

## SECTION 4

# SAMPLE TEST ITEMS FOR READING SPECIALISTS

This section of the Virginia Reading Assessment (VRA) Study Guide provides sample multiple-choice and constructed-response test items to assist you in preparing to take the VRA for Reading Specialists.

### Multiple-Choice Items

This section contains the multiple-choice sample items and associated information as follows:

- a description of multiple-choice item formats;
- test directions for multiple-choice items;
- sample multiple-choice items; and
- an answer key for multiple-choice items with explanations for the correct responses.

### Multiple-Choice Item Formats

VRA test items are designed to assess subject matter knowledge described in the test blueprint for each test field. In addition to demonstrating your ability to recall factual information, you will be asked to think critically about information, analyze it, apply it, consider it carefully, compare it with other knowledge you have, or make a judgment about it. The purpose of this section is to describe the most common multiple-choice item formats you may see on the VRA. This section also suggests possible ways to approach thinking about and answering them.

#### Multiple-Choice Item Format One: Single Test Items

In the single test-item format, a problem is presented as a direct question or an incomplete statement, and four response options (A, B, C, and D) appear below the question. Refer to sample item 1 as an example of this type of test item.

For test items in this format, a suggested approach is to read the entire item carefully and critically. Think about what it is asking and the situation it is describing. It is best to read and evaluate *all* four response options to find the best answer; you should not stop at the first answer that seems reasonable. After reading all four response options, eliminate any obviously wrong answers and select the best choice from the remaining answers. There is no penalty for incorrect multiple-choice item answers; therefore, it is better to select an answer than not to respond at all.

### **Multiple-Choice Item Format Two: Test Items with Stimulus Material**

Some test items are preceded by stimulus material to which the test items relate. Some examples of stimulus material that may be included on a test are maps, charts, tables, graphs, reading passages, and descriptions of classroom situations. In some cases, there is only one test item related to the stimulus provided. In other cases, two or more test items are related to a single stimulus. Each stimulus is preceded by a direction line indicating how many items are related to that stimulus. Refer to sample item 5 as an example of a test item with stimulus material.

The following approach is suggested when responding to test items with stimulus material. First, examine the stimulus. Note how the information is presented. For sample items 5 and 6, the stimulus is a list of guidelines for word-study notebooks. Now read sample item 5 associated with this stimulus. As you consider the additional activity described in each response option, review the stimulus to help you determine which additional activity is likely to be most effective in strengthening students' conceptual understanding of the words in their word-study notebooks. It is best to read and evaluate *all* four response options to find the best answer; you should not stop at the first answer that seems reasonable. After reading all four response options, eliminate any obviously wrong answers and select the best choice from the remaining answers. There is no penalty for incorrect multiple-choice item answers; therefore, it is better to select an answer than not to respond at all.

**Test Directions for Multiple-Choice Items****DIRECTIONS FOR SECTION I: MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEMS****Questions 1 to 90**

Each question in this section is a multiple-choice item with four answer choices. Read each question carefully and choose the ONE best answer. Record each answer on page one or two of Answer Document A in the space that corresponds to the question number. Completely fill in the circle having the same letter as the answer you have chosen. *Use only a No. 2 lead pencil.*

- Sample Question:      1. What is the capital of Virginia?
- A. Roanoke
  - B. Norfolk
  - C. Richmond
  - D. Charlottesville

The correct answer to this question is C. You would indicate that on Answer Document A as follows:

1.     A     B     C     D

Try to answer all questions. In general, if you have some knowledge about a question, it is better to try to answer it. There is no penalty for incorrect multiple-choice item answers; therefore, it is better to select an answer than not to respond at all.



DO NOT GO ON UNTIL YOU ARE TOLD TO DO SO.

### Sample Multiple-Choice Items

1. A reading specialist could best determine a student's independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels by:
  - A. administering a norm-referenced standardized reading test.
  - B. having the student complete a series of cloze exercises.
  - C. administering an Informal Reading Inventory.
  - D. having the student read aloud lists of grade-appropriate words.
  
2. A reading specialist is planning instruction for a first-grade student who is learning English as a second language (ESL). The student is a beginning reader in her primary language. The reading specialist, who has some familiarity with the student's primary language, begins by considering similarities between the sound system of the student's primary language and the sound system of English. The primary benefit of this approach is that it will help the reading specialist plan ways to:
  - A. promote positive transfer between the student's primary language and English.
  - B. improve the student's letter-recognition and letter-naming skills.
  - C. reinforce the student's automatic recognition of irregular sight words in English.
  - D. develop the student's recognition of voice-print matching.
  
