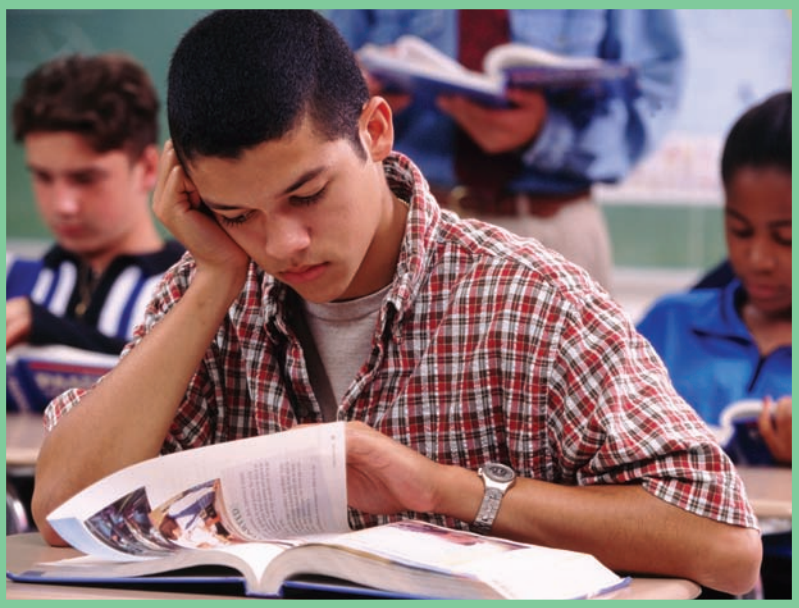
GRADE

9

TAKS STUDY GUIDE

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

Reading



A Student and Family Guide to Grade 9 Reading

TAKS STUDY GUIDE

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

Grade 9

Reading

A Student and Family Guide

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Dear Student and Parent:

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) is a comprehensive testing program for public school students in grades 3–11. TAKS replaces the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and is designed to measure to what extent a student has learned, understood, and is able to apply the important concepts and skills expected at each tested grade level. In addition, the test can provide valuable feedback to students, parents, and schools about student progress from grade to grade.

Students are tested in mathematics in grades 3–11; reading in grades 3–9; writing in grades 4 and 7; English language arts in grades 10 and 11; science in grades 5, 8, 10, and 11; and social studies in grades 8, 10, and 11. Every TAKS test is directly linked to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum. The TEKS is the state-mandated curriculum for Texas public school students. Essential knowledge and skills taught at each grade build upon the material learned in previous grades. By developing the academic skills specified in the TEKS, students can build a strong foundation for future success.

The Texas Education Agency has developed this study guide to help students strengthen the TEKS-based skills that are taught in class and tested on TAKS. The guide is designed for students to use on their own or for students and families to work through together. Concepts are presented in a variety of ways that will help students review the information and skills they need to be successful on the TAKS. Every guide includes explanations, practice questions, detailed answer keys, and student activities. At the end of this study guide is an evaluation form for you to complete and mail back when you have finished the guide. Your comments will help us improve future versions of this guide.

There are a number of resources available for students and families who would like more information about the TAKS testing program. Information booklets are available for every TAKS subject and grade. Brochures are also available that explain the Student Success Initiative promotion requirements and the new graduation requirements for eleventh-grade students. To obtain copies of these resources or to learn more about the testing program, please contact your school or visit the Texas Education Agency website at www.tea.state.tx.us.

Texas is proud of the progress our students have made as they strive to reach their academic goals. We hope the study guides will help foster student learning, growth, and success in all of the TAKS subject areas.

Sincerely,

Lisa Chandler
Director of Student Assessment
Texas Education Agency

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READING

INTRODUCTION

What Is This Study Guide?

This is a study guide to help you strengthen your skills on the Grade 9 TAKS Reading test.

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What's on the Grade 9 TAKS Reading Test?

The Grade 9 TAKS Reading test assesses your reading comprehension, or your understanding of what you read. This test measures achievement of certain test objectives, or goals. These TAKS test objectives are broad statements about the knowledge or skills being tested. You can find out more about the reading objectives for Grade 9 beginning on page 17 of this book. Here's an example of a TAKS objective for Grade 9 reading:

> The student will demonstrate an understanding of the effects of literary elements and techniques in culturally diverse written texts.

What does this mean? It means that students should be able to show that they understand how certain elements of a story—such as **setting** and **theme**—affect the story's meaning. The phrase "culturally diverse" means "having to do with a wide range of backgrounds and points of view."

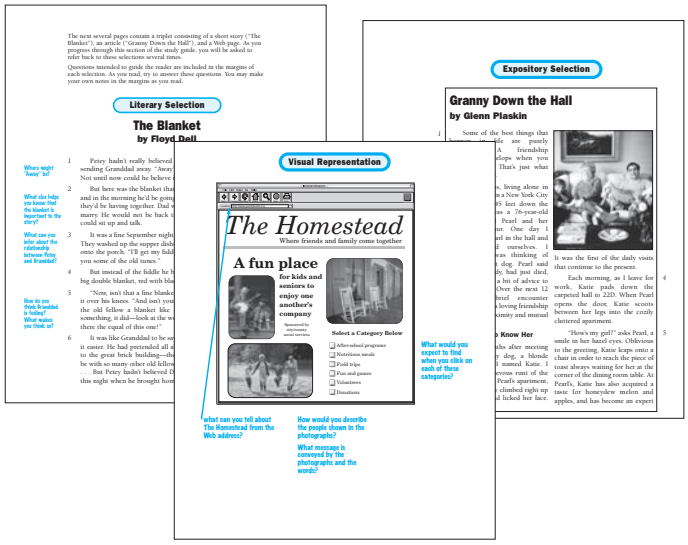
There are two types of questions on the Grade 9 Reading test: multiple-choice items and short-answer items.

- In a **multiple-choice** item, you choose the correct answer from four possible answers.
- In a **short-answer** item, you write a short response to a question.

What Is a Triplet?

The Grade 9 TAKS Reading test contains three selections. The three selections are related; that is why they are called a triplet.

A common theme or idea links all the selections in a triplet. These selections are carefully chosen to reflect a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and points of view. They are much like the selections you read in the classroom and in your everyday life.



Each triplet consists of

- a published literary selection (such as a short story or a chapter from a novel)
- a published expository, or informational, selection (such as an essay or magazine article)
- a one-page visual representation (such as an advertisement, Web page, or cartoon)

How Can This Study Guide Help You?

This study guide can help you strengthen the skills tested on the TAKS test. It explains the objectives that are tested and guides you through sample questions. These questions give you practice in applying the skills you have learned in the classroom. When you work through this study guide, you'll be working on the same skills that you'll need in order to do well on the test. This is your copy of the study guide, and you may make notes in it wherever you like.

How Is This Study Guide Organized?

This study guide begins by presenting a sample triplet.

- The first selection is a short story.
- The second selection is a magazine article.
- The third selection is a Web page.

You will see notes in the margins of each selection. These notes highlight important points that careful readers notice when they read.

Next the study guide gives you information about TAKS Objectives 1 through 3. Along with this information, you'll find sample items. These items show you how Grade 9 TAKS Reading tests the skills in these objectives.

The sample questions in the study guide are the same types of questions as those on the TAKS test and are at about the same level of difficulty.

This study guide contains answers to all the sample TAKS questions. Some of the answers appear in the sections that focus on the objectives, and others are found toward the end of the study guide. The answers include explanations that tell why each answer is correct or incorrect.

The next several pages contain a triplet consisting of a short story ("The Blanket"), an article ("Granny Down the Hall"), and a Web page. As you progress through this section of the study guide, you will be asked to refer to these selections several times.

Questions intended to guide the reader are included in the margins of each selection. As you read, try to answer these questions. You may make your own notes in the margins as you read.

Literary Selection

The Blanket

by Floyd Dell

Where might "Away" be?

1 Petey hadn't really believed that Dad would be doing it—sending Granddad away. "Away" was what they were calling it. Not until now could he believe it of his father.

What clue helps you know that the blanket is important to the story?

2 But here was the blanket that Dad had bought for Granddad, and in the morning he'd be going away. This was the last evening they'd be having together. Dad was off seeing that girl he was to marry. He would not be back till late, so Petey and Granddad could sit up and talk.

What can you tell about the relationship between Petey and Granddad?

3 It was a fine September night, with a silver moon riding high. They washed up the supper dishes and then took their chairs out onto the porch. "I'll get my fiddle," said the old man, "and play you some of the old tunes."

4 But instead of the fiddle he brought out the blanket. It was a big double blanket, red with black stripes.

How do you think Granddad is feeling? What makes you think so?

5 "Now, isn't that a fine blanket!" said the old man, smoothing it over his knees. "And isn't your father a kind man to be giving the old fellow a blanket like that to go away with? It cost something, it did—look at the wool of it! There'll be few blankets there the equal of this one!"

6 It was like Granddad to be saying that. He was trying to make it easier. He had pretended all along that he wanted to go away to the great brick building—the government place. There he'd be with so many other old fellows, having the best of everything. . . . But Petey hadn't believed Dad would really do it, not until this night when he brought home the blanket.

Why does Petey feel like crying?

7 "Oh, yes, it's a fine blanket," said Petey. He got up and went into the house. He wasn't the kind to cry and, besides, he was too old for that. He'd just gone in to fetch Granddad's fiddle.

8 The blanket slid to the floor as the old man took the fiddle and stood up. He tuned up for a minute, and then said, "This is one you'll like to remember."

How do you think Petey feels about his dad's girlfriend?

9 Petey sat and looked out over the gully. Dad would marry that girl. Yes, that girl who had kissed Petey and fussed over him, saying she'd try to be a good mother to him, and all. . . .

How might the girlfriend have influenced Dad's decision to send Granddad away?

10 The tune stopped suddenly. Granddad said, "It's a fine girl your father's going to marry. He'll be feeling young again with a pretty wife like that. And what would an old fellow like me be doing around their house, getting in the way? An old nuisance, what with my talks of aches and pains. It's best that I go away, like I'm doing. One more tune or two, and then we'll be going to sleep. I'll pack up my blanket in the morning."

What do paragraphs 9–11 reveal about the girlfriend?

11 They didn't hear the two people coming down the path. Dad had one arm around the girl, whose bright face was like a doll's. But they heard her when she laughed, right close by the porch. Dad didn't say anything, but the girl came forward and spoke to Granddad prettily: "I won't be here when you leave in the morning, so I came over to say good-bye."

12 "It's kind of you," said Granddad, with his eyes cast down. Then, seeing the blanket at his feet, he stooped to pick it up. "And will you look at this," he said. "The fine blanket my son has given me to go away with."

Which details help you understand the character of the girlfriend?

13 "Yes," she said. "It's a fine blanket." She felt the wool and repeated in surprise, "A fine blanket—I'll say it is!" She turned to Dad and said to him coldly, "That blanket really cost something."

14 Dad cleared his throat and said, "I wanted him to have the best. . . ."

15 "It's double, too," she said, as if accusing Dad.

16 "Yes," said Granddad, "it's double—a fine blanket for an old fellow to be going away with."

Why does the girlfriend leave?

17 The boy went suddenly into the house. He was looking for something. He could hear that girl scolding Dad. She realized how much of Dad's money—her money, really—had gone for the

How do you think Dad feels about her leaving? How might Granddad feel?

blanket. Dad became angry in his slow way. And now she was suddenly going away in a huff. . . .

18 As Petey came out, she turned and called back, "All the same, he doesn't need a double blanket!" And she ran off up the path.

19 Dad was looking after her as if he wasn't sure what he ought to do.

20 "Oh, she's right," Petey said. "Here, Dad"—and he held out a pair of scissors. "Cut the blanket in two."

21 Both of them stared at the boy, startled. "Cut it in two, I tell you, Dad!" he cried out. "And keep the other half."

22 "That's not a bad idea," said Granddad gently. "I don't need so much of a blanket."

23 "Yes," the boy said harshly, "a single blanket's enough for an old man when he's sent away. We'll save the other half, Dad. It'll come in handy later."

24 "Now what do you mean by that?" asked Dad.

25 "I mean," said the boy slowly, "that I'll give it to you, Dad—when you're old and I'm sending you—away."

What does Granddad understand as Dad stands before him?

26 There was a silence. Then Dad went over to Granddad and stood before him, not speaking. But Granddad understood. He put out a hand and laid it on Dad's shoulder. And he heard Granddad whisper, "It's all right, son. I knew you didn't mean it. . . ." And then Petey cried.

What do you think will happen next? Why do you think so?

27 But it didn't matter—because they were all crying together.

"The Blanket" used by permission of Amsco School Publications, Inc., 315 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10013.

Expository Selection

Granny Down the Hall

by Glenn Plaskin

1 Some of the best things that happen in life are purely accidental. A friendship sometimes develops when you least expect it. That's just what happened to me.

Where does the author live?

Why is that location important to the article?

