

North Carolina End-of-Grade Test of Reading Comprehension—Grade 8

What are the purposes of the NC Testing Program?

The North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests are required by General Statute 115C-174.10 as a component of the North Carolina Annual Testing Program. As stated, the purposes of North Carolina state-mandated tests are “(i) to assure that all high school graduates possess those minimum skills and that knowledge thought necessary to function as a member of society; (ii) to provide a means of identifying strengths and weaknesses in the education process in order to improve instructional delivery; and (iii) to establish additional means for making the education system at the State, local, and school levels accountable to the public for results.” This test is one component of the end-of-grade tests, which include reading comprehension and mathematics tests in grades three through eight. Students in grade three began taking a reading comprehension and mathematics pretest in the fall of 1996.

For school, school system, and state accountability, the scores from the end-of-grade tests at the prior grade are used to estimate a student’s level of knowledge and skills at the beginning of the new grade to determine the amount of growth during the school year (calculated from the difference between the two sets of test scores).

What is measured by the test?

The end-of-grade reading test for grade eight assesses the reading components of the grade eight North Carolina *Standard Course of Study*. The test consists of nine reading selections with three to nine associated questions for each selection. Each student is asked to read six literary selections (two fiction, one nonfiction, one drama, two poems) and three informational selections (two content and one consumer). The variety of selections on each form allows for the assessment of reading for various purposes: for literary experience, to gain information, and to perform a task.

The end-of-grade tests are organized by category, with each item falling into one of four categories: cognition, interpretation, critical stance, or connections. A description of each category and the average percentage of items per form for each category are shown in the table below. Each item is also aligned to a curriculum objective from the North Carolina English/Language Arts *Standard Course of Study*.

Descriptive Information for the North Carolina End-of-Grade Test of Reading Comprehension—Grade 8

Category	Description of Category	Average Percentage
Cognition	Refers to the initial strategies a reader uses to understand the selection. It is about purpose and organization of the selection. It considers the text as a whole or in a broad perspective. Cognition includes strategies such as using context clues to determine meaning or summarizing to include main points.	29%
Interpretation	Requires the student to develop a more complete understanding. It may ask students to clarify, to explain the significance of, to extend, and/or to adapt ideas/concepts.	40%
Critical Stance	Refers to tasks that ask the student to stand apart from the selection and consider it objectively. It involves processes such as comparing/contrasting and understanding the impact of literary elements.	25%
Connections	Refers to connecting knowledge from the selection with other information and experiences. It involves the student being able to relate the selection to events beyond/outside the selection. In addition, the student will make associations outside the selection and between selections.	6%

How is the test administered?

The North Carolina End-of-Grade Test of Reading Comprehension at grade eight consists of 56 multiple-choice questions administered during a 115-minute block within the last three weeks of school. Three equivalent forms are administered in each classroom to provide information for curriculum evaluation and planning. The tests are scanned and scored by the local education agency with software provided by the NCDPI. Reports of student performance are produced locally. In addition, test scores are aggregated at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to fulfill the state and federal reporting requirements for the accountability programs.

How was the test developed?

The reading selections were chosen by North Carolina educators to reflect the variety of reading done by students at this level in and out of school and to ensure accessibility to a majority of students. Those chosen are selections that would generally be read by students, would be interesting to the students, and have appropriate content for a reading comprehension test at this grade level. The questions for each selection were written and reviewed by trained North Carolina teachers and educators during the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years and were field tested in the spring of 2002. Each field test question was administered to approximately 1,300 students from randomly selected schools across the state. The grade eight reading test was implemented statewide for the first time in the spring of 2003.

What kinds of scores do students receive on the test?

The scores on the end-of-grade reading test are reported on a developmental scale, which allows the measurement of growth in achievement across the grade levels. On the grade eight reading test, the scale scores range from 231-290. The use of scale scores provides for easier and more consistent interpretations of the results from test to test. Achievement levels are also generated to provide an interpretation of student performance relative to a predetermined standard. Student scores are converted to one of the four achievement level categories shown below. In addition, student scores are reported as percentile ranks, which are generated from a statewide distribution of students who took the test during the first year the test was administered or the norming year.

Achievement Levels for the North Carolina End-of-Grade Test of Reading Comprehension—Grade 8

Level	Description	Scale Score Range
1	Students performing at this level do not have sufficient mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area to be successful at the next grade level.	231-243
2	Students performing at this level demonstrate inconsistent mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area and are minimally prepared to be successful at the next grade level.	244-253
3	Students performing at this level consistently demonstrate mastery of grade level subject matter and skills and are well prepared for the next grade level.	254-265
4	Students performing at this level consistently perform in a superior manner clearly beyond that required to be proficient at grade level work	266-290

Sample Items

The following pages contain a sample selection and sample items that represent the type of material that appears on the North Carolina End-of-Grade Test of Reading Comprehension – Grade 8. The category and objective correspond to the category and curriculum objective that the item is designed to measure. The thinking skill corresponds to the level of thinking the item requires as defined by a thinking skills framework adapted from Dimension of Thinking by Robert J. Marzano and others. Additional samples can be found on the NCDPI web site at www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/testing/eog.

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Weeds are everywhere, it seems, but just what makes people call a plant a weed? This selection explains. Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.