3. According to current research, which of the following approaches is most likely to increase the effectiveness of phonemic awareness instruction?
  - A. relying primarily on individualized drills and worksheets to promote phonemic awareness
  - B. introducing multiple phonemic awareness skills in each lesson
  - C. providing explicit whole-class phonemic awareness instruction for two or more hours each day
  - D. using concrete cues to help teach phonemic awareness

**Use the information below to answer the question that follows.**

A reading specialist uses a variety of word-sort activities to promote the phonics skills of second-grade students with reading difficulties. For each word-sort activity, the reading specialist gives the students their own decks of printed word cards. Students then sort the cards into two or more piles according to a sound and/or spelling pattern identified by the reading specialist. For example, one word-sort activity requires students to divide the word cards into two piles that correspond to words with long "e" sounds (e.g., leaf, seed) and words with short "e" sounds (e.g., hen, bread). Another word-sort activity requires students to divide the word cards into three piles based on spelling patterns as well as sound patterns (e.g., words in which the long "e" sound is spelled "ea," words in which the long "e" sound is spelled "ee," and words in which the long "e" sound is spelled "ie").

4. Which of the following guidelines would be most important for the reading specialist to follow when selecting words to use for phonics-based word-sort activities?
- A. Encourage students to select their own words for the word-sort activities.
  - B. Choose words from texts that are written at a level that is challenging for most students.
  - C. Use words that the students already recognize and can easily pronounce.
  - D. Select sets of words that are all drawn from the same age-appropriate children's book.

**Use the information below to answer the two questions that follow.**

A reading specialist is working with a group of middle school students to improve their vocabulary knowledge and skills. Students begin keeping word-study notebooks and follow the guidelines summarized below.

- During independent reading, identify an unfamiliar word.
- Write the word, and the sentence in which it appears, in your word-study notebook.
- Make and record some predictions about the word's meaning based on context and familiar word parts.
- Look up the word in the dictionary, and record information about the meaning(s) of the word.

5. Which of the following additions to this activity is likely to be most effective in strengthening students' conceptual understanding of the words in their word-study notebooks?
- A. Students apply phonics knowledge to analyze the spelling patterns of selected words in their word-study notebooks.
  - B. Students review the entries in their notebooks on a regular basis to reinforce their recall of the words' meanings.
  - C. Students choose an appropriate dictionary definition for the selected word and copy the definition into their notebook entry.
  - D. Students write down synonyms, antonyms, and other words that are related in meaning to the selected word.
6. The reading specialist wants to incorporate an interactive component into the activities involving the word-study notebooks. Which of the following activities would be most effective in further promoting students' vocabulary development?
- A. Each student engages in peer editing by correcting and revising the notebook entries of another member of the group.
  - B. Students take turns reading aloud selected entries from their notebooks to the other members of the group.
  - C. Each student shares a notebook entry with another member of the group, and they collaborate to write a sentence using the selected word.
  - D. Students use a rubric to assess the accuracy and completeness of a partner's notebook entry.

7. Third-grade students are learning to visualize characters and events in literary texts. Students pause when reading a story silently and describe how they visualize an important part of the story. Which of the following statements best explains how visualizing characters and events in a literary text is likely to promote students' understanding of the text?
- A. Visualizing characters and events in the text enhances comprehension primarily by prompting students to analyze organizational patterns in the text.
  - B. Visualizing characters and events in the text prompts students to combine background knowledge with the text to construct meaning and to engage with literature in a personal way.
  - C. Visualizing characters and events in the text increases students' comprehension of the text primarily by enhancing their appreciation for details of setting.
  - D. Visualizing characters and events in the text prompts students to distinguish different story elements and to interpret the text by applying literary analysis skills.
8. A reading specialist wants to help a sixth-grade student vary her reading strategies for different purposes and types of texts. Which of the following strategies would best help the student acquire information on particular topics when reading non-fiction texts?
- A. Read the entire text once without pausing and then use a dictionary to look up any unfamiliar words.
  - B. Read slowly and carefully to promote comprehension and recall of relevant information.
  - C. Read the text silently, then reread it aloud to clarify understanding of the main ideas and significant details.
  - D. Read selectively and adjust the pace of reading based on the content and difficulty of the text.