2 There I was, living alone in apartment 22G in a New York City high-rise. Just 45 feet down the hall in 22D was a 76-year-old woman named Pearl and her husband, Arthur. One day I bumped into Pearl in the hall and we introduced ourselves. I mentioned I was thinking of buying my first dog. Pearl said their dog, Brandy, had just died, and she offered a bit of advice to get me started. Over the next 12 years, that brief encounter blossomed into a loving friendship nurtured by proximity and mutual chemistry.

Getting to Know Her

Why did the author take his dog straight to Pearl's apartment?

How does paragraph 3 help you predict what will happen in the selection?

3 A few months after meeting Pearl, I got my dog, a blonde cocker spaniel I named Katie. I took the mischievous runt of the litter straight to Pearl's apartment, where the puppy climbed right up into her arms and licked her face.

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It was the first of the daily visits that continue to the present.

4 Each morning, as I leave for work, Katie pads down the carpeted hall to 22D. When Pearl opens the door, Katie scoots between her legs into the cozily cluttered apartment.

5 "How's my girl?" asks Pearl, a smile in her hazel eyes. Oblivious to the greeting, Katie leaps onto a chair in order to reach the piece of toast always waiting for her at the corner of the dining room table. At Pearl's, Katie has also acquired a taste for honeydew melon and apples, and has become an expert

How would you describe the relationship between Pearl and Katie? What details help you understand the relationship?

at eating corn on the cob (side to side without missing a kernel) and watermelon (avoiding the seeds).

6 After her various snacks, Katie jumps onto Pearl's bed and snoozes soundly on her nightgown. Although I never intended for my dog to become part of Pearl's household, our routine evolved quite naturally.

The Way She Is

Why do you think the author nicknamed Pearl "Granny"?

7 "Granny," as I nicknamed Pearl, is now a spry 88, sturdily built, rarely sick, and she still does all her own shopping, cooking and cleaning. Granny can be feisty one moment, girlish the next. She's conservative about money, clipping store coupons, yet immensely generous, whether she's taking clothes to the homeless or making dinner for friends at loose ends. Prim about her personal business, she has a crisp sense of humor and relishes a risqué joke. She has compassion for people's frailties and a cautious realism born of the Great Depression.

How do the words "Broadway plays she saw in the 1920s and '30s" help you understand the meaning of reminiscing in paragraph 8?

What details in paragraph 8 help you understand the relationship between the author and Pearl?

8 Although 40 years separate us, I always feel that Granny is a contemporary. She's up-to-date on tennis, golf, baseball, showbiz gossip and the stock market. She avidly listens to radio and TV news, talks about the wonders of the Internet and "the magic" of the fax, while also reminiscing, with carefully preserved programs in hand, about Broadway plays she saw in the 1920s and '30s. She's a shrewd judge of character and, on occasion, has given me the thumbs up or down on a prospective date or friend. Overall, she's just a great gal!

9 Born in New York City in 1912, Pearl was a bright, vivacious girl who had little interest in her studies but a lot of interest in boys. In fact, in 1935 she married Arthur, "the boy next door." During their early years together, Pearl worked as a secretary ("I earned $12 a week and sent my mother $5") while Arthur sold women's apparel wholesale. A close couple who rarely argued, Pearl and Arthur remained active travelers and theatergoers, even after retirement, and surrounded themselves with young people. Indeed, a 3-year-old boy named Ryan, who lived down the hall in apartment 22P, became one of their best friends. Ryan, now 10, is the son of my friend John, a single dad.

The Good Group

10 And so, we all began having spontaneous breakfasts and dinners together. During the day Arthur sometimes watched cartoons with Ryan and fed his "girl," Katie, chunks of apple as they both stretched out on his lounge chair. In the evenings Granny fried up her wickedly

What do details in paragraph 10 reveal about the group?

delicious paprika chicken cutlets and put out her home-baked apricot-and-plum tarts or chocolate pie. Our little band also went out to dinner occasionally and to the movies. We traded apartment-building gossip and shared major holidays.

11 One day, after we'd all had dinner together, a pleasant thought dawned on me: Granny and Arthur, Ryan and John, and Katie and I had formed our own little "family" right in the building. In 1990 I'd lost my grandmother, Essie, with whom I'd been extremely close. Now Pearl was, in essence, my new Granny. And Ryan, with no grandparents of his own, had quickly adopted Pearl and Arthur. It was touching to see him throw his arms around Granny's neck. "He's a great hugger; he's my boy!" beamed Pearl. Ryan's dad, John, also adopted Granny, and loved talking with her about the challenges of raising a young son. As for Pearl, with no children of her own, she simply adopted us all!

Through Thick and Thin

How might the friends have been helpful to Pearl during Arthur's absence?

What is the tone of "Through Thick and Thin"? How is it different from the tone of the rest of the selection?

12 Then one day in the fall of '94 Arthur was hospitalized with pneumonia and a cardiac condition. Now his chair was empty at our "family dinners," and we missed the sound of his baritone voice and his commonsense remarks. Every night Ryan asked about "Artur's" condition. Katie obviously missed him too, as she napped alone on his lounge chair, looking forlorn.

13 In January of '95, Pearl came home from the hospital late one afternoon and said it was over. They had been married for 59 years; now Arthur was dead. We all were bereft. I went with Pearl to a Westchester cemetery in the teeming rain and mud slides, holding her arm as she made her way to the grave. "That," Pearl recalls, "was the worst day of my life." Saying goodbye to Arthur was the only time I ever saw Pearl cry.

14 I believe that having young neighbors was healing for Pearl, and soon she was making dinner and sitting for Ryan again. She and Ryan grew ever closer. Today she picks him up after school, walks him to play dates or soccer practice, helps with his homework, teaches him card games, spoils him with Krispy Kreme doughnuts, watches TV with him, then sends him on home.

15 "Some days, when Ryan gets off the school bus," Pearl muses, "he runs over and hugs me. His friends just stand there looking kind of cockeyed, and I say, 'Do any of *you* have a Granny?' They shake their heads no and come over to me. I hug them all." Do they like it? "Yes, they do!"

What do details in paragraph 16 reveal about the nature of the relationship between the author and Pearl?

How would you summarize "Granny Down the Hall"?

Why do you think the author wrote this selection?

16 Granny and I have grown closer too. When one of us is sick, the other gets groceries. When the snow and ice make walking impossible for her, I bring in the food. When I had a back injury, she brought ice packs and soup. When Katie was mysteriously bleeding one night, she went with me to the animal hospital. And when I had a bike-riding accident and was taken to a hospital emergency room, it was Granny who came immediately. Likewise, when she was struck by a taxi, but was miraculously unharmed, I picked her up at that same emergency room and took her home.

17 Sometimes I wonder, *What if I hadn't wound up in the only vacant apartment on the 22nd floor? Would I ever have known Pearl?* Each of us has joined together to form a family circle. Through bad health, accidents, electrical outages, harsh winters, happy birthdays, holidays and everydays, we share a bond of love that brings us comfort, support, security—and fun.

18 When Granny turned 85, I invited 30 people over to celebrate. That day I re-nicknamed Pearl "Oldest Granny," and amid the chocolate cake and helium balloons, I asked "Oldest" if she'd ever had such a big birthday party. "I've never *had* a birthday party," she said. "Don't do it again!" We will anyway, on her 90th.

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Visual Representation

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What would you expect to find when you click on each of these categories?

What can you tell about the Homestead from the Web address?

How would you describe the people shown in the photographs?

What message is conveyed by the photographs and the words?

Objective 1

The student will demonstrate a basic understanding of culturally diverse written texts.

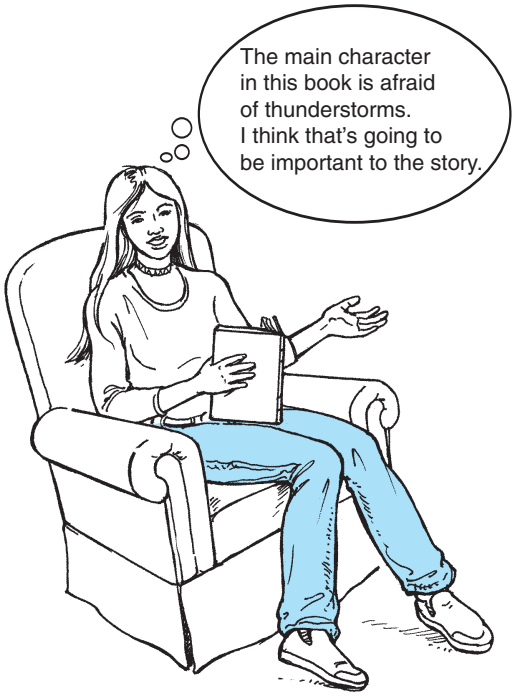
The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) statements and the student expectations for Objective 1 tell what students should be able to do as they read to understand the basic meaning of a selection.

What Is a Basic Understanding?

The process of reading is like having a conversation. The writer gives you the words on a page. As a reader, you bring listening and thinking skills to the conversation. You begin this "conversation" by gaining a **basic understanding** of what you read. This means much more than just seeing what's on the printed page. It means

- figuring out the meanings of words you read by using context clues and other strategies

- recognizing important details in a selection



- understanding the "big picture"—that is, what a selection is mainly about

These are "building block" skills. You will need these skills to develop a basic understanding of what you read. Next you will read about some of the skills tested in Objective 1.

Reading in Varied Sources

The reading selections for the TAKS test are very much like the materials you read every day. For example, you might be asked to read an essay about a teenager's visit to another country. Or you might read a folktale about a woman who defends her village. Perhaps you'll be asked to read and interpret a chart that rates and compares different brands of backpacks.

Why Develop Good Reading Skills?

Having good reading skills is extremely important both in school and out. To succeed in school—in all subjects—you need strong reading skills. In your life outside of school, reading skills help you reach a deeper understanding of the world around you. The world can seem wider and more interesting to those who like to read. Strong reading skills can be a key to more opportunities throughout your life—in education beyond high school, in jobs, and in personal growth.

©Ariel Skelly/CORBIS

In school you're learning to explore text in greater depth. You are looking at ways that authors reveal meaning. In other words, you're examining the author's part of the "conversation."

You're also learning how to make connections between what you read and what you already know—the reader's part of the "conversation." Through this process you become a better reader and, more importantly, a better thinker.

What Are Some Strategies for Reading?

The best way to get the most out of reading is to become an **active reader.** Here are some of the skills active readers use to get meaning from texts.

Before You Read

Just as a runner warms up before a race, an active reader warms up before reading. Take some time to get a general idea of what a selection is about before you read it from beginning to end. You might briefly look through the selection—read the title, look at the pictures, remember what you already know about the topic, and notice how the selection is organized.

Begin asking questions about the selection: What does this selection seem to be about? How has the author organized the writing? What information or experience can I bring to reading this selection? You might want to make predictions, or educated guesses, based on your preview of the selection. Here's a chart that you can use to make predictions before, during, and after reading:

Clue from the Text	My Prediction	Result of Prediction

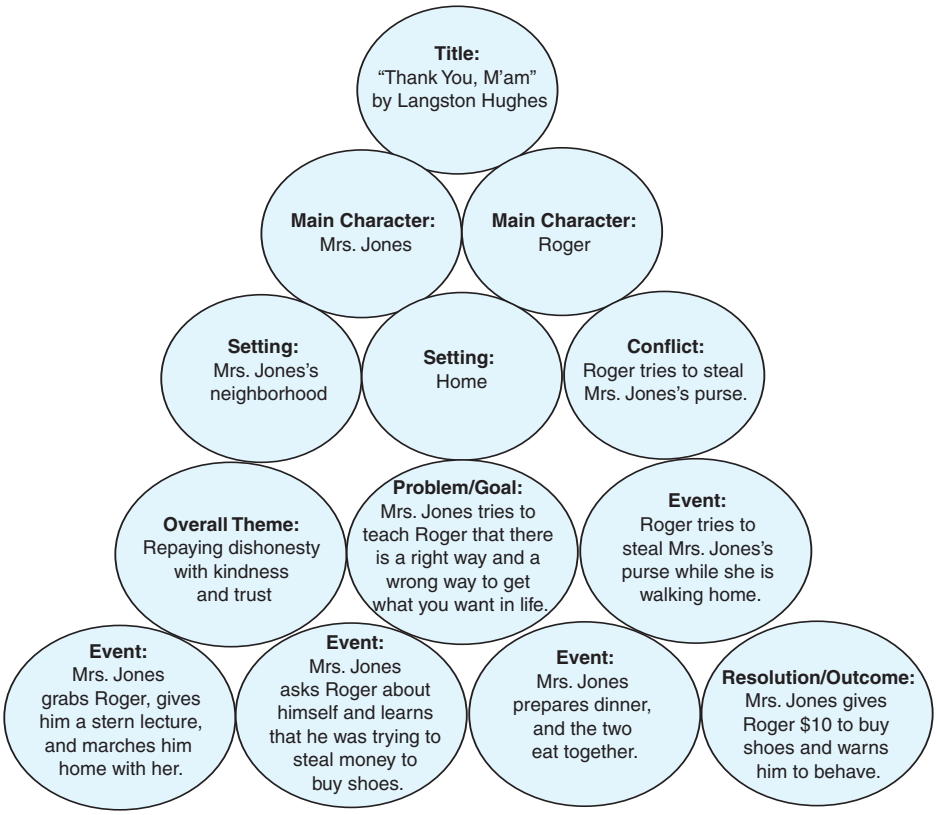
As You Read

As you read a selection, continue to ask yourself questions: What is this selection mainly about? What is the author's point of view? What problem does the main character face?