The Ways Of Weeds

by Anne Ophelia Dowden

In the eyes of many people, our city wild flowers are just weeds. This makes us wonder. What is a weed? It is not necessarily an unattractive plant. A dandelion is as beautiful as a chrysanthemum and would be as highly valued if it did not grow by the millions in green lawns where it is not wanted. Actually, this gives us the answer to our question: a weed is any plant that grows where man doesn't want it to. Some of the most beautiful wild flowers of country roadsides are considered weeds if they come up in a farmer's wheatfield or in someone's rose garden. When they appear in dreary spots in the middle of a city, they again become precious and worthy of admiration.

② There are, however, certain qualities that make plants "weedy." They are the qualities that we have found in our city plants—vigor, ability to travel, ability to reproduce themselves under all kinds of conditions. These traits were acquired by the ancestors of our weeds long ago and often far away. The majority of our weeds came to America from foreign lands. Most came from Europe, carried here intentionally or accidentally by the earliest settlers and by later generations of traders. The ones that landed on the East Coast came to a country that was covered with dense forests and a balance of wild life that had existed for millions of years. When trees were cut down and large areas cleared for farming, the sun-loving, open-field plants from Europe found an ideal place in which to spread. They had little competition from native American plants of the region, which were more at home in the

moist shade of the woods.

③ Many plants that began to run wild had been cherished flowers or vegetables in Old World gardens. The settlers brought with them seeds or rooted pieces of the plants they were accustomed to grow for ornament and food and medicine. Many of these now grow wild in the United States, and some—like mustard, mugwort, and toadflax—are vigorous enough to make their way into city lots. Clovers and grasses were brought for grazing cows and horses. And dozens of plants which were despised as weeds even in their homeland traveled here unseen in bales of hay, in packing materials, in the earth that was often used as ballast for ships.

The very first immigrant plants were brought to the West Coast by the Spaniards, and many of them are now common weeds in California. A few have reached the United States in recent years from Asia and the Southern Hemisphere, but the greatest number of new plants landed long ago on the East Coast. These have been making their way westward ever since, settling down wherever soil and temperature and rainfall make life possible for them. They become weeds wherever the native population of plants is not strong enough to crowd them out. Man has made this migration possible. He has moved westward, cutting down forests, ploughing fields, building roads, changing natural drainage—thus opening up new homes for new plants. He has also furnished transportation for them, often without knowing it.

Some of our weeds, of course, are native Americans—plants originally limited to small open areas and now given new opportunities by the changed countryside. These include some of the handsomest ones found in city

lots: sunflower, goldenrod, aster, milkweed. And there has also been a certain amount of west-to-east migration, as some plants of the western plains, like ragweed, have spread rapidly in the East.

“The Ways of Weeds” from *Wild Green Things in the City* by Anne Ophelia Todd Dowden. Copyright © 1972. Reprinted by permission of the author.

1. What information is emphasized in the selection’s first two paragraphs?
 - A how weeds came to this country
 - B what makes a plant a weed
 - C what causes weeds to flourish
 - D why people do not like weeds

2. Based on the selection, where did **most** of the American plants now considered weeds originate?
 - A the Far East
 - B Europe
 - C the Southern Hemisphere
 - D Central Asia

3. According to the information in paragraph 2, which factor contributed **most** to the spreading of weeds across America?
 - A the fragility of American plants
 - B the lack of animals to eat them
 - C the clearing of land for farms
 - D the foreign origin of most weeds

4. What is the **main** idea of paragraph 3?
 - A Many plants brought by settlers were not originally considered weeds.
 - B Europeans have different ideas about what is or is not a weed.
 - C Many weeds are commonly used in food and in medicine.
 - D People’s ideas about the usefulness of some plants changed over the years.

5. According to the selection, what is often the *main* difference between a weed and a plant that is admired?
- A its ability to spread
 - B where it came from
 - C its winter hardiness
 - D where it grows
6. Based on the selection, what is the *best* way to keep weeds from an area?
- A have healthy native plants
 - B use a lot of chemicals
 - C spend time in the garden
 - D water plants more frequently
7. Based on the information in the selection, which of the following relationships is *most similar* to the relationship below?

toadflax : vigorous

- A weeds : England
- B dandelion : unwanted
- C clover : ballast for ships
- D mugwort : fragile

8. Based on the selection, which of the following statements about weeds is true?
- A Most like to grow in the shade.
 - B Most can be used in medicines.
 - C Many came to this country by accident.
 - D Many have become less adaptable to different conditions.
9. What is the *main* difference between the weeds that came from Europe and the native American plants?
- A European plants loved shade and moisture.
 - B American plants loved sun and open fields.
 - C European plants loved moisture and open fields.
 - D American plants loved shade and moisture.

End of Set

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Answers to Grade 8 Reading Comprehension Sample Items

Passage Title	Question Number	Correct Answer	Category	Thinking Skill	Objective Number
The Way of Weeds	1	B	Cognition	Analyzing	2.01
The Way of Weeds	2	B	Cognition	Knowledge	2.01
The Way of Weeds	3	C	Cognition	Integrating	2.01
The Way of Weeds	4	A	Cognition	Analyzing	2.01
The Way of Weeds	5	D	Critical Stance	Organizing	5.01
The Way of Weeds	6	A	Interpretation	Integrating	2.01
The Way of Weeds	7	B	Critical Stance	Analyzing	2.01
The Way of Weeds	8	C	Interpretation	Analyzing	2.01
The Way of Weeds	9	D	Critical Stance	Organizing	2.01