#### Section 4: Sample Test Items for Reading Specialists

9. A reading specialist considers ways to use writing to promote the reading comprehension of middle school students. Which of the following writing exercises is likely to be most effective in promoting development of the students' inferential comprehension?
- A. Students analyze a news story by writing answers to the questions who, what, where, when, and how.
  - B. Pairs of students write an ending to a story they have not finished reading, then read and compare the actual ending to what they wrote.
  - C. Students use a graphic organizer to record the main ideas and important details of a nonfiction text.
  - D. Pairs of students create an outline of a story they have read that summarizes the main characters, the setting, and the sequence of events.
10. Students in a sixth-grade class have been working on independent research projects. They have collected data and are about to begin working on their multimedia presentations. Which of the following steps would be most appropriate for the students to take *first*?
- A. writing out a detailed script of the presentation
  - B. developing a storyboard or other plan for presenting the information
  - C. collecting a variety of photographs, video clips, and other visual aids
  - D. creating charts and graphs to clarify the main ideas of the presentation

11. According to current reading research, which of the following skills of beginning kindergarten students are the two best predictors of reading achievement at the end of kindergarten and first grade?
- A. sight word recognition and oral comprehension
  - B. listening skills and speaking skills
  - C. phonemic awareness and letter identification
  - D. oral and written vocabulary
12. An elementary school reading specialist is leading a school literacy team that will recommend improvements to the reading program. The team will begin by surveying stakeholders about their literacy beliefs and goals. The team will use the survey results to help develop a mission statement for the school's reading program that is consistent with state and district standards. Creating the mission statement is most likely to facilitate improvements in the school's reading program by:
- A. providing an action plan for making needed changes to achieve the agreed-upon goals of the school's reading program.
  - B. establishing the literacy team's leadership and authority to define the overall goals of the school's reading program.
  - C. detailing the essential elements of a reading curriculum that reflects schoolwide consensus on literacy goals and standards.
  - D. clarifying the fundamental goals of the reading program and motivating members of the school community to work toward achieving the goals.

#### Section 4: Sample Test Items for Reading Specialists

13. A high school reading specialist considers ways to keep faculty and staff informed about current reading research. The reading specialist secures funding to create a small school-based lending library of current professional publications related to reading that will be accessible to all teachers and staff. Which of the following additional strategies would be the most appropriate way to communicate relevant research findings about reading to school personnel?
- A. Provide faculty and staff with a comprehensive bibliography of scholarly articles that analyze the results of ongoing reading-related research.
  - B. Distribute to all faculty and staff a monthly literacy newsletter that includes information about current reading research and suggestions for classroom applications.
  - C. Post a sign-up sheet on the door of the reading specialist's office to arrange individual meetings with all faculty and staff to brief them on the latest reading research.
  - D. Send a memo to all faculty and staff inviting them to meet once a week to discuss the latest research findings about effective reading instruction.

## Answer Key

### Item 1, Objective 1, Correct Response C

An Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) can help a reading specialist select texts that are written at an appropriate level of difficulty for individual students. For the IRI, a student reads aloud selected passages while the reading specialist takes notes on the student's reading performance. The student also answers comprehension questions about the passages. The student's reading levels are determined by calculating the percentage of words that were correctly identified during the oral reading and the percentage of comprehension questions that were answered correctly.

### Item 2, Objective 3, Correct Response A

For students who are learning English as a second language (ESL), positive transfer can occur when a similarity exists between the student's primary language and English. For example, if a student's primary language is phonetically based, and if some letters that are shared by the primary language and English correspond to the same sounds in both languages, these similarities can facilitate the student's learning of English.

### Item 3, Objective 4, Correct Response D

Current research suggests that use of concrete cues can increase the effectiveness of phonemic awareness instruction. For example, a reading specialist may use plastic cubes to represent the phonemes of a spoken word (e.g., *man*), guiding the student to place one cube on the table as each sound of the word (e.g., /m/ /a/ /n/) is articulated. Other manipulatives, including magnetic or cardboard letters, also can enhance the effectiveness of phonemic awareness activities.

### Item 4, Objective 6, Correct Response C

A primary purpose of these types of word-sort activities is to reinforce students' knowledge of common sound patterns and spelling patterns in words. For this reason, the activities should use familiar printed words that students can easily recognize and pronounce. Gaining familiarity with these patterns will help students learn to decode unfamiliar words through analogy with known words.

### Item 5, Objective 7, Correct Response D

Identifying synonyms (words with similar meanings) and antonyms (words with opposite meanings) for a designated word helps strengthen students' understanding of the word's denotative and connotative meanings. Linking the designated word to related words provides a conceptual context that anchors students' understanding and reinforces recall of the word's meaning.

### Item 6, Objective 7, Correct Response C

Repeated exposure to new vocabulary through varied reading, writing, and oral language activities promotes students' understanding and retention of the words. The activity described requires students to read a sentence containing the target word, to discuss the word's meaning, and to compose a new sentence that uses the word. Working with a partner also motivates students to share and extend their understanding of word meanings.