Look at the questions in the margins of the selections on pages 9–16. These are the types of questions that careful readers ask themselves as they read. They're also the same types of questions you might find on the Grade 9 TAKS reading test.

You may find it helpful to record information on charts or other visual organizers as you read. Graphic organizers can help you focus your thinking about a selection. They help you see how ideas are related in text. Venn diagrams, time lines, cause-and-effect charts, and story maps are examples of graphic organizers for reading.

Here's an example of how a reader has used a graphic organizer for reading fiction. You may have used story maps or other graphic organizers in your classroom reading. A story cluster is one way to show all the important parts of a piece of fiction.



Now try creating your own story cluster for "The Blanket."

Taking notes is a good way to organize ideas as you read, but sometimes it is difficult to know what to write down. It can be helpful to arrange your notes in a graphic organizer so that you can quickly locate important information. For example, you might organize notes from a chapter in your history book by clustering important details around each main topic.

Here's an example of a graphic organizer based on a magazine article about a new type of animal shelter. This type of organizer is a problem/solution chart.

PROBLEM: Sick and abandoned animals in the community
SOLUTION: A new type of animal shelter
• Facilities donated by the city • Free and discounted veterinary care • Fund-raising teams for food and medicine • Volunteers who provide daily care • Website for adoptions • Free obedience training for new pets

Understanding Word Meanings

On the Grade 9 TAKS reading test, you will be asked to determine the meanings of certain words from the reading selections. One way to find the meaning of a word is to look it up in a dictionary. Another way is to look for clues in a selection. Often other words and sentences give you a good idea of a word's meaning. Knowing how to look for these clues can help you figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words.

As the worker **pulverized** the soft stones with a hammer, a cloud of dust arose.

The doctor instructed Mrs. Ruth to take two **capsules** with water.

Using Context Clues

You can often figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word by looking at **context clues**.

Context clues are words and sentences that surround an unfamiliar word. Suppose, for example, you read this sentence from a selection:

> "You'll want to join me for a talk this evening," said Grandma in a stern tone that told me this was an edict rather than a polite invitation.

To find the meaning of *edict*, look at clues such as "stern tone" and "rather than a polite invitation." These words suggest that Grandma is being firm and demanding. The words "rather than" suggest that *edict* may be the opposite of *invitation*. You can use these clues to guess that an edict is a command.

Sometimes context clues aren't in the same sentence as the unfamiliar word or phrase. Clues might come before or after the sentence. They might even come before or after the paragraph.

Figurative Language

> The confection was like a mountain of spun sugar.

The figurative language "like a mountain of spun sugar" tells you that a confection is something sweet to eat.

Here's an example of the type of context-clue question you might find on the TAKS reading test. First return to "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15 and review paragraphs 12 and 13. Then answer the question below.

> Which words from paragraphs 12 and 13 help the reader understand the meaning of the word *bereft*?
>
> **A** *voice, commonsense*
>
> **B** *fall, rain*
>
> **C** *forlorn, cry*
>
> **D** *obviously, over*

Paragraphs 12 and 13 are mainly about Arthur's illness and eventual death. When we read about how everyone feels when Arthur dies, we expect words that convey a feeling of sadness. This makes Choice C the correct answer. Choice A cannot be correct because these words don't convey any emotion. Choices B and D do not show the same degree of sadness as Choice C.

Using Prefixes, Roots, and Suffixes

Knowing the meanings of **prefixes**, **roots**, and **suffixes** can help you figure out the meanings of many unfamiliar words.

A **prefix** is a word part added before a root to change its meaning.

> *Honest* means "truthful."
>
> The prefix *dis-* means "not."
>
> *Dishonest* means "not truthful."

The **root** is a word part that can be combined with prefixes and suffixes to form new words. In the example above, *honest* is the root of *dishonest*.

A **suffix** is a word part added after a root to change its meaning.

> *Reside* means "to live in a certain place."
>
> The suffix *-ent* means "one who."
>
> *Resident* means "one who lives in a certain place."

Using a Glossary, Dictionary, or Thesaurus

A **glossary** is an alphabetical list of words with definitions or explanations and examples. Textbooks often have glossaries at the back to help students understand terms and expressions. A **dictionary** contains the same types of information that a glossary provides, but it also gives a word's part of speech, as well as its pronunciation and any multiple meanings. A **thesaurus** is a dictionary of synonyms and antonyms.

While reading a selection, have you ever come to a word that seems to have a different meaning from the one you are used to seeing? This can make the entire selection confusing. As you read, watch for words that have **multiple meanings**, such as *sentence*, *capital*, and *frame*.

> The gardener was *livid* when he saw that the deer had eaten his roses and that all his hard work had been for nothing.

The word *livid* has four meanings: (1) discolored by bruising, (2) ashen or pallid, (3) reddish, or (4) very angry. It's not hard to guess that a gardener who has worked hard to grow roses only to see them destroyed would be upset. This is one clue to the meaning of *livid*. Another way to figure out the meaning of *livid* is to plug each of the four meanings of the word into the sentence above. You quickly see that the words *very angry* make the most sense in the sentence.

To choose the correct meaning of a word, you can also consider the word's part of speech and its context. When you use a glossary, a dictionary, or a thesaurus, you can look up all the meanings of a word to discover which meaning fits the context in which the word is used.

Here's an example of the type of multiple-meaning question you might find on the Grade 9 TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11 and review paragraph 12. Then answer the question below.

Read the following dictionary entry.

> **cast** \'kast\ *v* **1.** to throw away or discard **2.** to assign a role or part to an actor **3.** to turn to glance in a certain direction **4.** to shape by allowing liquid to harden in a form or mold

Which definition best matches the use of the word *cast* in paragraph 12?

A Definition 1

B Definition 2

C Definition 3

D Definition 4

Notice that paragraph 12 is mostly about Granddad pointing out the fine blanket to his son's girlfriend. Next consider how each definition would fit into the context of the sentence and the paragraph. Then choose the meaning that makes the most sense in the sentence.

Choice A is incorrect because Granddad's eyes are not "thrown away" in the paragraph. Choice B is also incorrect because Granddad is not "assigning roles" to anyone in the paragraph. Choice C makes the most sense because a glance is a movement of the eyes. Choice D is incorrect because it makes no sense in the context of the sentence. Therefore, the correct answer must be Choice C.

Using Word Relationships

You can often figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word by looking at its **relationship** with other words within the text.

Words are often paired in context to illustrate similarities or differences. If you read carefully and know what to look for, comparisons can help you determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

Here are some examples of different types of word relationships:

Homonym

> The two men set sail on the *course* even though the weather report advised against it.

Homonyms are words that sound alike but are not spelled alike. In this sentence, the word *course* may not have a meaning you are familiar with. From its usage, though, you can tell that it probably means "a route chosen," rather than "rough" or "crude."

Synonym/Antonym

> Unlike the three constant-level lakes in the area, Stone Lake's level is *variable*.

A **synonym** is a word that means the same thing or almost the same thing as another word. An **antonym** is a word that means the opposite of another word.

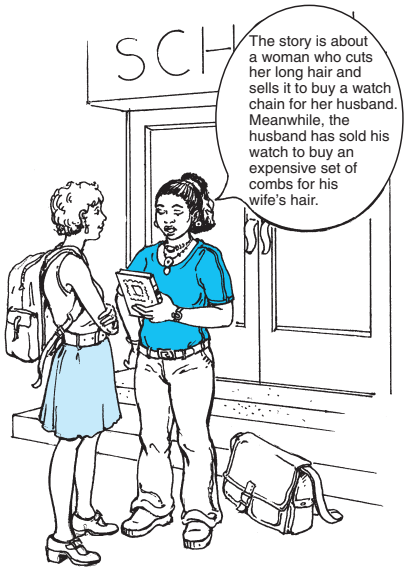
Often synonyms or antonyms used in context with an unfamiliar word can give you clues to the word's meaning. In the sentence above, the word *constant* appears to have a meaning opposite that of the word *variable*. Since you know that *constant* means "unchanging," you can guess that *variable* has the opposite meaning: "changing."

Connotation/Denotation

> Minh described the hike up Black Rock as merely *challenging*, but it was the most difficult climb I've ever attempted.

Connotation refers to a feeling associated with a word, in addition to its dictionary meaning. The **denotation** of a word is its dictionary definition.

In the sentence above, *challenging* and *difficult* have the same denotation, or dictionary meaning: "hard to do." But would you rather take on a task that is challenging or one that is difficult? *Difficult* has a more negative connotation than *challenging*.



Summarizing

A **summary** captures the main points of a selection, boiling them down to a few sentences. A **plot summary** is a condensed description of the events of a fictional story, usually given in the order of occurrence.

When you summarize, you use your own words to briefly state the main ideas and key details of the text. Reading a summary is one way to get a sense of the important points of a selection or book without reading the whole text. Writing a summary helps you understand the key ideas.

Here's an example of the type of summary question you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15. Review the story and answer the question below.

Which of these is the best summary of the selection?

A Glenn Plaskin lives alone in a New York City high-rise apartment building. After getting some advice from his neighbor Pearl, he bought a cocker spaniel he named Katie. Now Plaskin takes Katie to visit Pearl almost every day.

B An older woman named Pearl lives in the same building as Glenn Plaskin. She is feisty and intelligent and has enjoyed going to the theater for many years. Although she was sad when her husband died, she has found many ways to make her life meaningful.

C Glenn Plaskin met his neighbor Pearl in the hallway of their apartment building. Their friendship soon grew to include Pearl's husband, Plaskin's dog, and another neighbor and his son. Plaskin believes that their lives have been enriched by their "family circle" of friends.

D A woman named Pearl befriended a little boy named Ryan in a New York City apartment building. They enjoy sharing meals together, and Pearl often picks Ryan up after school. In many ways Pearl and Ryan's relationship is like that of a grandmother and grandson.

The correct answer is Choice C. This summary gives, in order of occurrence, the most important points of the selection. Choices A, B, and D also contain important information from the article, but the facts and events included in these choices do not form the basis of the article. Some important information has been left out of each of these answer choices.

When you are asked to choose the best summary of a selection, remember that a good summary includes *all* the most important points or events in a selection.

Looking at the "Big Picture"

There are times in your reading when you will want a quick snapshot of a selection's main point. The **gist** of a piece of writing is what it is mostly about. The gist will not include all the details of a summary, but it should be a big enough idea to cover the entire selection or part of the selection that you are reading.

Sometimes the gist is easy to identify because it is clearly stated. It answers the question "What is this selection (or paragraph) mainly about?" Read the paragraph below and identify its gist.

> Mexico is my favorite travel destination. The country has large, cosmopolitan cities and quaint villages. A variety of terrains, including deserts, mountains, beaches, and tropical jungles, provide opportunities for all kinds of outdoor activities. Perhaps most appealing, though, are the historical sites. Ancient Aztec cities and Mayan pyramids offer a glimpse into Mexico's distant past.

The first sentence, "Mexico is my favorite travel destination," is the big idea that states the gist of the paragraph. The rest of the sentences support this main point by giving reasons why Mexico is a favorite destination. The gist may not always be stated in the first sentence of the paragraph.

Sometimes the gist is not stated directly. In this case you have to read "between the lines" to figure out what a selection is mostly about. Pay careful attention to details. They can help you identify the gist when it is not stated. Read the following paragraph and identify what it is mainly about.

> The San Antonio River Walk buzzes with activity. People visit shops that offer colorful souvenirs and cool relief from the summer heat. They sample exotic foods and drinks at the inviting riverside restaurants. Happy tourists wave from tour boats at their counterparts on the sidewalks. The lively sound of mariachi music sets the rhythm for all these activities.

Details in the paragraph about tourists, souvenirs, and attractions help you identify the gist, which is hinted at but not stated directly. You might state the main point in this way: San Antonio's River Walk is a popular tourist attraction.

Here's an example of the type of gist question you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Reread paragraphs 13 through 18. Then answer the question below.

> Paragraphs 13 through 18 are mostly about —
>
> **A** the argument between Dad and his girlfriend
>
> **B** the beauty of Granddad's new blanket
>
> **C** the embarrassment Petey feels when he goes inside
>
> **D** the importance of spending money wisely

If you think about "taking a picture" of these six paragraphs, you know that the photo would mostly show Dad and his girlfriend having an argument. This makes Choice A the correct answer. You may notice the beauty of the blanket or Petey's going inside as details, but neither of these details captures the main focus of the paragraphs. For this reason Choices B and C are incorrect. Choice D sounds like a "big idea," but it conveys only the girlfriend's side of the argument.

