

# Tests That Teach

by Karen Tankersley

## Chapter 1. Constructed Response: Connecting Performance and Assessment

### Helping Students Prepare for the Future

Early in their school careers, students learn that the teacher has the “right” answers to questions asked in the classroom. Successful students learn that their “job” is to try to figure out that “right” answer and to provide it for the teacher. Students who are able to do this quickly and accurately are perceived as brighter and are rewarded with higher grades and more positive feedback. Students who have difficulty in perceiving the answer the teacher is seeking may well be viewed as less competent and are less tolerated. In far too many classrooms, teachers do not require students to think deeply or move beyond the basic knowledge and comprehension level. Even those students who are perceived as bright, capable learners are seldom asked questions like “How do you know?” or “How did you get that answer?” or “Why do you think so?” or “Show me proof that answer is correct.” This lack of cognitive follow-through in our classrooms leads to shallow thinking and encourages students to simply try to guess what the teacher is thinking during instruction rather than really cognitively engage in deep thinking and learning.

Another issue that has limited the depth of thinking and learning in American classrooms is that our ever-expanding curriculum has been “a mile wide and an inch deep.” Traditional classrooms have emphasized facts and rote information at the expense of requiring students to apply higher-order thinking activities. As knowledge in the world continues to explode at exponential levels, this is no longer practical. Instead, students must be able to manage information and apply the appropriate level of sophistication needed to think deeply and process complex problems.

To solve problems in real-world situations, students must be able to apply knowledge and use thinking strategies to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information. In the real world, answers are seldom black and white, and there are often many solutions to a problem. Preparing students with only surface-level knowledge does not lead to “deep thinking,” to intellectual independence, or to building a student's capacity to problem solve and analyze complex situations in the real world. Requiring students to think and process information at much deeper levels prepares them for the real role they will face in life and in tomorrow's workplace. We might be surprised at just how capable our students are if we push them to reach beyond where they are currently performing. As Mem Fox (1993) so aptly puts it in her book, *Radical Reflections*, “If we allow children to show us what they can do rather than accepting what they usually do, we would be in for some grand surprises. As adults, our feeble expectations of children's capabilities puts brakes on their potential” (p. 65).

Preparing students to think deeply, thoroughly, and critically is a task we cannot begin too early. If we create classrooms where students are willing to take risks, share their ideas and thoughts, delve deeply into issues and ideas, and take responsibility for their own learning, our students will become deep thinkers who will not only perform well today but also be more prepared for the increasingly complex world they will face tomorrow.

### Second-Generation Assessments Require Deeper Thinking

Many of the first state assessment instruments contained primarily multiple-choice types of items. As testing instruments became more sophisticated, short-answer and open-ended, constructed-response items where students had to apply their knowledge on a more complex performance-oriented task began to appear more frequently. As states continue to make revisions, more and more constructed-response questions are being incorporated into assessment instruments.

If we examine the content standards now in place in most states, we will see that they require students to use higher-order thinking and reasoning skills rather than just memorize content information. This emphasis on higher-order thinking reflects the philosophy that while content

knowledge and basic skills are important, it is the ability to reason and apply those skills that truly demonstrates mastery of content.

Despite the fact that the tests have changed to include a greater emphasis on higher-order thinking with performance-based measures, some teachers have not changed the way they approach their daily instruction. For this reason, it is in the constructed-response sections where students are having difficulty applying their knowledge. This results in lower overall scores on these parts of the state test. With changes to how we approach daily instruction, we can help our students develop the skills they need not only to do well on these assessment items but also to internalize what we are trying to teach them.

### **What Is Constructed Response?**

Let's start with a definition of what constructed-response items are so we have a common understanding of what the term means. *Constructed-response questions* are assessment items that ask students to apply knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities to real-world, standards-driven performance tasks. Sometimes called "open-response" items, constructed-response questions are so named because there is often more than one way to correctly answer the question, and they require students to "construct" or develop their own answers without the benefit of any suggestions or choices.

Constructed-response items can be very simple, requiring students to answer with only a sentence or two, or quite complex, requiring students to read a prompt or a specified text article, reflect on the key points, and then develop a meaningful essay or analysis of the information. Whether simple or complex, all constructed-response questions measure students' ability to apply, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the knowledge that they have acquired in a more abstract way.