**Item 7, Objective 9, Correct Response B**

Visualizing the characters and events in a literary text can be an effective strategy to enhance comprehension. In order to visualize literary characters or plot episodes, the reader must make a personal connection with the text, drawing on background knowledge and experience to picture the characters and events described.

**Item 8, Objective 10, Correct Response D**

Students must learn to adjust their reading strategies for varied purposes and for different types of texts. When searching for specific information in a nonfiction text, a student can read selectively by using skimming and scanning strategies. A student may need to read more slowly to understand a passage that contains technical vocabulary or presents unfamiliar concepts.

**Item 9, Objective 11, Correct Response B**

Inferential comprehension enables a reader to draw conclusions based on information that is not explicitly stated in a text. For example, a student may connect prior knowledge with implied information in a story to make predictions about the plot or the characters. In the activity described, the student partners take the additional step of writing a new ending for the story. Comparing their own ending to the actual ending of the story further strengthens the students' ability to make inferences while reading.

**Item 10, Objective 13, Correct Response B**

The multiple options and tasks involved in preparing a multimedia research presentation can be overwhelming for students. As a first step, students should develop a storyboard or other plan for presenting their research findings. This approach helps students focus their thoughts and organize their materials so that the remaining tasks proceed in a logical and manageable fashion.

**Item 11, Objective 14, Correct Response C**

Current research suggests that phonemic awareness and letter identification play a critical role in early reading development. At the beginning of kindergarten, those children who demonstrate phonemic awareness and letter-recognition skills are most likely to be progressing well in their reading development by the end of kindergarten and first grade.

**Item 12, Objective 15, Correct Response D**

The primary purpose of creating a mission statement for a reading program is to engage the school community in articulating, and working to achieve, the fundamental goals of the reading program. Formulated in this way, the mission statement can guide the process of planning and implementing any needed improvements in the reading curriculum.

**Item 13, Objective 16, Correct Response B**

A monthly literacy newsletter is an efficient, convenient way to keep school personnel informed about current reading research and recommended instructional strategies. Providing a common frame of reference, the newsletter can help stimulate ongoing discussion among faculty and staff about effective, research-based methods of reading instruction.

## Constructed-Response Items

This section contains the constructed-response sample items and associated information as follows:

- a description of the constructed-response item format;
- test directions for constructed-response items;
- sample constructed-response items;
- the performance characteristics and scoring scales for the constructed-response items; and
- strong responses to the sample constructed-response items.

### Constructed-Response Item Format

The VRA for Reading Specialists includes two constructed-response items; you should answer both questions. The constructed-response item that is linked to Domain V of the test blueprint is expected to have a typical response time of approximately 30 minutes. The constructed-response item for Domain VI involves a case study and is expected to have a typical response time of approximately 60 minutes. Refer to the test blueprint at [www.vra.nesinc.com](http://www.vra.nesinc.com).

Each constructed-response item will typically include:

1. contextual or background information that presents the topic of the constructed-response item; and
2. one or more specific directions or assignments that advise you of the elements that you are expected to provide in your response.

All responses to constructed-response items are scored holistically using scoring scales that describe varying levels of performance. These scales are used by scorers in judging the overall effectiveness of each response. Committees of Virginia educators reviewed both the performance characteristics and the scoring scales before they were approved by the Virginia Department of Education.

The **Performance Characteristics** guide scorers in considering responses to the constructed-response items. Review the performance characteristics contained in this section as you prepare to take the VRA.

The **Scoring Scales** are related to the performance characteristics for the test and are used by scorers in assigning scores to responses to the constructed-response items.

As a whole, the response to each assignment must demonstrate an understanding of the content of the field. Responses are scored on the extent to which they achieve the purpose of the assignment, are appropriate and accurate in the application of subject matter knowledge, provide high-quality and relevant supporting evidence, and demonstrate a soundness of argument and an understanding of the subject area.

A response to a constructed-response item is designated "unscorable" if it is unrelated to the assigned topic, illegible, not in the appropriate language, of insufficient length to score, or merely a repetition of the assignment. If there is no response to a constructed-response item, it is designated "blank."

## Test Directions for Constructed-Response Items

### DIRECTIONS FOR SECTION II: CONSTRUCTED-RESPONSE ITEMS

This section of the test consists of two constructed-response assignments. For constructed-response Assignment 1, you are to prepare a written response and record it in the area provided on pages 3 and 4 of Answer Document B. For the Case Study Assignment, record your answer in the Case Study Response Booklet.

Read each assignment carefully before you begin to write. Think about how you will organize what you plan to write. You may use any blank space provided in this test booklet following each assignment to make notes, write an outline, or otherwise prepare your response. ***Your final responses, however, must be written on the appropriate pages of Answer Document B or in the Case Study Response Booklet.***

Written responses will be evaluated based on the extent to which they demonstrate knowledge and skills important for effective delivery of a balanced, comprehensive reading program. Read each assignment carefully to ensure that you address all aspects of the assignment. Your responses to the assignments will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

**Purpose:** The candidate demonstrates an understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain by fulfilling the purpose of the assignment.