Identifying Supporting Details

Supporting details tell more about a selection. They add depth, color, and interest to a piece of writing. Supporting details might answer questions such as *Who? What? When? Where? How?* or *Why?* They might also appeal to your senses by describing how something feels, looks, sounds, smells, or tastes. Examples, descriptions, and facts or figures are forms of supporting details.

Here's an example of the type of detail question you might find on the Grade 9 TAKS reading test. Return to "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15. Review paragraph 5 and then answer the question below.

What does Katie find waiting for her each morning when she goes to Pearl's apartment?

A Another dog

B Gourmet dog food

C Her favorite pillow

D A piece of toast

The correct answer is Choice D. The author states that Katie always has a piece of toast waiting for her. This supports the main point that Pearl has established a routine of caring for Katie. Answers A, B, and C are not included as details in the paragraph.

Objective 2

The student will demonstrate an understanding of the effects of literary elements and techniques in culturally diverse written texts.

The TEKS and the student expectations for Objective 2 describe what students should be able to do as they read to move beyond a basic understanding of the text. This objective focuses on questions such as What is the theme of this story? Why is the setting important in this story? What is the main problem that the character faces?

Understanding Literary Elements

You will find the following literary elements most often in fiction. Some narrative nonfiction—such as autobiographies, biographies, and essays—also contains these elements.

- **Theme**—the overall message of a literary work
- **Setting**—the time and place in which story events occur
- **Characters**—the people or animals in a story
- **Conflict**—the struggle between opposing characters or forces in a story
- **Plot**—what happens in a story. Plot includes the problem or conflict one or more characters face and how the problem or conflict is resolved.

Understanding Literary Techniques

Authors bring to life the elements of stories by using special tools known as literary techniques. These techniques help shape your understanding of the stories.

Open an author's "toolbox," and you're likely to find at least one of these among the pencils and pens and paper: literary language, foreshadowing, flashback, and symbolism.

The skills for Objective 2 are analyzing skills. You'll need these skills to better appreciate and respond to stories.

Using Text to Defend Responses

From time to time—in and out of school—you're asked to justify a statement of fact or opinion with reasons. There are times when "Because I said so" just won't do. For instance, you might have to support a statement such as this one about a story you read:

> In this story Jason only pretends to admire Leo's skill at playing the guitar.

How would you justify, or defend, your statement? One effective way is to use text from the story as evidence. Who can argue with this kind of proof?

Look for text evidence—in black and white—to back up your responses to a piece of writing. This will help you dig a little deeper to understand an author's message. It will also help you feel confident about your responses.

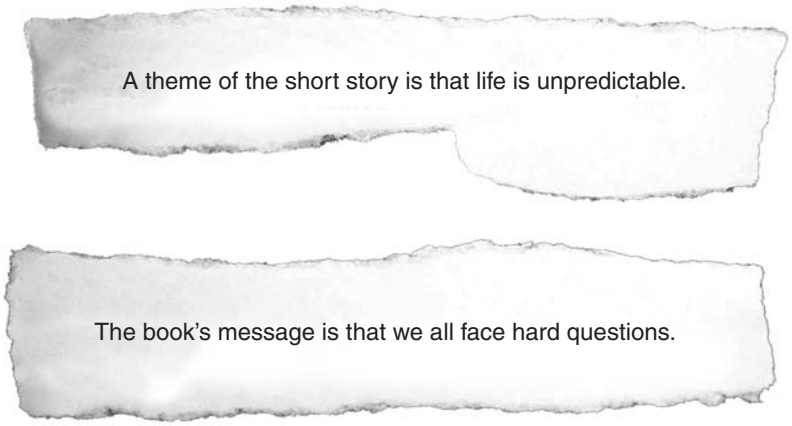
Here's an example of a text-support question that you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Review the story and answer the question below.

> Which quotation from the story shows how wrong Dad has been?
>
> **A** *"Yes," said Granddad, "it's double—a fine blanket for an old fellow to be going away with."*
>
> **B** *"I won't be here when you leave in the morning, so I came over to say good-bye."*
>
> **C** *"He'll be feeling young again with a pretty wife like that."*
>
> **D** *"I mean," said the boy slowly, "that I'll give it to you, Dad—when you're old and I'm sending you—away."*

One of the most powerful statements made by a character in this story, Choice D is the correct answer. It is only when Petey threatens to cut the blanket in half that Dad sees the error of his ways. Choices A and C are statements made by Granddad to try to justify Dad's actions, not to show how wrong Dad has been. Choice B is the reason Dad's girlfriend gives for coming to the house; it doesn't show how wrong Dad has been.

Recognizing Theme

The theme of a literary work is its underlying message. A theme is a central insight about life or human nature that an author wants you to take away from a story.



Some themes are clearly stated in a selection. Others are not. You can often figure out a story's theme by looking closely at details about the characters, events, and setting of the story. Sometimes the title of a story is a good clue to a theme. A helpful question to ask when determining a theme is "What message about life or human nature does the author want me to think about?"

When you think you've discovered a theme of a story, here's another good question to ask: "Can I justify this theme with supporting evidence from the text?"

Here's an example of a theme-based question you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Review the story and answer the question below.

A primary theme of this story is that —

A few options exist for people as they grow older

B adults can learn lessons from children

C family members do not get along when they all live together

D most problems are only temporary

Choice B is the correct answer because Petey is able to teach Dad a lesson about caring for others. Choice C may seem appealing early in the story, but by the end of the story, we see that the members of this family can get along together. Choices A and D are hinted at in the story, but both statements are too general to be primary themes of "The Blanket."

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Analyzing Setting

The **setting** of a story is the place and time in which the events happen. Stories can be set in real or imaginary places. The events can happen in the past, present, or future.

When I was ten, growing up in Kansas in 1970, . . .

Back in the days when people traveled by car. . .

For most of the year, I live in a small apartment in New York City. . .

In a flat field along a country road. . .

Setting can be an important part of the plot. It can help you understand why characters act as they do. Setting can influence a story's overall meaning by creating a particular mood or atmosphere.

As you read, notice whether the setting gives you clues to a character's background, beliefs, and motives. For example, imagine a story in which a 16-year-old boy and his family live in a remote setting deep in Alaska. The setting of the story may help you understand the boy's independent nature.

Here's an example of a setting question you might find on the Grade 9 TAKS reading test. Return to "Granny Down the Hall" on page 12. Review the selection and answer the question below.

The setting of the article is important because —

A it emphasizes current events

B it shows the effects of the Great Depression

C it demonstrates the conveniences of living in a large city

D it helps communicate a sense of community

Choice D is the correct answer. Living close to one another within the high-rise building provides the residents with an opportunity to form close relationships. Choice A is incorrect because the setting has nothing to do with current events. Choice B is incorrect because the story does not take place during the Great Depression. Choice C is incorrect. The conveniences of living in a large city are not discussed in the article.

Analyzing Characters

At the beginning of a story, readers meet the character or characters in the story. Characters can be people or animals. The author of a story reveals the characters' traits through what the characters say or do or through what other characters say about them.

You can analyze a character by asking these questions as you read a story:

- What is this character feeling?
- Why does the character do certain things in the story?
- How does this character react to other characters in the story?
- How does this character change in the story?

A character in a story has certain traits, or qualities, that set him or her apart from other characters. As a reader, you discover a character's traits as the story unfolds.

Here's an example of a question about character that you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return again to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Review the text and answer the question below.

Which word best describes Granddad's attitude about going away?

A Angry

B Resigned

C Indifferent

D Confused

Choice B is the correct answer. Through Granddad's words and actions, the reader knows that Granddad has accepted his fate and understands there is nothing he can do about it. There is no suggestion in the story that Granddad is angry, indifferent, or confused.

Remember that you can always use your dictionary if you do not understand a word used on the Grade 9 reading test.

Point of View

Every story is told from a certain **point of view**. A story that is narrated by one of its characters is in the **first-person point of view**. In this case, the reader becomes very familiar with the narrator but can know only what the narrator sees and reports. A story told by a narrator who does not participate in the action is in the **third-person point of view**. In this case, the narrator can either make the reader aware of the feelings and actions of all the characters or simply report the thoughts of one or two characters.

Here's an example of a point-of-view question that you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Review the text and answer the question below.

The story's point of view allows the reader to understand —

A the girlfriend's thoughts about Granddad

B Petey's loyalty to Granddad

C Dad's commitment to his girlfriend

D Granddad's love of music

The correct choice is B. "The Blanket" is told from a third-person point of view, but the narrator seems to focus the reader's attention more on Petey and Granddad than on Dad and the girlfriend. The narrator makes the reader aware of Petey's loyalty to Granddad through Petey's thoughts, feelings, and actions. Choices A, C, and D are incorrect, since the narrator does not reveal similar details about the girlfriend's thoughts regarding Granddad, Dad's commitment to his girlfriend, or Granddad's love of music.

Understanding Plot (Rising Action, Climax, and Resolution)

Plot

The **plot** is simply what happens in the story—the events that occur from beginning to end. The plot is usually built around a **conflict**, or problem, faced by one or more characters. The events in a story move toward the **resolution**, or solution, to the conflict.

Conflict

In most stories the main character faces a conflict of some kind. This struggle is often between two characters. For example, an athlete may have a conflict with her coach, or two neighbors may have a conflict with each other. Conflict can also happen within a character. A woman may struggle with the question of whether to change careers, or a young man may wrestle with the question of whether to accept a dare. Conflict can also be between characters and a force of nature, such as a great storm, or between characters and the society in which they live.

Here's an example of a conflict question that you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Review the text and answer the question below.

Dad's primary conflict is that he is —

A forced to decide what is best for Granddad

B unaware of Granddad's real feelings

C angry about Petey's attitude

D torn between Granddad and his girlfriend

Choice D is the correct answer. The words and actions of the characters as well as the events that unfold make it clear that Dad is making Granddad leave because of his girlfriend's wishes. No evidence in the story supports the idea that going away is best for Granddad, so Choice A is not a logical response. We are not told what Dad thinks about Granddad's real feelings or Petey's attitude, so Choices B and C cannot be correct.

Rising Action

Once the characters have been introduced and the setting and conflict are developed, a sequence of events called the **rising action** moves the plot forward.

Here's an example of a question about rising action that you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Review the text and answer the question below.

Petey does not believe that Dad is sending Granddad away until —

A they visit the brick building

B Dad's girlfriend comes over

C he sees the blanket

D Granddad packs his clothing

Choice C is the correct answer. When Petey sees the blanket and recognizes that Granddad is being sent away, the tension in the story begins to build. Choices A and D are not correct because these events are not discussed in the story. Choice B is not correct because Petey has already realized that Granddad is going away before the girlfriend arrives.

Climax

The **climax** is a story's turning point. All the events in the rising action build toward the climax. This is also the point at which the character or characters begin to move toward resolving the conflict.

Here's an example of a question about a story's climax that you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Review the story and answer the question below.

The climax of the story occurs when —

A Petey realizes that everyone is crying

B Dad's girlfriend becomes angry and leaves

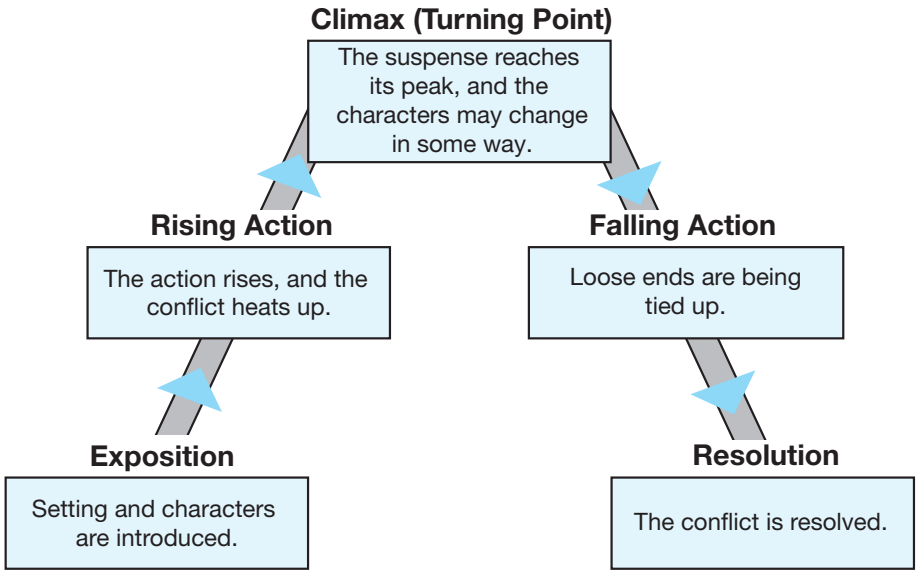
C Granddad puts his hand on Dad's shoulder

D Petey demands that the blanket be cut in half

Choices A and C are incorrect because the story is winding down by the time these two events occur. Choice B is incorrect because after the girlfriend leaves, more meaningful and interesting events occur. Choice D is the correct answer. When Petey demands that the blanket be cut in half, the outcome of the conflict must be decided, one way or another.