### **Classroom Instruction That Builds Thinking**

Good teachers have always known that effective learning requires practice and very specific performance feedback to build success. Consider when a child learns to ride a two-wheeled bicycle for the first time. We provide support such as training wheels or more physical support such as holding onto the bike and running alongside the child until the child can balance the bicycle unaided. All during the process, we provide feedback or suggestions on how to combine the actions of balancing and pedaling at the same time. In addition to teaching the child how to move forward, we also describe how to stop, turn, and use appropriate safety procedures. At first the task is difficult, but with persistence, the child makes progress. Although he or she may still fall or be wobbly now and then, it is the continued practice and our coaching that eventually help the child learn to synthesize all of the information into accomplishing the task.

Constructed-response test questions entail a similar sequential process. For example, consider the following test item that might appear on a high school reading assessment: "Identify the mood in the passage from Joseph Conrad's novel *The Heart of Darkness*. Use at least four specific examples and details from the text to support your answer." This question would require students to read the given passage with sufficient comprehension not only to understand the concept of "mood" but also to analyze the text, choose relevant examples, and then support a logical argument about the text in written form. This is a complex task that many high school students find not only challenging but perhaps even overwhelming. It is therefore not surprising that students perform less well on open-ended, constructed-response items on state and national assessments than they do on multiple-choice items. At least with a multiple-choice item, depending on the number of responses presented for each question, students have a one-in-four or perhaps a one-in-five chance of answering correctly, even when they have no idea what the right answer may be. Constructed-response questions, in contrast, require students to supply their own answer to the question, commonly referred to as a "prompt."

Just as practice and feedback help a child learn to ride a bicycle, if we want students to score well on constructed-response items on their annual assessments, we must provide them with many opportunities to use higher-level thinking where we can coach and shape their abilities. Students need to be trained in how to analyze the requirements of a task, explain their thinking, and support their analysis or opinions with concrete evidence. We must ask them regularly to make connections, synthesize responses, analyze sets of data, and use all of their background knowledge to interpret information. When this activity has become the norm rather than the exception, then we will have truly accomplished our goal of preparing our students for the demands facing them.

### **Creating a Classroom Conducive to Higher Levels of Thinking**

Classrooms that maximize student learning potential are environments where independent thinking is valued and students are encouraged to see themselves as capable problem solvers. The teacher's role becomes the “guide by the side” rather than the “sage on the stage.” The atmosphere is supportive and nonthreatening so that risk taking and divergent thinking are encouraged and promoted. Questions are not answered primarily by the teacher but, rather, by the students themselves. Students are encouraged to experiment and grapple with ideas to make their own connections and find their own solutions. They are asked to explain their conclusions, outline their thought processes, and justify their decision making. In these classrooms, it is important to talk more about the process used to arrive at a specific response rather than about whether the answer was correct. In short, it is what the student has learned rather than what the teacher has taught that becomes the focus of daily operations.

To clarify this idea by again comparing it to performing a simple sport, we can conceptually teach a child to hold a baseball bat and to swing it at an oncoming ball. We can help the child understand the rules of baseball and even how to run from base to base or the points to consider for stealing a base, but we cannot teach that player how to apply all of these skills to maximize the chance of success. It is the player who must learn to evaluate, to strategize, and to combine all of these skills to play the game successfully. The degree to which each individual can successfully combine all of this training and information into successfully playing the game determines whether that person becomes an occasional player at the local park or a highly paid, major league professional. Likewise, how well students integrate what they have learned and practiced in the classroom helps determine their performance on assessments.

In classrooms that promote deep thinking, students receive ample time to explore and reflect on multiple perspectives. In these classrooms, learning is a community activity. Students frequently work together to develop, clarify, or blend their thoughts and ideas on the topics they are learning. They ask not only their teacher but one another for information, explanations, and clarifications on a regular basis. Activities draw from real-life examples that provide immediate and meaningful relevance to students' lives and experiences. Students understand that there may be more than one right answer and that process is just as important as an answer. They use a variety of communication tools such as drawings, diagrams, tables, and other forms of graphic organizers or visual displays to process and present their thoughts and ideas. Comparing, interpreting, and analyzing information become common tasks that permeate learning in the classroom. As a classroom teacher, I always thought that the best learning occurred when I remembered that learning should, above all, be enjoyable and stimulating. The chapters that follow will help you enhance what has been successful for you as well as take your instructional practices to the next level. With these changes, your classroom can foster the kind of successful, complex, independent thinkers capable of facing the challenges of the 21st century.