**Application of Content:** The candidate accurately and effectively applies the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.

**Support:** The candidate supports the response with appropriate evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.

The assignments are intended to assess knowledge and skills of reading instruction, not writing ability. Your responses, however, must be communicated clearly enough to permit a valid judgment of your knowledge and skills. Your responses should be written for an audience of educators knowledgeable about reading instruction.

The final version of each response should conform to the conventions of edited American English. Your responses should be your original work, written in your own words, and not copied or paraphrased from some other work. You may, however, use citations when appropriate.

The multiple-choice section of Answer Document B containing your name will be removed from your written response to maintain your anonymity during the scoring process. Do not write your name on any other portion of Answer Document B or on the Case Study Response Booklet, and do not separate any of the sheets from the documents.

You may work on the assignments in any order you choose, but be sure to record your final responses in the appropriate locations, as listed in the directions for each individual assignment.

## Assignment 1: Sample Constructed-Response Item (Domain V)

Use the information below to complete the exercise that follows.

A new third-grade teacher is concerned about the reading performance of a student in her class. She shares her concerns with you, the school's reading specialist. You agree to observe as the teacher informally assesses the student's reading comprehension. For this assessment, the student silently reads an excerpt from a grade-level story and then answers questions posed by the teacher. Printed below is the excerpt from the story.

Jeff sat at his desk staring out the window and fumbling with the postcard in his hand. He was tired of homework. He was tired of listening to his parents laughing as they made dinner together in the kitchen. He was tired of listening to his brother laughing on the phone with friends. Jeff got up and began pacing.

Twice he walked through the kitchen, where his parents looked up from their work and smiled. But otherwise they ignored him. Three times he walked past his brother chatting on the phone in the living room. Jeff's brother made faces at him and finally threw his shoe at Jeff. This cheered Jeff up a little. He went back to his room.

Back at his desk, Jeff reread the postcard from his friend Sarah. She liked her new town and her new school, she said, but she missed him. Jeff sighed. They had lived next door to each other all their lives. Staring out the window, Jeff thought about all the fun adventures he and Sarah had had last summer, spying on the neighbors and training Sarah's new puppy. One more week until summer vacation, he thought. What would he do? He set the postcard down and began pacing again.

As Jeff passed through the kitchen for the third time, his father asked, "What's up, Jeff?" But before he could answer, his brother appeared in the doorway with the phone still in his hand. "Jeff doesn't want to do his homework, so he keeps bugging me. Will you tell him to stop!"

After the student reads the passage, the teacher asks some questions. Printed below is a transcript of their conversation about the passage.

*Teacher:* Tell me what this story is about so far.  
*Student:* It's about a kid named Jeff who doesn't want to do his homework.  
*Teacher:* Can you tell me anything else about Jeff?  
*Student:* He likes to bug his brother.  
*Teacher:* Are there other characters in the story besides Jeff and his brother?  
*Student:* Yeah, Jeff's parents. And he has a friend named Sarah who lives next door. They do stuff together in the summer, like spy on people and play with Sarah's puppy. Jeff's wondering what they're going to do this summer. I bet they're going to do some more spying!  
*Teacher:* The story mentions a postcard. What can you tell me about the postcard?  
*Student:* Sarah sent it. She must be on vacation. She said she misses him because they've lived next door to each other their whole lives.  
*Teacher:* What is Jeff's mood like in the story?  
*Student:* Bad! He keeps pacing around and bugging his brother.  
*Teacher:* Why do you think he's in a bad mood?  
*Student:* Because he doesn't want to do his homework.

Later, you confer with the teacher and offer your assistance in interpreting the results of this assessment and in planning instruction to improve the student's reading comprehension.

## Section 4: Sample Test Items for Reading Specialists

### **Examinee Task**

Write a response in which you:

- identify one important *reading comprehension* need demonstrated by the student, citing specific evidence from the assessment information provided;
- describe one instructional strategy or activity that you would advise the student's teacher to use in addressing the comprehension need you have identified;
- explain the general research-based rationale for this instructional strategy or activity; and
- explain why this instructional strategy or activity is likely to be effective in addressing the comprehension need demonstrated by the student.