Resolution

A story usually ends when the conflict faced by the main character is resolved: the damsel is rescued from the tower . . . the bully apologizes and mends his ways . . . the lost cat is found. In the resolution of a story, the loose ends are tied up, whether or not the characters "live happily ever after."



Here's an example of a question about a story's resolution that you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Review the story and answer the question below.

What causes Petey, Dad, and Granddad to cry at the end of the story?

A Their feelings of remorse and relief

B Their embarrassment over the trouble caused by the blanket

C Their feelings of isolation and loss

D Their sadness that the girlfriend has gone away

Choice A best explains the characters' reasons for crying at the end of the story. Dad is probably feeling remorse because of his behavior, and Petey and Granddad are feeling relieved that Granddad will not have to leave. The remaining choices are all incorrect. There is nothing to indicate that the characters feel embarrassed, nor do they have reason at the end of the story to feel isolated or lost. Dad might be sad that his girlfriend has gone away, but this event probably does not cause Granddad or Petey to cry, since they don't seem to particularly like the girlfriend.

Understanding Literary Language

. . . the dried leaves whispering in the wind . . .

. . . was an Everest of a man . . .

. . . a necklace of islands off the coast . . .

. . . the moon hid itself behind the clouds . . .

. . . tulips like red-hatted soldiers . . .

. . . the task was like herding cats . . .

When you read this sentence—*From the plane window, the city lights below shimmered like jewels*—you know that the writer doesn't mean that the city lights are literally jewels. She's making a comparison to catch the reader's imagination. The two things being compared—city lights and jewels—are fundamentally different, but the writer wants the reader to see that these things have something in common. This is an example of the use of **literary language**.

Authors often use literary language to add liveliness and flavor to descriptions. The chart below shows more examples of literary language.

Type of Literary Language	How It's Used	Example
Simile	Compares using *like* or *as*	She had a will as strong as steel.
Metaphor	Hints at a comparison without using *like* or *as*	The sky was an ocean of deep blue.
Personification	Gives human qualities to an object, animal, or idea	Two magpies gossiped on a maple branch.

Here's an example of a question about literary language that you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Review the text and answer the question below.

In paragraph 11, the simile "whose bright face was like a doll's" tells the reader that the girlfriend is —

A shy and modest

B clever but cruel

C happy and cheerful

D pretty but artificial

Choice D is the correct answer. The simile is a comparison between the girlfriend's face and the artificial, painted face of a doll. This comparison is later supported by the girlfriend's behavior during her argument with Dad. Choices A and C are too positive to describe Dad's girlfriend as she appears in the story, and Choice B does not describe the qualities of a doll.

Understanding Literary Terms

Remember the author's "toolbox" that we looked into earlier? Some of the tools authors use to communicate information about characters, events, and theme are discussed below.

Mood

The overall feeling or atmosphere that an author creates for a reader is called **mood**. For example, the mood of a story can be suspenseful. Or it can be peaceful, fearful, or comic. Specific words or phrases—such as "the mournful wail of the train whistle" or "a cyclone of mishaps"—can contribute to the mood of a work.

Foreshadowing

Through **foreshadowing** an author gives hints about what will happen later in a story. Foreshadowing can arouse your curiosity or build suspense. What do you think the author is foreshadowing in the following story excerpt?

The first time Dancer escaped from the corral, Rudy was lucky. He followed the horse's hoofprints on the dirt path to a stand of trees by Amber Creek.

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Irony

Irony involves a difference between how something seems and how it really is. In **verbal irony** a character says the opposite of what he or she means: "'How de-LICIOUS,'" Carolyn managed to say as she took another bite of the awful meat pie." In **irony of situation** an event or situation turns out to be different from what the reader expected. For example, a character who is portrayed as helpless ends up bravely rescuing his friends. In **dramatic irony** there's a difference between what a character says or thinks and what the reader knows is true. Through the use of irony, writers remind readers that life is unpredictable.

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Flashback

A **flashback** interrupts a story to tell about an event that happened in the past. Through flashbacks, authors can explain why characters think or behave in certain ways.

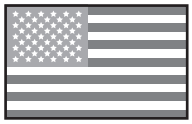
> Once he had maneuvered the craft to a cruising altitude, Tremaine relaxed in his seat. He watched the clouds give way to the small plane and was suddenly reminded of that day with his father. . . .
>
> "Tremaine! Come here!" his father shouts from the backyard. Tremaine is barely five. He is curious and alert, and he knows that his father would not call him so insistently if it weren't for something important, maybe even something exciting.

Notice how the author has used a series of dots (ellipses) to signal a break in the story's forward movement. The words "suddenly reminded of that day with his father" also tell you that you are being taken back in time. Perhaps if you read the rest of the flashback, you might see a connection between the event of that day long ago and Tremaine's love of flying.

Symbolism

Love

Peace


U.S.A.

A **symbol** is an object, a place, a person, an event, or an animal that stands for something other than itself. A symbol has its own meaning, but it can also represent an idea or a quality. Authors often use **symbolism** to make a point, create a certain feeling, or present a theme.

The symbols shown above are familiar ones. Symbols in literature are more personal and can differ from author to author. For example, a flower could represent Earth, or a flowing river could represent the passage of time. Careful readers look for deeper meaning by identifying and analyzing symbols in works of literature.

In the story "The Blanket," the blanket can be seen as symbolizing the warmth and protection provided by a family. In the story Dad gives the blanket to Granddad to replace the love and warmth of family when Granddad is to be sent away.

Dialogue

Conversation between two or more characters in a written work is known as **dialogue**. Writers use dialogue to bring characters to life and to give the reader a sense of the characters' traits. The words a character speaks or thinks are usually set off with quotation marks.

> "Open the hood of this car," Marian demanded.
>
> "But why?" Carlos asked, a smile beginning to form.
>
> "Because," Marian said, putting her hands on her hips, "I'm going to learn everything there is to know about how a car works. And you're going to teach me."

Protagonist/Antagonist

The main character in a work of fiction is called the **protagonist**. Authors usually want readers to identify with, or feel sympathy for, the protagonist in a story. The **antagonist** is a character or force that opposes the protagonist in some way. Often, but not always, the antagonist is better known as the story's villain.

Here's an example of a question about literary terms that you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11. Review the story and answer the question below.

Dad's girlfriend can be considered the antagonist of this story in that —

A she seems to care more about herself than about those around her

B she fusses over Petey and says that she wants to be a good mother to him

C she seems to want the blanket for herself

D she tells Granddad she won't be there when he leaves

Choice A is the correct answer. The girlfriend's self-centeredness puts her at odds with Petey and his desire to keep Granddad at home. Choices C and D describe the girlfriend, but they do not show her in opposition to Petey. Choice B does not support her role as the antagonist.

Objective 3

The student will demonstrate the ability to analyze and critically evaluate culturally diverse written texts and visual representations.

The TEKS statements and the student expectations for Objective 3 tell what students should be able to do to think critically about what they read in order to gain a deeper understanding. This deeper understanding comes from "reading between the lines." It also comes from looking at how an author has shaped a piece of writing and from making comparisons and connections.

Reading Between the Lines

The term "reading between the lines" is another way to describe the skill called making **inferences**. You may not realize it, but you make inferences all day long. Any time you connect bits of information to make a logical guess, you're making an inference. When you read, you make inferences by

- drawing conclusions
- making generalizations
- making predictions

Analyzing and Evaluating Text

Another way to examine a piece of writing more closely is to look at the word choices an author has made. You might ask, "How has the author put together words to form sentences and paragraphs?" Looking at a piece of writing in this way can tell you about the way an author thinks and possibly about the way the author wants you to think.

Another way to analyze and evaluate text is to look at the way authors present themselves to readers. Does the author seem reliable? Can you trust the information the author is giving you? Are the author's ideas worthwhile?

Understanding and Evaluating Media Messages

You're bombarded with media messages every day—from television, radio, magazines, newspapers, advertisements, photographs, billboards, posters, websites, and flyers. The skills you use to look more closely at what you read can also be used to look at various forms of media. What is the main idea of the image? What is its purpose? How well does the image achieve its purpose?

The skills described above are analyzing and evaluating skills. They are the skills that you need in order to respond at a deeper level to writing and visual messages.

Analyzing Text Structures

As authors plan their writing, they select organizational patterns, or text structures, to arrange and link their ideas. One way to better understand text is to look at how it's organized. One common organizational pattern is **chronological order**, in which authors tell the events in the order in which they happen. Many stories and narratives are presented in chronological order. Other text structures include compare and contrast, cause and effect, and problem and solution.

Authors use the pattern of **compare and contrast** to compare two or more people, objects, or ideas. Suppose an author wants to compare the benefits of having siblings with the benefits of being an only child. The author might begin by describing all the benefits of having siblings and follow this with a description of all the benefits of being an only child.

In using the pattern of **cause and effect**, an author may describe either a single cause and its effect or a series of causes and effects. Suppose someone is writing a narrative about her younger sister. Within the narrative she writes a paragraph using the pattern of cause and effect to describe an incident in which her sister embarrassed her in front of a group of friends. This, in turn, causes the author to stop taking her sister on outings.

Now suppose the same writer is working on a short article about sibling relationships and friendship. She begins the article by describing the challenges of making friends at school—a problem. In the next paragraph, she includes examples about practicing social skills with a sibling—a solution. She has organized the article with a **problem-and-solution** pattern.

Here's an example of a question about comparison and contrast that you might find on the TAKS reading test. Return to "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15. Review the article and answer the question below.

> What is one technique the author uses to compare Pearl and Ryan's relationship to that of a grandmother and grandson?
>
> **A** Writing about Ryan's father
>
> **B** Explaining Pearl's and Ryan's differences
>
> **C** Listing Pearl's and Ryan's shared activities
>
> **D** Describing his own grandmother

Choice C is the correct answer because the activities shared by Pearl and Ryan are similar to those shared by a grandmother and grandson. Choices A and D are incorrect because neither of these techniques helps the reader understand the relationship between Pearl and Ryan. Because the differences between Pearl and Ryan are not explained in the article, Choice B is incorrect.

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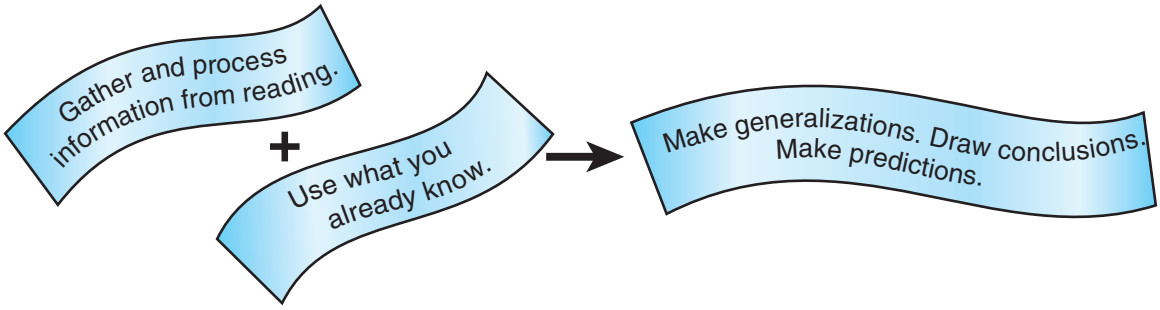

Making Inferences

When you make an inference while reading, you combine information you read with your own knowledge and experience to make an educated guess.

Here's an example of an inference:

> **Information:** Alicia's heart beat faster as she descended deeper into the cave by rope. She had never felt so alert in her life. Every fiber in her body was tuned to the slightest sound or sight or touch. She gave a whoop of joy when she reached the cave floor.
>
> **Inference:** Alicia is excited about exploring the cave.

Sometimes more than one inference is possible. In a question on the TAKS reading test that calls for making an inference, only one inference out of several possible ones will be correct. The selections you read will provide clues so that you can make the correct inference. Sometimes a question that focuses on making an inference will ask you to support the inference with information from the selection.

Let's use a sample question about "The Blanket" to explore making a correct inference. Review the story on pages 9–11 and answer the question below.

In paragraph 6, the reader can infer that "the government place" is —

A a hospital

B a military base

C a home for the elderly

D an apartment building

Looking at the answer choices, you may notice that there is nothing in the text to support Choices A and B. Likewise, nothing in the text suggests that Granddad is moving to a place where he can live independently; therefore, you can also eliminate Choice D. You can see that Choice C is the correct answer because it is a place where Dad can send Granddad to be cared for. You can infer that Dad no longer wants Granddad to live at his house because his girlfriend prefers to have the house to herself.

Drawing Conclusions

Authors often guide readers to figure out some things on their own. They give you one or more pieces of evidence and expect you to use your reasoning powers to **draw a conclusion**. This is part of the continuing "conversation" between an author and a reader.