### Grade 11 Sample ELA SBA Stems for Constructed Response

As you are shifting towards more text dependent, constructed responses, here are some stems that align with SBA:

**Claim 1: Reading- Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.**

**Target 2: Central Ideas** – Summarize central ideas/key events using key relevant details.

- Summarize the central idea of the text. Use key details from the text to support your summary.
- What is the theme/the central idea of the text? Use details from the text to support your answer.
- What is the author's/the poet's/the speaker's/[character's] message about [text detail that relates to the theme or central idea]? Use details from the text to support your answer.
- Read this paragraph/section from paragraph [#] and the directions that follow. [Text excerpt] What is the author's central idea in this paragraph/section? Use details from the paragraph/section to support your answer.
- Determine the central idea. Analyze the development of the central idea by using key events from the text.

**Target 4: Reasoning & Evidence (Literary)** - Make an inference or provide a conclusion and use supporting evidence to justify/explain inferences (character development/actions/traits; first- or third-person point of view).

- What inference can be made/conclusion drawn about [character development/actions/traits; first- or third-person point of view; theme; author's message]? Support your answer using details from the text.
- What does [content in text] [indicate/suggest/tell] the reader about [character name/speaker/plot point/author's point of view/character's point of view /author's message]? Support your answer using details from the text.
- What inference(s) can be made/conclusion(s) drawn about [character(s) name(s)/plot point/author's point of view]? Support your answer with details from the text.
- What inference can be made about the narrator's feelings toward [character(s) name(s)/plot point/literary element]? Support your answer with details from the text.
- What inference can be made about [character name]'s relationship with [character name]? Support your answer with details from the text.

**Target 9: Central Ideas** – Summarize central ideas, topics/subtopics, key events, or

procedures using supporting ideas and relevant details.

- Summarize the central idea of the text/in [section of the text]. Use key evidence from the text to support your summary. (Note: A section of the text will be referenced only if it is easily identifiable; students will not be required to count several paragraphs into the text.)
- Summarize the author's message/claim/point about [text detail]. Use evidence from the text to support your summary/Give the key evidence he/she provides to support his/her claim/point.
- Read this paragraph and the directions that follow. [Text excerpt] What is the author's central idea in this paragraph/section? Use details from the paragraph/section to support your answer
- In the text/[section of the text], the author states [text excerpt]. Explain how this statement supports the central idea of the text. Use evidence from the text in your response. (Note: A section of the text will be referenced only if it is easily identifiable; students will not be required to count several paragraphs into the text.)

**Target 11: Reasoning & Evidence (Informational)** – Make an inference or provide a conclusion and use supporting evidence to justify/explain inferences (author's line of reasoning, point of view/purpose, relevance of evidence or elaboration to support claims, concepts, ideas).

- What conclusion can be drawn about the [author's line of reasoning/point of view/purpose/relevance of evidence/elaboration to support claims, concepts, and ideas]? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
- What inference can be made about the [author's line of reasoning/point of view/purpose/relevance of evidence/elaboration to support claims, concepts, and ideas]? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
- What inference can be made about the author's opinion about [idea/concept in the text]? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
- What was most likely the author's intention when mentioning [description of target detail] at the [beginning/end] of paragraph [paragraph #]? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

### Grades 6-8 Sample ELA SBA Stems for Constructed Response

As you are shifting towards more text dependent, constructed responses, here are some stems that align with SBA:

**Claim 1: Reading- Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.**

**Target 2: Central Ideas** – Summarize central ideas/key events using key relevant details.

- Summarize the central idea of the text. Use key details from the text to support your summary.
- What is the theme/the central idea of the text? Use details from the text to support your answer.
- What is the author's/the poet's/the speaker's/[character's] message about [text detail that relates to the theme or central idea]? Use detail from the text to support your answer.
- Read this paragraph/section from paragraph [#] and the directions that follow.  
[Text excerpt]  
What is the author's central idea in this paragraph/section? Use details from the paragraph/section to support your answer. Determine the central idea. Summarize the development of the central idea by using key events from the text.
- Summarize what happens after/during [text event]. Use key events from the text to support your summary.

**Target 4: Reasoning & Evidence (Literary)** - Make an inference or provide a conclusion and use supporting evidence to justify/explain inferences (character development/actions/traits; first- or third-person point of view).