## Performance Characteristics

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>PURPOSE</b> The candidate demonstrates an understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain by fulfilling the purpose of the assignment.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>APPLICATION OF CONTENT</b> The candidate accurately and effectively applies the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>SUPPORT</b> The candidate supports the response with appropriate evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</li></ul>

### Scoring Scale for the Constructed-Response Item (Without Case Study)

<b>3</b>	<p><b>The "3" response reflects a thorough understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</b></p> <p>The response completely fulfills the purpose of the assignment by responding fully to the given task.</p> <p>The response demonstrates an accurate and effective application of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</p> <p>The response provides strong supporting evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>The "2" response reflects a general understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</b></p> <p>The response generally fulfills the purpose of the assignment by responding to the given task.</p> <p>The response demonstrates a generally accurate and reasonably effective application of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</p> <p>The response provides supporting evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</p>
<b>1</b>	<p><b>The "1" response reflects limited or no understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</b></p> <p>The response partially fulfills or fails to fulfill the purpose of the assignment by responding in a limited way or inadequately to the given task.</p> <p>The response demonstrates a limited and/or ineffective application of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain and may contain significant inaccuracies.</p> <p>The response provides limited or no supporting evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</p>

**A Strong Response to Assignment 1: Sample Constructed-Response Item (Domain V)**

This student needs to improve his inferential comprehension skills. He focused only on what was explicitly stated ("Jeff doesn't want to do his homework."), thus missing both an important implied main idea (Jeff misses Sarah) and an important cause-effect relationship (why Jeff is in a bad mood).

The teacher could address this need through a directed reading-thinking activity, which prompts students to make predictions as they read. After making predictions, the student reads some paragraphs silently. Then the teacher asks him to confirm his predictions with evidence from the text. They repeat these steps several times while reading a text.

Research suggests that making predictions about a text promotes comprehension by setting a purpose for reading and by prompting the reader to make inferences about the text based on prior knowledge. This activity would be effective in addressing the student's comprehension need because it would help him get in the habit of thinking beyond the literal text, thus promoting his inferential comprehension.

### **Sample Constructed-Response Item (Case Study)**

This case study focuses on a student named Robert, who is eleven years old. His primary language is English. The documents on the following pages describe Robert's reading performance during the first four months of sixth grade. Using these materials, write a response in which you apply your knowledge of reading assessment and instruction to analyze this case study. Your response should include three parts:

1. identify three of Robert's important reading strengths and/or needs at this point in the school year, citing evidence from the documents to support your observations;
2. describe two specific instructional strategies and/or activities designed to foster Robert's literacy development for the remainder of the school year by addressing the needs and/or building on the strengths you identified; and
3. explain how each strategy/activity you describe would promote Robert's reading proficiency.

### INFORMAL READING ASSESSMENT

Printed below is an excerpt used for an informal assessment of Robert's reading performance. For this assessment, Robert silently read a passage selected by his teacher, who judged it to be appropriate for his reading level. The passage comes from a text that the class is using as part of an earth science unit.

#### What Causes Earthquakes?

To understand the cause of earthquakes, you first have to learn a little about the earth's crust. The topmost layer of the earth is called the crust. The earth's crust is composed of seven major parts called *plates*. These plates are enormous. For example, the plate we live on, the North American plate, includes the whole continent of North America plus a large area of the Atlantic Ocean. Plates are about 60 miles thick on average, but some are twice as thick. Yet plates do not stay in one place! They are not stationary. How can this be?

The layer of the earth immediately below the crust is called the mantle. The upper part of the mantle is made of hot rock. The rock is so hot that it is melted. The earth's plates are not stationary because they float on top of this hot liquid rock.

As a plate moves, it may pull away from some of the plates around it. It may also collide with or slip past other plates around it. These movements of the plates cause major changes in the earth's crust. Sometimes these movements and changes cause earthquakes.

When two plates move and rub against each other, pressure can build up as the large blocks of rock grind together. As the two plates continue to collide, the pressure increases. Eventually, the strain between the large blocks of rock becomes so great that the rocks slip past each other. An earthquake occurs. The vibrations caused by an earthquake can be strong enough to destroy buildings and collapse bridges.

After Robert's silent reading, the teacher asked him some questions. Printed below is a partial transcript of their conversation.

*Teacher:* Tell me what you learned about earthquakes from this article. What causes earthquakes?

*Robert:* Vibrations. Vibrations cause a lot of damage, like destroying buildings and bridges.

*Teacher:* But what causes the vibrations?

*Robert:* Rocks slipping. Rocks falling. Like an avalanche, I guess. Big boulders probably.

*Teacher:* The article talks a lot about plates. Can you explain what plates are?

*Robert:* Yeah, they're in the earth's crust. There are seven of them and they're 60 miles wide.

*Teacher:* What do plates have to do with earthquakes?