Information: George opened his backpack to get his report. Where was it? Then he returned to his locker and searched every inch of space for the paper. As he grew more anxious, he mentally retraced his steps after he had printed out the finished report the night before.

Conclusion: George has lost a report he wrote.

A conclusion is a decision you make after you gather information and think about it. Most of the time you need more than one piece of information to reach a conclusion. In the example above, if you had only the information in the first sentence, you could not have formed the same conclusion.

Making Predictions

When you make a **prediction**, you try to answer the question "What will happen next?" To make predictions, it's helpful to notice

- how characters react to problems
- important details about plot, setting, and character
- foreshadowing, or hints about what might happen later in the story

> Suppose two friends of yours are competing against each other in a race tomorrow. One friend has been running at the school track almost every day for two months. The other just started running last week. What prediction can you make about who will win the race? What did you base your prediction on?

On the TAKS test you may be asked to support conclusions or predictions with evidence from the text. Questions on the test may ask you to supply this evidence, or they may ask you to choose among ideas or sentences from the text.

Analyzing Across Texts

Sometimes you will need to use your analytical skills on more than one selection. When you play a video game that has been adapted from a television show you enjoy or you read two books featuring the same characters, you cannot help making mental comparisons between the two. The TAKS reading test will ask you to perform this type of analysis as well. But remember that evidence to support your analysis **must** be present in both selections.

Here's an example of a cross-text item you might see on the TAKS reading test. Review "The Blanket" on pages 9–11 and "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15, thinking about ideas that the two selections have in common. Then answer the question below.

> Which idea is important in both "The Blanket" and "Granny Down the Hall"?
>
> **A** Deciding who owns family possessions
>
> **B** Bridging the gap between generations
>
> **C** Comforting one another when someone dies
>
> **D** Excluding others from family discussions

The correct answer is Choice B. In both selections there are close relationships between members of different generations. Choice A is incorrect because ownership of family possessions is not discussed in either selection. Choice C is incorrect because comforting someone following a death relates only to "Granny Down the Hall." Choice D is incorrect because it is not an idea that is addressed in either selection.

Recognizing Historical Context

The time period in which a literary work is set is its **historical context**. Knowing this information can help you understand key points about a selection's setting and background. It may also help you understand why characters act and feel as they do. The customs and attitudes of characters in a story set in the past may be very different from those of today.

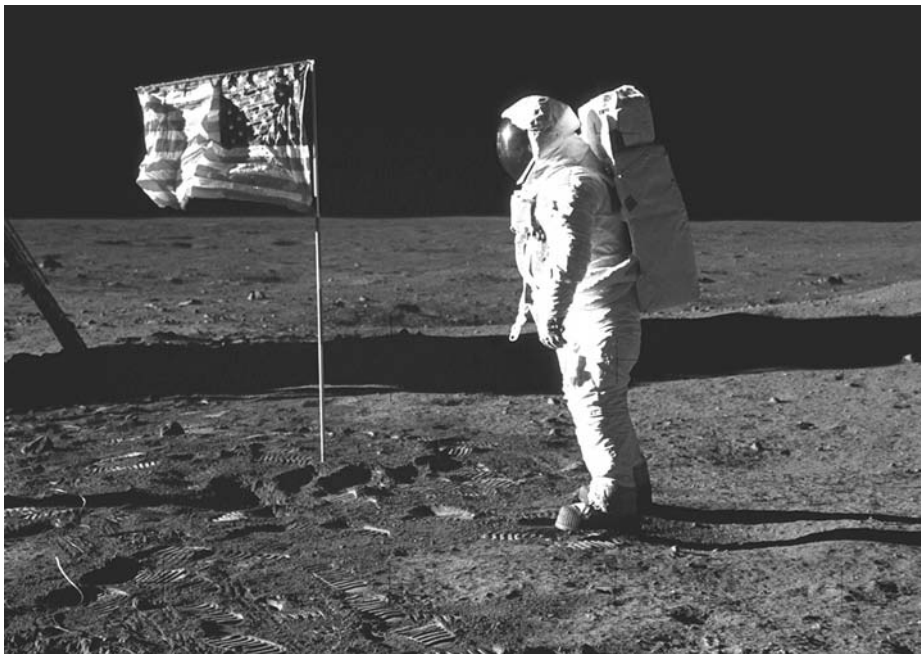

Photo courtesy of NASA

For example, suppose you're reading a story about children who work in a factory. You may find it hard to believe that the children are working long hours each day instead of going to school or playing. It helps to understand that at an earlier time in history, child labor was not uncommon, although it is outlawed in many parts of the world today.

It's just as important to understand the contemporary context of some pieces of writing. If you're reading a newspaper article about year-round schooling, it may help your understanding to know that year-round schools are common in several states in the United States.

Author's Purpose

Good writers have a purpose for writing. An author may have an idea he or she cares about and wants others to care about, too—such as recycling. An author may want to express his or her ideas about a topic, such as whether students should be required to wear uniforms.

Not all writing has a serious goal, though. Sometimes writers just want to share an idea that interests them. Or they may want to entertain readers with a funny story.

Most purposes for writing fall into these categories:

Purpose	Characteristics	Examples
To inform	Has mostly factual information	Newspaper and magazine articles, encyclopedia and textbook passages
To persuade	Tries to influence readers to think or act in a certain way	Newspaper editorials, advertisements
To express or describe	Presents a point of view, shares personal feelings	Personal essays, autobiographical stories
To entertain	Tells a story, often using humor or suspense	Short stories, novels

Recognizing an author's purpose can help you better understand what you're reading. For example, if you're reading an article titled "The Best Backpack Money Can Buy!" you might guess that the author's purpose is to sell you a backpack.

Some clues to an author's purpose include the use of

- lively descriptions, events presented in chronological order, and humor (to entertain)
- words such as *must*, *should*, *best*, and *worst* and the use of compare and contrast (to persuade)
- phrases such as *I am*, *I think*, and *I feel* and the use of cause and effect (to express or describe)
- bulleted or numbered items, illustrations, diagrams, maps, and the use of compare and contrast or cause and effect (to inform)

Here's an example of a question about author's purpose that you might see on the TAKS reading test. Reread paragraph 16 of "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15. Then answer the question below.

The purpose of paragraph 16 is to show —

A how friends can help one another

B why the elderly have so many problems

C why it is dangerous to live in a city

D how Katie recovered from her illness

Choice A is the correct answer because the author describes how he and Granny helped each other during times of trouble. The paragraph does not explain why elderly people have problems or the dangers of living in a city, so Choices B and C are incorrect. Katie's illness is mentioned in paragraph 16 as an example of friends helping each other, but it is not the focus of the paragraph. This makes Choice D incorrect.

Now think about the selection as a whole. What do you think the author's overall purpose is in this article?

Author's Craft

Authors make deliberate choices in the words they use, the way they structure a piece of writing, and the tone they create in a selection. These choices are elements of the author's **craft** and lead the reader to feel and react in ways that the author intends.

Maya Angelou ©Bettmann/CORBIS

Here's an example of a question about author's craft similar to one you might see on the Grade 9 TAKS reading test. Return to "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15 and review paragraphs 12 and 13. Then answer the question below.

What is the tone of paragraphs 12 and 13?

A Unemotional

B Sad

C Forceful

D Bitter

Choice B is correct because paragraphs 12 and 13 are about Arthur's illness and death. Choice A is wrong because the tone is emotional. Choices C and D are incorrect because neither *forceful* nor *bitter* can be used to describe the tone of the author's account of Arthur's illness and death.

Credibility of Information Sources

Careful readers have their "radar" on as they read informational text. They monitor the text to see whether it is trustworthy, asking questions such as "Is this source credible?"

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The word **credible** means "deserving belief." When you analyze the credibility of information sources, you judge whether the sources are believable.

Here are some specific questions to ask as you evaluate the credibility of information sources:

- Is the author a respected authority on the topic? What is his or her relationship to the topic?
- Does the author have something to gain by providing this information?
- Does the author support opinions with sound reasons?
- How current is the information?

Information in well-known encyclopedias, almanacs, and atlases is usually reliable. Remember that although the Internet is a huge source of information, some of it is not so reliable. Sources whose Web addresses end in the following are often reliable sources of information:

- .edu (education)
- .gov (government)
- .mil (military)

Objective 3

Recognizing Logical Argument

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Logic is the science of correct reasoning based on experience. "That sounds right to me," "That's probably true because . . .," and "If _____ is true, then _____ must be true" are examples of thoughts you have when you are engaged in the process of logical reasoning.

Authors whose purpose is to persuade generally try to lead you in a way that makes you agree with their opinions. One way they do this is by using **logical argument**. By presenting reasons, facts, and expert testimony, authors aim to have readers say to themselves, "Yes, that sounds right."

Reasons—Reasons tell why you should agree with the author's opinion. They cannot stand alone but must be supported by facts or figures.

Facts—By definition, facts can be proved true.

Expert testimony—Information provided by experts provides support for any opinion.

Faulty Reasoning

Often authors make statements that sound right but that on closer inspection are misleading. Some types of faulty reasoning include the following:

Hasty generalizations—coming to a conclusion without sufficient evidence.

> My friends and I liked that book; therefore, it will surely be a best-seller.

Personal attack—attacking a person who holds an opposing position or opinion rather than attacking the position itself.

> Joe did not like the book, but with his record of library fines, I'm not sure you should listen to him.

Either/or—presenting a position as if it were one of only two choices available.

> Either you love taffy, or you truly do not appreciate good candy.

False cause and effect—suggesting that merely because one event follows another, the first event must be the cause or source of the second event.

> Since I got this new pencil, my math grade has improved by 10 points.

Modes of Persuasion

You already know that persuasive text is writing in which the author tries to convince you to think or act in a certain way. In addition to newspaper editorials and advertisements, you'll find persuasive writing in speeches, books, and magazines—even movies.

Modes of persuasion are the various tools authors use to persuade readers. Some of these modes, or forms, appeal to a reader's powers of reason, or logic. Others appeal to the emotions.

Persuasive writing that appeals to a reader's powers of logic usually

- states the author's position on an issue
- gives opinions or claims that have supporting reasons or facts
- has a reasonable and respectful tone
- answers opposing views

Persuasive writing that appeals to a reader's emotions can sometimes use these faulty or deceptive modes of persuasion:

- **Loaded language:** Uses words and phrases that have a positive or a negative connotation. For example, "Cloud Puff Cakes are out of this world. You'll love their heavenly taste."
- **Bandwagon appeal:** Urges readers to do or believe something because everyone else does. For example, "Absolutely every shopper at FoodFest is buying Cloud Puff Cakes."
- **Testimonials:** Uses famous people to endorse a product or idea. For example, "Famous singer Julia Ruiz loves our Cloud Puff Cakes."

Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

Understanding modes of persuasion can help you evaluate information and make informed decisions.

Here's an example of a question analyzing bias and persuasive techniques that you might see on the TAKS reading test. Review the Web page on page 16 and answer the question below.

Which words are used on this Web page to persuade people that the Homestead is a good place to visit?

A *kids, seniors, come*

B *together, fun, enjoy*

C *sponsored, social, select*

D *games, services, donations*

Choice B is the correct answer because each of the words has a meaning that is positive and appealing—a good place to visit might be one where people can be together, have fun, and enjoy themselves. Choices A, C, and D include words that are neutral and have no particular emotional appeal.

Viewing Media

The term *media* refers to a wide variety of communication forms—television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet, for example. Except for radio, these forms all involve your sense of sight.

When you read a short story, you take in ideas as words on a page. The author helps you see how the ideas relate to one another. A television ad, on the other hand, may dazzle you with colorful images, fast motion, pounding music, and hypnotic words spoken by a professional announcer. After the ad is over, it's up to you to sort out the ideas and their meanings.

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Just as it's important to evaluate what you read, it is also important to evaluate information you view for purpose, content, and quality. In other words, you must be a careful viewer as well as a careful reader.

When you view media, be aware that you may be receiving several ideas at once—and quickly. Take time to identify each idea. See whether you can find relationships among the ideas. Use your own good judgment and be a critical viewer.

Here's an example of a question that analyzes ideas in media that you might see on the TAKS Grade 9 reading test. Review the Web page on page 16 and answer the question below.

The designers of the website appeal to the viewer's emotions by —

A including warm, sentimental images

B making the website easy to use

C using lengthy descriptions

D offering choices of specific interest

Choice A is the correct answer because warm and sentimental images generally make the people who view them feel happy and content. On the other hand, Choices B and D are not features to which viewers would respond emotionally, even though they might appreciate the ease of use and choices for finding more information. Choice C is not correct because there are no lengthy descriptions on the Web page.

Purposes of Media Forms

There are many different forms of media, and these forms can have a variety of purposes. For example, they can **entertain**, **inform**, or **persuade**. It's not always easy, though, to determine the purpose of a media message.

Suppose you're "channel surfing" through television programs. One program catches your attention, so you watch and listen. A woman in a white chef's coat describes the health benefits of drinking freshly made smoothies and shakes. She shows how easy it is to make these healthful drinks by using the Blend-N-Smooth, an amazing new appliance. Audience members respond with enthusiasm as the host passes out samples for them to taste. What is the main purpose of the program—to inform? Or to persuade?