- What conclusion(s) can be drawn about [character(s) name(s)/plot point/author's point of view/theme/topic]? Support your answer with details from the text.
- What inference(s) can be made about [character(s) name(s)/plot point/author's point of view/theme/topic]? Support your answer with details from the text.
- What inference can be made about the narrator's feelings toward [character(s) name(s)/plot point/literary element]? Support your answer with details from the text.
- What inference can be made about [character name]'s relationship with [character name]? Support your answer with details from the text.

**Target 9: Central Ideas** – Summarize central ideas, topics/subtopics, key events, or procedures using supporting ideas and relevant details.

- Summarize the central idea of the text/in [section of the text]. Use key evidence from the text to support your summary. (Note: A section of the text will be referenced only if it is easily identifiable; students will not be required to count several paragraphs into the text.)
- Summarize the author's message/point about [text detail]. Use evidence from the text to support your summary/Give the key evidence he/she provides to support his/her point.
- Read this paragraph and the directions that follow.  
[Text excerpt]  
What is the author's central idea in this paragraph/section? Use details from the paragraph/section to support your answer.
- In the text/[section of the text], the author states [text excerpt]. Explain how this statement supports the central idea of the text. Use evidence from the text in your response. (Note: A section of the text will be referenced only if it is easily identifiable; students will not be required to count several paragraphs into the text.)

**Target 11: Reasoning & Evidence (Informational)** – Make an inference or provide a conclusion and use supporting evidence to justify/explain inferences (author's line of reasoning, point of view/purpose, relevance of evidence or elaboration to support claims, concepts, ideas).

- What conclusion can be drawn about the [author's line of reasoning/point of view/purpose/relevance of evidence/elaboration to support claims, concepts, and ideas]? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
- What inference can be made about the [author's line of reasoning/point of view/purpose/relevance of evidence/elaboration to support claims, concepts, and ideas]? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
- What inference can be made about the author's opinion about [idea/concept in the text]? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
- What most likely did the author intend by mentioning [description of target detail] at the [beginning/end] of paragraph [paragraph #]?

## Guide to Creating Text-Dependent Questions

### Text-Dependent Questions: What Are They?

The Common Core State Standards for reading strongly focus on students gathering evidence, knowledge, and insight from what they read. Indeed, nearly all of the Reading Standards in each grade *require* text-dependent analysis; accordingly, aligned curriculum materials should have a similar percentage of text-dependent questions.

As the name suggests, a text-dependent question specifically asks a question that can only be answered by referring explicitly back to the text being read. It does not rely on any particular background information extraneous to the text nor depend on students having other experiences or knowledge; instead it privileges the text itself and what students can extract from what is before them.

For example, in a close analytic reading of Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” the following would not be text-dependent questions:

- *Why did the North fight the Civil War?*
- *Have you ever been to a funeral or grave site?*
- *Lincoln says that the nation is dedicated to the proposition that “all men are created equal.” Why is equality an important value to promote?*

The overarching problem with these questions is that they require no familiarity at all with Lincoln’s speech in order to answer them. Responding to these sorts of questions instead requires students to go outside the text. Such questions can be tempting to ask because they are likely to get students talking, but they take students away from considering the actual point Lincoln is making. They seek to elicit a personal or general response that relies on individual experience and opinion, and answering them will not move students closer to understanding the text of the “Gettysburg Address.”

Good text-specific questions will often linger over specific phrases and sentences to ensure careful comprehension of the text—they help students see something worthwhile that they would not have seen on a more cursory reading. Typical text-dependent questions ask students to perform one or more of the following tasks:

- Analyze paragraphs on a sentence-by-sentence basis and sentences on a word-by-word basis to determine the role played by individual paragraphs, sentences, phrases, or words
- Investigate how meaning can be altered by changing key words and why an author may have chosen one word over another
- Probe each argument in persuasive text, each idea in informational text, each key detail in literary text, and observe how these build to a whole
- Examine how shifts in the direction of an argument or explanation are achieved and the impact of those shifts
- Question why authors choose to begin and end when they do
- Note and assess patterns of writing and what they achieve
- Consider what the text leaves uncertain or unstated



## Creating Text-Dependent Questions for Close Analytic Reading of Texts

An effective set of text-dependent questions delves systematically into a text to guide students toward extracting the key meanings or ideas found there. Text-dependent questions typically begin by exploring specific words, details, and arguments, and then move on to examine the impact of those specifics on the text as a whole. Along the way, they target academic vocabulary and specific sentence structures as critical focus points for gaining comprehension.