*Robert:* I'm not exactly sure. I think they make the rocks fall.

*Teacher:* Were there any words in the article that you didn't know?

*Robert:* Hmm. Yeah, "stationary." I don't know that word.

*Teacher:* Let's look back at the first paragraph. Reread the last four sentences and see if you can figure out what "stationary" means.

*Robert:* (*rereads the four sentences*) Hmm, the plates don't stay in one place . . . they're *not* stationary. Oh! So "stationary" must mean stay in one place.

TEACHER NOTES

**Name:** Robert

9/22 Robert really enjoys math and he loves working on the class computer whenever he can. However, his work in language arts and other content areas is not very consistent. He tends to rush through assignments and makes a lot of careless mistakes. I'm not sure he's really working at his full potential.

10/20 During parent-teacher conferences, I asked Robert's parents about his at-home reading. They said he's never been a big reader but seems to understand what he reads "just fine." He's not allowed to play games on the computer or watch TV on school nights until he finishes his homework and reads for 15 minutes. He usually finishes everything in about a half hour. For his 15 minutes of reading, he almost always picks an article from the sports section of the newspaper (he told his parents "I don't like books"). He apparently spends a lot of time playing computer games and is quite good at them.

11/18 Robert has been reading a book on codes and cryptography all week during SSR [sustained silent reading]. This is the first time this year he actually seems to be reading during SSR! He usually just grabs any old thing and flips through the pages. He's never disruptive, but he's not engaged either. I'm pleased to see him connect with this book. He's talked about it a lot with me and several classmates. He's clearly learned a lot from this book.

12/15 Robert's grades on his language arts and content-area assignments (with the exception of math, in which he consistently performs well) are not improving. He frequently misses the main ideas in both fiction and nonfiction texts. While his decoding skills seem strong enough (he generally pronounces new words accurately and reads aloud with fluency), I'm often surprised by what he doesn't know in terms of vocabulary. I frequently remind him to slow down and be more careful with his work.

**READING JOURNAL ENTRY**

Robert's reading group has been reading the novel *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen. In this novel, a boy named Brian, whose parents are divorced, is flying over the densely wooded Canadian wilderness on his way to visit his father when the pilot of the two-seater plane has a heart attack and dies. Brian must land the plane safely and then survive in the wilderness with nothing but his instincts and a hatchet, a gift from his mother. He endures many hardships during his 54 days in the wilderness.

The students in Robert's reading group meet to discuss some chapters of the book. They respond independently to other chapters by writing about them in their reading journals. For the journal entries, students first discuss their personal reactions to the story. Then they respond to specific teacher questions or prompts. Following is Robert's reading journal entry after finishing reading the book. The teacher's prompts that day were: (1) Describe your personal reactions to the story; (2) summarize the conflicts Brian faced throughout the story; and (3) describe how Brian has changed from the person he was at the beginning of the story.

I thought he would get saved and he did. He didn't have any conflicts cause there wasn't any other characters. Maybe the moose. It was really dangerous and liked to conflict. Hes a lot skinnier at the end of the story.

### DICTATED SPELLING AND MECHANICS

Robert's class writes two dictated sentences each morning. The teacher takes the sentences from the students' current readings in language arts or the content areas. For each sentence, the teacher reads the sentence aloud and asks the students to write it down. The teacher then reads the sentence again and lets the students check their spelling and mechanics. Robert's performance from three mornings is shown below. The sentences that the teacher read aloud appear in parentheses.

<i>Monday</i>
(A hurricane's whirling winds and heavy rains can cause much damage.)
1. <i>The hurricain's wurling winds and heavy rains caused much damage.</i>
(Their herd of cows grazed in the meadow, too.)
2. <i>Their herd of cows grazed in the meadow, too.</i>

<i>Tuesday</i>
(The car received a few scratches when Keith's bike struck it.)
1. <i>The car received a few scratches when Keeth's bike struck it.</i>
(Natural disasters of all kinds happen each year.)
2. <i>Natural disasters of all kinds happen each year.</i>

<i>Wednesday</i>
(The students were excused from school in anticipation of the hurricane.)
1. <i>The students were excused from school in anticipation of the hurricane.</i>
(Tigers are heavier and more dangerous than lions.)
2. <i>Tigers are heavier and more dangerous than lions.</i>

**TEST SCORES**

Printed below is the report of Robert's national percentile rankings from a standardized test recently administered to his class.