Here are some questions that can help you discover the purpose of a media message:

- How is the message presented? Is it presented by an authority? What do your instincts tell you about the truth of the message?
- What kind of language does the message use? Does it use phrasing such as *you should*? Does it use words such as *better* or *worst*?
- Does the message present a balanced picture, or does it support only one side of an issue?
- What is the source of the information? Is it up-to-date?

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As you analyze media messages for purpose, you'll find that many of the messages are designed to persuade.

Here's an example of a question analyzing the purpose of media that you might see on the TAKS reading test. Review the Web page on page 16. Then answer the question below.

The primary purpose of this website is to —

A share information about a community program

B teach parents about city and county social services

C prove that children and seniors like one another

D convince other cities to build community centers

Choice A is the correct answer. The description of the Homestead, the photographs, and the various category links appear designed to inform interested viewers about a community resource. A website designed to teach parents about social services would include more examples than just the Homestead, so Choice B is not correct. Choice C is incorrect because no argument is made to prove such an opinion, although the pictures indicate that it is true. Other communities might choose to build community centers, but there is no appeal for them to do so on the website, so Choice D is incorrect.

Persuasion in Media

Many media messages are designed to persuade, but they may be disguised as entertainment or information. Just as authors use certain tools in persuasive writing, media writers use tools to persuade viewers. Some of these persuasive techniques include the use of loaded terms and symbols.

Loaded Terms

Media messages often contain words or statements that are chosen to draw an emotional response from the viewer. These **loaded terms** can cause a viewer to respond in a certain way—for example, "Waverider board shorts—for the coolest of the cool."

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Symbols

A **symbol** is an object that stands for something beyond itself. Symbols are often used in persuasive media messages because they appeal to the emotions. For example, a mountain can symbolize strength, or a storm cloud can symbolize danger. Be alert for symbols—particularly in advertisements—that try to tap into your hopes, dreams, or fears.

Here's an example of a question about persuasion in media that you might see on the TAKS reading test. Review the Web page on page 16. Then answer the question below.

> The website's designers probably included the photo of the house to show that —
>
> **A** most activities at the Homestead take place inside
>
> **B** very few people visit the Homestead
>
> **C** the Homestead receives donations from large corporations
>
> **D** the Homestead is a comfortable place

Choice A is incorrect because the pictures and categories suggest many outdoor activities. There is nothing to suggest that Choices B or C are correct. Choice D is the correct answer. The rocking chairs and the lacy curtains make the place look warm and inviting.

Finding the Main Point of a Media Message

Just like an essay, an article, or a short story, an advertisement or other media message contains a **main point**. Finding the gist of a media message, however, can sometimes be harder than finding the gist of a written selection.

Visual messages—such as those on television, billboards, and the Internet—can pack a lot of ideas into a small space. You've heard the saying "A picture is worth a thousand words." Media messages usually combine pictures *and* words. That's a lot of information to sift through to find a main idea.

Here are some tips for analyzing a media message to find its main idea.

- Break the message into smaller parts: the visual image and the text (and music, if any). Ask yourself what point each part of the message makes. Are the key points in each part the same?
- Look at the details. Do they support one main idea?
- Try to summarize each part of the message. Do these summaries point to an overall message?
- Look for any symbols in the message. Recall that a symbol is an object that stands for another thing or idea. Is the symbol repeated in the message? What does the symbol stand for?

Review the Web page on page 16. By looking at the pictures and reading the words, you can conclude that the overall message of the website is that seniors and children can play and learn together at the Homestead.

Short-Answer Items

The Grade 9 TAKS reading test will ask you to respond to several short-answer questions. Short-answer questions differ from multiple-choice questions. They require you to write a short answer and support it with evidence from the selection rather than simply selecting from Choices A, B, C, or D.

The short-answer questions on the Grade 9 TAKS reading test

- address Objectives 2 and 3
- are based on the expository and literary selections
- may address one or both selections
- have many different possible answers

Each short-answer question on the TAKS reading test is followed by a number of lines on the answer page. If the question asks about one selection, five lines are provided. This tells you that your answer will be only a few sentences long. If the question asks about both selections, eight lines are provided. These extra lines provide you a little more space to compare the selections and use text support from both of them.

Answering a Short-Answer Question

Short-answer questions on the Grade 9 TAKS reading test are much like those you have on classroom tests. You should use the same strategies that you would use for any question that requires a short written answer. Your answers should be clearly written **and** supported with evidence from the text. The support may include

- a direct quotation
- a paraphrase
- a brief summary

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Answering short-answer questions on the TAKS reading test may feel different from answering the same types of questions during an ordinary day at school. You may feel extra pressure during this test. Here are some hints to help you relax and do your best on this part of the test. Many of these hints are useful for all parts of the TAKS reading test.

- Take a deep breath and clear your mind. Then read the first question slowly and carefully. Make sure you understand what information the question is asking for.
- Think about how to answer the question. Review the main points in your mind. You may want to make notes to use when writing your answer.
- Answer the question carefully. Do not write more information than the question calls for.
- Make sure that you support your answer with appropriate evidence from the selection or selections.
- Reread the question. Then review your answer. Make sure that your answer is complete and accurate.

Sample Short-Answer Items and Student Responses

Here are some examples of short-answer questions that you might find on the Grade 9 TAKS reading test. Return to "The Blanket" on pages 9–11 and review the story. Then read the question and sample responses below.

In "The Blanket," how does the reader know that Petey is upset with Dad for planning to send Granddad away? Support your answer with evidence from the selection.

Score Point 0

This student repeats the plot of the story without adding any analysis or text support.

Well Petey stays home with Granddad to see if he was leaving because Dad told him to. When he saw the blanket, he knew it was true. So he stayed because he was leaving in the morning. And they talked all night.

Score Point 1

Throughout the selection it is apparent that Petey and Granddad are close. In paragraph 7, Petey almost cries and that helps the reader fully comprehend. Toward the end Petey shows his father how he feels and puts the final touch on his argument.

This student offers some text support but doesn't link it to the analysis that is offered. What does the reader comprehend? What is Petey's argument?

Score Point 2

You can detect that Petey is upset with his father when Petey angrily yelled at his father and said to cut the blanket in half, and save it for later. When the father asked why, Petey stated furiously, "So I can give it to you when I'm older and send you away." Then they all cried.

This student weaves analysis in with text quotations and paraphrases of the text.

Score Point 3

Petey is very upset with his father for planning to send Granddad away. In paragraph 25 Petey says, "I mean, I'll give it to you, Dad—when you're old and I'm sending you away." Petey here makes a definite point to his father of how agreeable he is being to his girlfriend's wishes without considering how irrational they may be. Petey proves to him the negative result of being passive, and his father realizes the choice he is making is wrong. By Petey making his father realize this, he proves his devotion to Granddad.

This student makes interesting, thoughtful points in his analysis and supports them with relevant text.

Now turn back to "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15. Review the article before reading the following question and sample responses.

In "Granny Down the Hall," why is the author's friendship with his neighbors so important to him? Support your answer with evidence from the selection.

Score Point 0

These are general ideas about friendship, but how do we know that they are related to "Granny Down the Hall"?

The author's friendship is important because he believes that you should always be a good friend and not let anyone down. He also thinks you should be there when someone needs you.

Score Point 1

How does the text support relate to the analysis?

Examples of "kindness" and "sentimentality" from the text are needed.

How did the author and Pearl help each other?

In the story the author says, "she's a good old gal." You really know by reading this that he enjoys Pearl. He enjoys her kindness and she is sentimental. He helps her and she helps him. Also they make a family circle that makes them all feel loved because she is their Granny.

Score Point 2

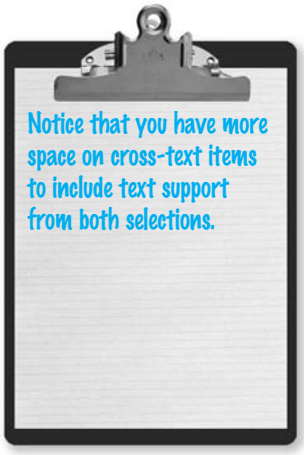
In "Granny Down the Hall," the author's friendship is important to him for a few reasons. He says, "Each of us has joined together to form a family circle...we share a bond of love that brings us comfort, support, security, and fun." Friends are his family, and he needs them to survive.

An example from the text is clearly linked to the ideas in the analysis.

Score Point 3

Glenn Plaskin's friendship with Pearl was deep and loving. First Plaskin's dog Katie became "part of Pearl's household" each day while he was at work. Once their friendship develops, Glenn nicknames Pearl Granny. She takes the place of his real grandmother who had died. Glenn and Granny share all the things family members share—great discussions, meals, bad times like illnesses and Arthur's death, and happy times like Granny's birthday. Plaskin says, "We share a bond of love that brings us comfort, support, security, and fun."

In-depth analysis is paired with quotations and paraphrased text.



Now look at both "The Blanket" on pages 9–11 and "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15. Keep these selections in mind as you read the following question and sample responses.

What do Glenn Plaskin and Petey do to show that family relationships are important to them? Explain your answer and support it with evidence from **both** selections.

Score Point 0

They both show that family relationships are important by spending time with each other. Also helping each other out in rough times when they really need you the most.

Who? Petey and Glenn?

What rough times?

Where is the text support?

Score Point 1

Petey shows that his family relationship is important to him by convincing his dad not to send away Granddad. Glenn Plaskin shows how important his family relationship is by standing by Pearl through thick and thin.

This student attempts analysis but provides no text support.

Score Point 2

Petey shows that his relationship with his granddad is important to him by crying when he discovers that Granddad is being sent away even though "he wasn't the kind to cry, and besides, he was too old for that." Petey loved Granddad so much that he found a way to keep dad from sending him away. Glenn Plaskin shows his family relationship is important to him when he writes that his relationship with Pearl is "a loving friendship nurtured by proximity and mutual chemistry." The admiration with which he writes about her shows just how much he cares.

This student provides clear analysis and text support from both selections.

Score Point 3

Petey and Glenn Plaskin believe family relationships are important and enduring. In "The Blanket," Petey tells his dad to "cut the blanket in two" and save the other half for when the dad is old and being sent away. Through Petey's actions, Dad realizes how cruel he's been acting. Petey teaches his dad that family is too valuable to be compromised. In "Granny Down the Hall," Glenn Plaskin develops a family relationship with Pearl, who he calls Granny. No matter what, he is there to assist her. When Arthur dies, he mourns with her at the cemetery. When she is hit by a taxi, he picks her up from the ER. Though they aren't blood kin, Glenn believes they share a bond of love and commitment that makes them a real family.

This student's response shows thoughtful analysis and word choice as well as relevant direct quotations and paraphrasing.

On Your Own

Now try these practice items. Then check your answers using the answer key and explanations beginning on page 84.

Use "The Blanket" on pages 9–11 to answer questions 1–13.

Question 1

Who gave the blanket to Granddad?

A Petey
B Petey's mother
C Dad's girlfriend
D Petey's father

Answer Key: page 84

Question 2

Granddad is planning to leave —

A after dinner
B next week
C in a few weeks
D the next morning

Answer Key: page 84

Question 3

At the beginning of the story, Dad is —

A at the grocery store
B with his girlfriend
C washing the dishes
D packing for Granddad

Answer Key: page 84

Question 4

Dad's girlfriend is upset because —

A she was not invited to dinner
B Granddad is moving away
C the blanket is so expensive
D she does not like fiddle music

Answer Key: page 84

Question 5

When Dad's girlfriend comes to the house, she says that —

A she will not be there when Granddad leaves
B she is excited about getting married
C she does not want Granddad to leave
D she plans to drive Granddad to his new home

Answer Key: page 84

Question 6

What is paragraph 10 mostly about?

A Granddad is happy that Dad is getting married.
B Granddad stops playing his fiddle to talk to Petey.
C Granddad feels he will be in the way when his son marries.
D Granddad is too ill to remain at home.

Answer Key: page 84

Question 7

The fact that Granddad pretends he wants to go away shows that he is —

A angry about the decisions his son has made concerning him

B ready to make a change in his lifestyle

C disappointed in his son's behavior

D sensitive to the feelings of his son and grandson

Answer Key: page 84

Question 8

In paragraph 7, Petey goes into the house not only to get the fiddle but also —

A to wash up the dinner dishes

B to avoid talking to Granddad anymore

C to keep Granddad from seeing him cry

D to watch for his father from the window

Answer Key: page 84

Question 9

The primary conflicts in this story are developed through —

A flashback

B humor

C dialogue

D description

Answer Key: page 84

Question 10

The author's descriptions of Dad's girlfriend serve to —

A highlight Petey's affection for her

B contrast her appearance with her actions

C show that she is mature for her age

D contrast her youthfulness with Granddad's age

Answer Key: page 84

Question 11

In paragraph 13, the girlfriend speaks to Dad coldly because she —

A resents the fact that he gave Granddad such a nice gift

B is annoyed that Petey and Granddad are at home

C thinks that he should have bought her a present, too

D knows that he is already angry with her

Answer Key: page 84

Question 12

What is one reason the author doesn't give Dad's girlfriend a name in the story?