While there is no set process for generating a complete and coherent body of text-dependent questions for a text, the following process is a good guide that can serve to generate a core series of questions for close reading of any given text.

### **Step One: Identify the Core Understandings and Key Ideas of the Text**

As in any good reverse engineering or “backwards design” process, teachers should start by reading and annotating the text, identifying the key insights they want students to understand from the text. Keeping one eye on the major points being made is crucial for fashioning an overarching set of successful questions and critical for creating an appropriate culminating assignment.

### **Step Two: Start Small to Build Confidence**

The opening questions should be ones that help orient students to the text. They should also be specific enough so that students gain confidence to tackle more difficult questions later on.

### **Step Three: Target Vocabulary and Text Structure**

Locate key text structures and the most powerful words in the text that are connected to the key ideas and understandings, and craft questions that draw students’ attention to these specifics so they can become aware of these connections. Vocabulary selected for focus should be academic words (“Tier Two”) that are abstract and likely to be encountered in future reading and studies.

### **Step Four: Tackle Tough Sections Head-on**

Find the sections of the text that will present the greatest difficulty and craft questions that support students in mastering these sections (these could be sections with difficult syntax, particularly dense information, and tricky transitions or places that offer a variety of possible inferences).

### **Step Five: Create Coherent Sequences of Text-dependent Questions**

Text-dependent questions should follow a coherent sequence to ensure that students stay focused on the text, so that they come to a gradual understanding of its meaning.

### **Step Six: Identify the Standards That Are Being Addressed**



Take stock of what standards are being addressed in the series of questions and decide if any other standards are suited to being a focus for this text (forming additional questions that exercise those standards).

### **Step Seven: Create the Culminating Assessment**

Develop a culminating activity around the key ideas or understandings identified earlier that (a) reflects mastery of one or more of the standards (b) involves writing, and (c) is structured to be completed by students independently.

From [www.achievethecore.com](http://www.achievethecore.com)

Citing Evidence Examples

| From Presentations (listening)  | From Texts  |
|---|---|
| <p>According to the presentation...</p> <p>It was said that...</p> <p>I made a connection when the presenter/speaker said _____, and it made me think ...</p> <p>One thing I learned from the presentation was _____ because the presenter/speaker said...</p> <p>I heard the speaker say _____, therefore...</p>  | <p>According to the text...</p>  <p>In the text it said...</p> <p>I made a connection to the text when it said _____, and it made me think ...</p> <p>One thing I learned from the story was _____ because the text said...</p> <p>In my passage, I read _____, as a result...</p> |

6 Steps for drafting a Constructed Response:



1. Re-read the passage at least once, then re-read the question carefully to decide all the parts it is asking for. Mark the key words in the question. The key words are the verb or verbs, any character names, and key literary terms.
2. Rewrite the question in your own words to make sure that you know exactly what is being asked. And then, turn that question into a topic sentence for your answer.
3. Go back to the passage and collect the needed information. Make sure you get the relevant details/evidence from the text. (if the question asks for 3 details, make sure you find 3 details).
4. Organize the details into a logical order. Use a graphic organizer if that helps.
5. Draft your answer neatly, citing the details/evidence from the text.
6. Re-read and revise/edit your answer to make sure you have answered all parts of the question.

-from WritingFix.com

11<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA Constructed Response Example

**The Stimuli:**

The only good thing about the day being so hot was the sight the solar stills presented. Every cone was covered on the inside with drops and rivulets of condensation. The day ended. I calculated that the next morning would make it a week since the Tsimtsum had sunk. The Robertson family survived thirty-eight days at sea. Captain Bligh of the celebrated mutinous *Bounty* and his fellow castaways survived forty-seven days. Steven Callahan survived seventy-six. Owen Chase, whose account of the sinking of the whaling ship, *Essex*, by a whale inspired Herman Melville, survived eighty-three days at sea with two mates, interrupted by a one-week stay on an inhospitable island. The Bailey family survived 118 days. I have heard of a Korean merchant sailor named Poon, I believe, who survived the Pacific for 173 days in the 1950s. I survived 227 days. That's how long my trial lasted, over seven months.