**STANDARDIZED BASIC SKILLS TEST  
Student Score Report (National Percentile Rank)**

**ROBERT XXX  
GRADE 6**

CONTENT AREA	PERCENTILE RANK
<b>READING</b>	
VOCABULARY	46
COMPREHENSION	54
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>WRITING</b>	
PREWRITING	39
COMPOSING	51
EDITING	56
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>MATHEMATICS</b>	
PROBLEM SOLVING	87
COMPUTATION	81
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>86</b>

### Performance Characteristics

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>PURPOSE</b> The candidate demonstrates an understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain by fulfilling the purpose of the assignment.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>APPLICATION OF CONTENT</b> The candidate accurately and effectively applies the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>SUPPORT</b> The candidate supports the response with appropriate evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domain.</li></ul>

### Scoring Scale for the Constructed-Response Item (With Case Study)

<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">4</p>	<p><b>The "4" response reflects a thorough understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</b></p> <p>The response completely fulfills the purpose of the assignment by responding fully to the given task.</p> <p>The response demonstrates an accurate and effective application of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</p> <p>The response provides strong supporting evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</p>
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">3</p>	<p><b>The "3" response reflects a general understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</b></p> <p>The response generally fulfills the purpose of the assignment by responding to the given task.</p> <p>The response demonstrates a generally accurate and reasonably effective application of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</p> <p>The response provides supporting evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</p>
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">2</p>	<p><b>The "2" response reflects a limited understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</b></p> <p>The response partially fulfills the purpose of the assignment by responding in a limited way to the given task.</p> <p>The response demonstrates a limited and generally ineffective application of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains and may contain significant inaccuracies.</p> <p>The response provides limited supporting evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</p>
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold;">1</p>	<p><b>The "1" response reflects little or no understanding of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</b></p> <p>The response fails to fulfill the purpose of the assignment by responding inadequately to the given task.</p> <p>The response demonstrates a largely inaccurate and/or ineffective application of the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</p> <p>The response provides little or no supporting evidence, examples, and rationales based on the relevant content and pedagogical knowledge from the applicable VRA domains.</p>

### A Strong Response to the Sample Constructed-Response Item (Case Study)

Robert's greatest strength in reading seems to be in the area of phonics and decoding. Evidence of this includes the Teacher Notes on 12/15 ("he generally pronounces new words accurately and reads aloud with fluency") and the Dictated Spelling tasks, in which he displays knowledge of spelling patterns and conventions appropriate for his grade level (e.g., heavy/heavier, received, dangerous, anticipation) and applies common phonics patterns to unfamiliar words (hurricain, wurling, Keeth).

An important weakness for Robert is his tendency to rush through assignments without self-monitoring. Evidence for this behavior includes the Teacher Notes on 9/22 and 12/15, his misunderstanding of the earthquake article in the Informal Reading Assessment ("falling" rocks . . . "like an avalanche" cause earthquakes), and all aspects of his performance (comprehension of the text, accuracy/thoroughness of the response, spelling/mechanics) in the work sample (Reading Journal Entry).

Robert's other weakness as a reader is his limited vocabulary knowledge, as evidenced in the Teacher Notes on 12/15, his misuse of the word "conflict" in his Reading Journal Entry, and his below-average score for vocabulary (46) on the national standardized test.

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Two instructional strategies I would recommend for fostering Robert's literacy development for the remainder of the school year would be:

- (1) teaching Robert to apply self-monitoring skills as he reads, and
- (2) increasing Robert's independent reading.

To promote Robert's self-monitoring skills, I would model and provide guided practice in asking questions and conducting think-alouds while reading. Robert should be prompted to make connections between what he is reading and his own knowledge and experiences. Other questions should help him focus on the main ideas and supporting details of a text. In addition to guided practice, Robert can use checklists to reinforce his use of self-monitoring skills when working independently.

Helping Robert learn self-monitoring strategies would promote his reading proficiency by activating schema that supports his comprehension of a text and by increasing his active engagement with texts. Evidence in the case study shows that Robert comprehends better when he is interested and engaged in a text (Teacher Notes 11/18 indicate that he demonstrated good comprehension of the sports articles and cryptography book) and when he is prompted to think aloud about a text (Informal Reading Assessment shows that thinking aloud helped him figure out what "stationary" means).

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Getting Robert in the habit of asking himself questions as he reads should also help him get out of the habit of rushing through a text without really thinking about what it is saying.

To help Robert increase his independent reading, the teacher should first help him identify topics that interest him, then help him learn how to identify and locate materials that relate to those interests. To promote his engagement with these materials, the teacher should arrange frequent opportunities for Robert to talk about his reading (e.g., reading interest groups, teacher conferences). Robert's parents should also be encouraged to continue talking with him at home about his independent reading.

Increasing Robert's independent reading and his engagement with texts (by talking about his reading) will help Robert increase his vocabulary and provide him with additional opportunities to practice his self-monitoring skills.