A To show that she is not an important character in the story

B To confuse the reader

C To emphasize that she is not a true part of the family

D To create a sense of mystery

Answer Key: page 84

Question 13

How does the author create tension in the story?

A By establishing a lighthearted mood

B By setting the story in Petey's home

C By foreshadowing Dad's marriage

D By having the characters confront one another

Answer Key: page 85

Use "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15 to answer questions 14–24.

Question 14

In paragraph 5, the word *oblivious* means —

A unaware of

B charmed by

C sensitive to

D angry about

Answer Key: page 85

Question 15

The author and Pearl began their friendship by discussing —

A dogs

B children

C work

D the theater

Answer Key: page 85

Question 16

The only time the author ever saw Pearl cry was when —

A Arthur was buried

B Ryan moved away

C her dog died

D she retired from her job

Answer Key: page 85

Question 17

Which sentence from the selection best reflects the author's attitude about his friendship with his neighbors?

A *Some of the best things that happen in life are purely accidental.*

B *Overall, she's just a great gal!*

C *It was touching to see him throw his arms around Granny's neck.*

D *We traded apartment-building gossip and shared major holidays.*

Answer Key: page 85

Question 18

A primary message expressed in this selection is that —

A people in big cities are often friendly

B animals are excellent companions for people who live in apartments

C cooking is an educational activity

D people can form families even though they are not related

Answer Key: page 85

Question 19

The author believes that one of the key elements in a friendship is —

A having the same interests and lifelong goals

B supporting one another in good times and bad

C being about the same age

D living in an apartment building

Answer Key: page 85

Question 20

The selection's point of view is important because —

A the author can tell Pearl's story better than she can

B all the neighbors are able to share their memories

C it reveals the depth of the author's feelings for his "family"

D it shows that only a few of the neighbors belong to the "family"

Answer Key: page 85

Question 21

One reason that Pearl is able to maintain friendships with younger people is that —

A she enjoys large birthday parties

B she likes taking care of other people's dogs

C she wanted to be an actress when she was younger

D she is interested in current events and modern topics

Answer Key: page 85

Question 22

When Pearl said, "Don't do it again!" in paragraph 18, she probably meant that —

A she felt a little embarrassed by the attention she received at her party

B she would have preferred a larger birthday celebration

C she knew that Plaskin's apartment was too small for 30 people

D she thought that her neighbors had spent too much money on the party

Answer Key: page 85

Question 23

The subheading in the article that best describes the strength of the friendship between the author and Pearl is —

A "Getting to Know Her"

B "The Way She Is"

C "The Good Group"

D "Through Thick and Thin"

Answer Key: page 85

Question 24

The author uses contradictions in paragraph 7 to show —

A the challenges of a busy life

B his ability to use precise language

C the many aspects of Pearl's personality

D his confusion about Pearl's habits

Answer Key: page 86

Use both "The Blanket" on pages 9–11 and "Granny Down the Hall" on pages 12–15 to answer questions 25 and 26.

Question 25

What is one major difference between the family in "The Blanket" and the group of friends in "Granny Down the Hall"?

A No one is threatening the unity of the group of friends.

B The family includes members of three different generations.

C No common interests are shared by members of the family.

D The group of friends enjoys spending time together.

Answer Key: page 86

Question 26

Both Petey and Glenn Plaskin understand that —

A everyone needs supportive parents

B friendships require a great deal of effort

C close relationships are valuable

D friends are as important as family members

Answer Key: page 86

Use the Web page on page 16 to answer the following question.

Question 27

Which category could logically be included on the website?

A Employment Advice

B Easy Crafts to Make Together

C Foreign Travel Opportunities

D How to Choose the Right Pet

Answer Key: page 86

Question 28

Who do you think is the wisest character in "The Blanket"? Support your answer with evidence from the selection.

Answer Key: page 86

Question 29

How does the author of "Granny Down the Hall" show the development of his friendship with Pearl? Support your answer with evidence from the selection.

Answer Key: page 86

Question 30

What is one significant difference between Granddad in "The Blanket" and Pearl in "Granny Down the Hall"? Explain your answer and support it with evidence from both selections.

Answer Key: page 86

"The Blanket"

Question 1 (page 76)

Choice D is the correct answer. It is stated in paragraph 2 that the blanket was one that "Dad had bought for Granddad," so Choices A, B, and C are incorrect.

Question 2 (page 76)

Choice D is the correct answer. In paragraph 2, it is stated that Granddad will be going away in the morning. Since Choice D is the correct answer, Choices A, B, and C are incorrect.

Question 3 (page 76)

Choice B is the correct answer. It is stated in paragraph 2 that Dad is "off seeing that girl he was to marry." Since Choice B is the correct answer, Choices A, C, and D are incorrect.

Question 4 (page 76)

Choice C is the correct answer. In paragraph 17, the girlfriend scolds Dad because she realizes "how much of Dad's money—her money, really—had gone for the blanket." Choice A is incorrect because there is no discussion of a dinner invitation. Choice B is incorrect because the girlfriend is seemingly happy that Granddad is leaving. Choice D is not correct because there is no mention of the girlfriend not liking Granddad's fiddle playing.

Question 5 (page 76)

Choice A is the correct answer. In paragraph 11, the girlfriend says, "I won't be here when you leave in the morning, so I came over to say good-bye." Since Choice A is the correct answer, Choices B, C, and D are incorrect.

Question 6 (page 76)

In paragraph 10, Granddad says, "And what would an old fellow like me be doing around their house, getting in the way? An old nuisance, what with my talks of aches and pains." Since he feels that he will be in the way when his son marries, Choice C is the correct answer. Granddad seems happy for his son, but that is not the focus of the paragraph, so Choice A is not correct. Choice B is a detail and not the main idea of the paragraph. Choice D is not supported by any information in the story.

Question 7 (page 77)

Choice D is correct because the reader can tell through Granddad's words and actions that he is kind and loving toward Petey and Dad. Choices A, B, and C are not supported by details in the story.

Question 8 (page 77)

Choice C is correct because the reader can infer that the author is using irony with the statement "He wasn't the kind to cry and, besides, he was too old for that." There is no evidence that Petey goes into the house to do anything other than fetch Granddad's fiddle, so Choices A, B, and D are incorrect.

Question 9 (page 77)

Choice C is correct. Dialogue among the characters reveals that Dad is probably choosing between his father and his girlfriend and that Petey is angry with his father for making such a decision. Choices A and B are incorrect because the author uses neither flashbacks nor humor in the story. Choice D is incorrect because descriptions do not develop the story's conflict, even though they provide interesting details.

Question 10 (page 77)

Choice B is the correct answer. While the girlfriend is described as being a pretty girl whose "bright face was like a doll's," her behavior is selfish and mean. Choice A is incorrect because Petey seems to have little affection for the girlfriend. Choices C and D are incorrect because they are meaningless in terms of developing the plot.

Question 11 (page 77)

Choice A is the correct answer. The fact that the girlfriend is focusing on the cost of the blanket and that she spoke coldly to Dad about it reveal that she is unhappy about Dad's spending so much money on Granddad. Choice B is incorrect because the girlfriend expects Granddad to be at home so that she can tell him good-bye. There is nothing in the story to support that either Choice C or D is correct.

Question 12 (page 77)

Choice C is correct. Dad, Granddad, and Petey are all identified by the names used within their family. By referring to this character as "the girlfriend," the author emphasizes her position outside the family unit. Choice A is not correct because the girlfriend's role is important in the plot development. Choices B and D are incorrect because neither reflects the author's purpose in this story.

Question 13 (page 78)

Choice D is the correct answer. Tension builds in the story once the girlfriend scolds Dad and Dad and Petey begin to argue. Choice A is incorrect because there is no lighthearted mood in the story. Choice B is incorrect because the setting has no influence on the tension that builds in the story. Choice C is incorrect because Dad's upcoming marriage is discussed directly and not foreshadowed.

"Granny Down the Hall"

Question 14 (page 78)

Choice A is the correct answer; paragraph 5 states that Katie always jumps up on the chair and ignores Pearl's greeting in her excitement over finding the expected piece of toast. Choices B, C, and D do not make sense in the context of the paragraph.

Question 15 (page 78)

Choice A is the correct answer. In paragraph 2, the author describes his first encounter with Pearl. During this first meeting, they discuss dogs. Choices B, C, and D are not correct because these topics are not discussed at the first meeting. Rather, they are topics discussed later as the friendship develops.

Question 16 (page 78)

Choice A is the correct answer. In paragraph 13, the author states: "Saying goodbye to Arthur was the only time I ever saw Pearl cry." Since the author sees her cry only once and that one time is identified, Choices B, C, and D must be incorrect.

Question 17 (page 78)

Choice A is correct. It is a general statement that might refer to all the neighbor friends, and it reflects the overall message of the selection. Choices B and C are incorrect because they refer to only one neighbor. Choice D is incorrect because it provides details about the friendships rather than reflecting the author's general attitude.

Question 18 (page 78)

Choice D is the correct answer because the author indicates in paragraph 17 that the neighbors have "joined together to form a family circle." Choices A and B are faulty generalizations, since some city people are not friendly and since animals are not always excellent companions for apartment dwellers. While you might argue that cooking is an educational activity, Choice C is not a message expressed in the selection.

Question 19 (page 79)

Choice B is correct. In the sections "The Good Group" and "Through Thick and Thin," the author describes all the ways friendships develop and strengthen among the neighbors. Choice A is incorrect because the members of the group have a variety of interests, and we do not know the lifelong goals of all the neighbors. Choice C is incorrect because the group members range in age from very young to very old. Choice D is incorrect because, while many people live in the apartment building, they are not all friends.

Question 20 (page 79)

Choice C is correct. The first-person point of view allows the author to express his thoughts and feelings, as well as report on the events that have occurred among the group members. There is no evidence that Choices A and D are correct. Choice B is incorrect because only Pearl's memories are described, and they are reported secondhand through the voice of the narrator.

Question 21 (page 79)

Choice D is the correct answer. In paragraph 8, the author says, "Although 40 years separate us, I always feel that Granny is a contemporary." Choice A is incorrect because Granny has had only one birthday party in her life. Choices B and C may be true, but alone they are not good reasons for being able to maintain friendships with young people.

Question 22 (page 79)

Choice A is the correct answer, since Granny is unused to the kind of attention bestowed on a person at a birthday party and since she seems to prefer paying attention to others. Choice B is incorrect since she asks the others not to throw her a party again. There are no details to indicate that she thinks the apartment is too small or that she thinks the others have spent too much money, so Choices C and D are incorrect.

Question 23 (page 79)

Choice D is correct because it refers to the friendship surviving through both good times and bad times. Choices A and B refer to the period during which the author was getting to know Pearl. Choice C refers to the way the group of friends came together.

Question 24 (page 79)

Choice C is correct because the contradicting details are all used to describe Granny's character. Choices A and D are incorrect because these purposes do not figure in the development of the selection. Choice B is incorrect because like most authors, Plaskin uses precise language to express ideas and not as a purpose for writing.

"The Blanket" and "Granny Down the Hall"

Question 25 (page 80)

The correct choice is A. No one in the group of friends threatens the others in any way. Each person helps and supports the others. This is not true of the family in "The Blanket." Petey and Granddad are threatened by the intentions of Dad and his girlfriend. Choices B and D are incorrect because both groups include people from three different generations and both include people who enjoy spending time together. Choice C is incorrect because the statement is false.

Question 26 (page 80)

Choice C is the correct answer. Both Petey and Glenn Plaskin recognize the importance of close relationships. Choice A is incorrect because Plaskin never discusses his parents. Choice B is incorrect because it is not the focus in either selection. Choice D is incorrect because even though Plaskin believes that friends are as important as family members, there is nothing to indicate that Petey would agree.

"The Homestead" Web Page

Question 27 (page 80)

The correct choice is B. Making crafts would fit in naturally with the other activities listed among the links. Choices A, C, and D do not seem appropriate for a place like the Homestead.

Short-Answer Questions

Question 28 (page 81)

Sample response: I think that Petey is the wisest character in the story. He is wise enough to recognize that his grandfather doesn't really want "to go away to the great brick building" and wise enough to see that his father's girlfriend is self-centered.

Question 29 (page 82)

Sample response: By describing events in the order in which they happened, the author shows how his relationship with Pearl developed. By doing this, he shows how their "brief encounter blossomed into a loving friendship nurtured by proximity and mutual chemistry."

Question 30 (page 83)

Sample response: One significant difference between Granddad and Pearl is the kind of relationship they share with loved ones. Pearl created the family she never had: "With no children of her own, [Pearl] simply adopted us all!" Granddad has both a son and a grandson, but he accepts the fact that his son no longer wants to care for him: "It's best that I go away, like I'm doing."

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