From *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel. ©2001, Harcourt Books. Used with permission by the author.

**Item Prompt:**

What do the stories of survival in the last paragraph suggest to the reader about the narrator? Support your answer using details from the text.

**Sample 2-point Rubric for CR item:**

**2** A response:

- Gives sufficient evidence of the ability to make a clear inference/conclusion
- Includes specific examples/details that make clear reference to the text
- Adequately explains inference/conclusion with clearly relevant information based on the text

**1** A response:

- Gives limited evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion
- Includes vague/limited examples/details that make reference to the text
- Explains inference/conclusion with vague/limited information based on the text

**0** A response:

- Gives no evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion

OR

- Gives an inference/conclusion but includes no examples or no examples/details that make reference to the text

OR

- Gives an inference/conclusion but includes no explanation or no relevant information from the text

**Sample Constructed Responses:**

2 Point Exemplar:

The use of the stories of survival in the last paragraph suggests that the narrator is encouraged that he will survive this overwhelming experience of being stranded at sea. He compares his own situation to those of other known historical figures, such as the Robertson family, Captain Bligh, and Owen Chase, who were all lost at sea, but survived. The narrator specifies how long these various people survived with some impressive lengths of time at sea, such as a Korean merchant sailor who survived the Pacific for 173 days in the 1950s. Perhaps these stories, in addition to the working solar stills, bring the narrator comfort that he, too, can survive despite his circumstances.

1 Point Exemplar:

The stories suggest that the narrator is knowledgeable about shipwreck events. He refers to Captain Bligh's mutinous Bounty and the Essex, a whaling ship.

0 Point Exemplar:

The narrator is very smart.

View additional samples by grade level at <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/resources/>

7<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA Constructed Response Example

**The Stimuli:**

**Ups and Downs**

Scientists have been studying this isolated food chain for 50 years to understand how changes in one link can cause changes in another. As more moose are born on the island, they eat more balsam fir. The more they consume, the more they damage the trees. Stunted trees mean less food. Eventually, there's not enough food to support all the moose. Many starve, and their numbers decrease. With fewer moose dining on them, fir trees gradually recover.

A similar boom-and-bust cycle occurs between predator and prey. Ten times the size of a wolf, a moose has long, strong legs and a dangerous kick. So wolves prey mainly on old and weak animals. Good hunting means food for the whole pack. Wolves then raise lots of pups, and their numbers increase. More wolves mean more mouths to feed and more moose get eaten. However, when the moose population decreases, wolves starve.

With fewer predators stalking the moose, more survive to old age. The moose population increases, and the cycle begins again.

"Life in the Food Chain" by Ellen R. Braaf from *Ask Magazine's* September 2008 issue, copyright © 2008 by Carus Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission.

**Item Prompt:**

Summarize the central idea in the section "Ups and Downs." Use key evidence from the text to support your summary.

**Sample 2-point Rubric for CR item:**

**2** A response:

- Gives sufficient evidence of the ability to determine/summarize the author's message/claim/point/central idea, or to explain the support for a central idea
- Includes specific examples/details that make clear reference to the text
- Adequately explains the author's message/claim/point/central idea, or explanation with clearly relevant information based on the text

**1** A response:

- Gives limited evidence of the ability to determine/summarize the author's message/claim/point/central idea, or to explain the support for a central idea
- Includes vague/limited examples/details that make reference to the text
- Explains the author's message/claim/point/central idea or explanation with vague/limited information based on the text

**0** A response:

- Gives no evidence of the ability to determine/summarize the author's message/claim/point/central idea, or to explain the support for a central idea

OR

- Gives the author's message/claim/point/central idea, or explanation, but includes no examples or no examples/details that make reference to the text

OR

- Gives the author's message/claim/point/central idea, or explanation, but includes no explanation or no relevant information from the text

**Sample Constructed Responses:**

2 Point Exemplar:

The section "Ups and Downs" explains how the food chain operates on the island. When the moose increase, they eat more pines. When the pines die, the moose have nothing to eat, so they die. When there are plenty of moose, the wolves eat well. When the wolves eat well, they multiply. They require more moose to eat. The connections between the species control the population on the island as years go by.

1 Point Exemplar:

It focuses on how the life on the island is connected. Wolves and moose and pines all affect each other's populations.

0 Point Exemplar:

Life is connected in a chain on the island.

View additional samples by grade level at <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/resources/>