and excitement. They have an overall look on what exactly they want the camp to be like, and they follow through with that vision. In the text it says things such as "play to their hearts content" and "love what you do." These are quotes that show that music is something they think comes from the heart. It shows that the Perlmans' have a goal, and that is to want the children to play music from their hearts. They also have a certain system that happens at the camp. For example in the text it says that at the end of the session, they have two concerts; and orchestral and choral concert and then a chamber music marathon. It seems as though the Perlmans' put a lot of time and effort into creating their camp and their dedication to it shines through.</p>
1	<p>A response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives limited evidence of the ability to determine/summarize the author's message/claim/point/central idea, or to explain the support for a central idea • Includes vague/limited examples/details that make reference to the text • Explains the author's message/claim/point/central idea or explanation with vague/limited information based on the text 	<p>The Perlmans' dedication to their sleep away camp is very strong. They care about taking care of the kids, trying to give them a happy and healthy environment. They try to make it as fun as possible for them so they can do what they really want to do which is make beautiful music.</p>
0	<p>A response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives no evidence of the ability to determine/summarize author's message/claim/point/central idea, or to explain the support for a central idea <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives the author's message/claim/point/central idea or explanation, but includes no examples or no examples/details that make reference to the text <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives the author's message/claim/point/central idea or explanation, but includes no explanation or no relevant information from the text 	<p>this camp was about helping kids succeed at the activity they like to do</p>

Item	Grade	Claim	Target	DOK	Standard(s)
#12	8	1	11	3	RI.3

Evidence Statement

The student will make an inference about an informational text and identify evidence within the text that supports that inference.

What inference can be made about the author's opinion on the likelihood of students returning for multiple years? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Type your answer in this box.

Score	Rationale	Exemplar
2	<p><u>A response:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives sufficient evidence of the ability to make a clear inference/conclusion • Includes specific examples/details that make clear reference to the text • Adequately explains inference/conclusion with clearly relevant information based on the text 	<p>i think that the author's opinion is that students will return to mr. perlman's camp for multiple years. i think this because the author describes the camp as a 'noteworthy and nurturing summer program.' the author tells the reader that the camp has special features that make the program different and unusual. for example, mrs. perlman is caring of all the children and, since it is an intimate group, knows what might be troubling the children. the camp is highly noncompetitive and mrs. perlman's motto is 'if you don't do well, it doesn't mean it's your fault.' so i think the author is recommending this summer program because it is safe, secure, noncompetitive, and devoid of pressure.</p>
1	<p><u>A response:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives limited evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion • Includes vague/limited examples/details that make reference to the text • Explains inference/conclusion with vague/limited information based on the text 	<p>The author has a very confident view on students returning. "Everybody who comes to visit gets it. They're there for a minute and a half and they want to stay forever."</p>
0	<p><u>A response:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives no evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives an inference/conclusion but includes no examples or no examples/details that make reference to the text <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives an inference/conclusion but includes no explanation or relevant information from the text 	<p>You can infer that students that return there will accomplish many good things in music.</p>

Item	Grade	Claim	Target	DOK	Standard(s)
#18	8	2-W	1aE	3	W.3

Evidence Statement
The student will use information provided in a stimulus to write well-developed narratives that apply narrative techniques such as, including dialogue to convey events/experiences, and including descriptive details and sensory language to convey events/experiences.

A student is writing a realistic fiction narrative for language arts class. Read the draft of the narrative and complete the task that follows.

An Important Decision

With a few clicks on the school's website, I find what I am looking for - the dates for volleyball tryouts. Nothing makes me happier than that sport. Whether I am casually bumping the ball with friends in the backyard or spiking one into the opposition's court with laser accuracy, I feel completely alive. Even though the official tryouts are a few weeks away, I have been practicing relentlessly when the gymnasium is open to students.

My excitement leads me to call my best friend Katelyn. As soon as I hear the line ringing, a thought occurs to me and makes my heart flutter. The first day of tryouts is the same date as Katelyn's dance recital! She is depending on my moral support. When Katelyn's chipper voice answers, a sudden paralysis takes over my mind and body. Eventually I mumble, "Hey Katelyn . . . hang on a second . . . uh, let me call you back."

Continue the narrative by writing one to three paragraphs that help readers better understand the central conflict of the story.

Type your answer in this box.

Score	Rationale	Exemplar
2	<p>A response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides appropriate and mainly specific descriptive details and/or dialogue Provides adequate development of experiences, characters, setting, action, and/or events Uses adequate sensory, concrete, and/or figurative language Is mostly "shown" 	<p>I do not know what to do next. Should I choose my best friend or the opportunity to be on the volleyball team? I mean, I Love Katelyn, as she is my best friend. However, volleyball is important to me, too! I have been playing volleyball since I can remember, and it is a part of who I am. Panic spreads throughout my body as I can think of a solution to my problem. Maybe if Katelyn's dance recital is in the afternoon, I can go after my tryouts. Or if my tryouts are in the morning, and her recital is in the afternoon, I could still go. My heart is beating really fast. I can feel the beads of sweat forming on my forehead. What should I do!? Should I go talk to my mom and ask for advice? Suddenly, I remember she went grocery shopping. Now I know that is out of the question. I should probably handle this by myself. I don't know if I should choose sports over my best friend. They are both important to me and I love them both. I made a mental list of pros and cons of how it would affect me to go to my tryouts first. The disadvantage of going to my tryouts first is that I could lose my best friend. Katelyn might never talk to me again. When I thought of the consequences, I suddenly knew what I should do... After a thoughtful discussion with myself, I decided to call Katelyn. After the third ring, she answered. She said, "Hey, what's going on?" "Hey Katelyn," I said. "Your dance recital happened to be on the same day as my volleyball tryouts. I decided I'm going to your dance recital instead. I know you know how much being in this volleyball team means to me, but my bestfriend is more important than anything. My tryouts can wait until the second day. I want to be there for you for moral support. So...yeah. What do you think?" Katelyn said, "Oh my gosh, really? Uh, okay! Thank you so much! I will return to the favor to you eventually. I will be there whenever you need me. Thank you! I owe you one! Oh - I got to practice again. Talk to you later, bye! Love you!" And with that, she hung up the phone. I knew I made the right choice.</p>

<p>1</p>	<p><u>A response:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides mostly general descriptive details and little or no dialogue, and may include extraneous details that are unrelated or only loosely related • Provides limited development of experiences, characters, setting, action, and/or events • Uses limited sensory, concrete, and/or figurative language • Is somewhat “told” 	<p>I think to myself what am i going to do, i can't miss the tryouts or Katelyn's recital. My life feels like a disaster as my mind fights its self trying to choose between my dream and my best friend. I have to think of of the effects of choosing one over the other, if i choose vollyball than Katelyn would lower her opinion of me and might not be my friend, and if i choose the recital all the time of training would come to a waste but i would still have my best friend. As I finally made a choice I called her up and tell her what i was going to do.</p>
<p>0</p>	<p><u>A response:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives no evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives an inference /conclusion but includes no examples or no examples/ details that make reference to the text <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives an inference/_ conclusion but includes no explanation or relevant information from the text 	<p>Katelyn's dance recital is the same date as the tryouts for volleyball but Katelyn needs friends support witch will be hard to choose what to do.</p>