

The Reading Assessment

The NAEP reading assessment measures students' ability to understand, to interpret, and to think critically about different types of texts. Recognizing that readers vary their approach according to the demands of different types of text, the NAEP framework specifies the assessment of reading in three contexts: reading for literary experience, reading to gain information, and reading to perform a task. (Reading to perform a task is not assessed at Grade 8.) The assessment comprises reading materials selected from publications and other resources typically available to students in and out of school.

Across the three contexts for reading, students are asked to demonstrate their understanding by responding to comprehension questions that reflect four different approaches to understanding text. The NAEP framework accounts for these different approaches by specifying four aspects of reading that represent the types of comprehension questions asked of students. Forming a general understanding questions ask students to consider the text as a whole. Developing an interpretation questions ask students to discern connections and relationships within the text. Making reader/text connections questions ask students to connect information from the text with prior knowledge and experience. Examining content and structure questions ask students to critically evaluate the content, organization, and form of the text. All four aspects of reading are assessed at all three grades within the contexts for reading described above.

The NAEP reading assessment contains multiple-choice questions, as well as short and extended constructed-response questions. Students spend approximately 50 to 60 percent of their assessment time providing written answers to constructed-response questions. For more information regarding the reading assessment framework please visit <http://nagb.org>.

NAEP Reading Framework Distribution of Question Pool Across Contexts

	Grade 8
Reading for Literary Experience	40%
Reading to Gain Informative	40%
Reading to Perform a Task	20%

Reading Booklet Directions

In each of the next two sections, you will have 25 minutes to read a story, an article, or a document and answer questions about it. You should think carefully about your answers, and you should use the entire 25 minutes to complete each section.

You will be asked to respond to three different types of questions. Some of the questions will require you to choose the best answer and fill in the oval for that answer in your booklet.

For other questions, you will be asked to write short answers on the blank lines provided in your booklet. Here is an example of a question that requires you to provide a short answer.

Example 1

Give an example from the article that shows Mandy was not a quitter.

One example is that Mandy's mother didn't want her to umpire in public, but Mandy persuaded her mother to let her.

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Also, you may be asked to answer other questions by writing longer, more detailed responses on a full page of blank lines. For example, here is a question that requires you to provide a longer answer.

Example 2

Explain how Mandy's mother and brother helped Mandy to become the first woman umpire.

Mandy's mother helped her by agreeing to let her umpire at a public ball game. Mandy did so well that the team offered her a job as umpire. Mandy's brother helped her by letting her play baseball with him. He also helped Mandy to persuade their mother to let her play in public.

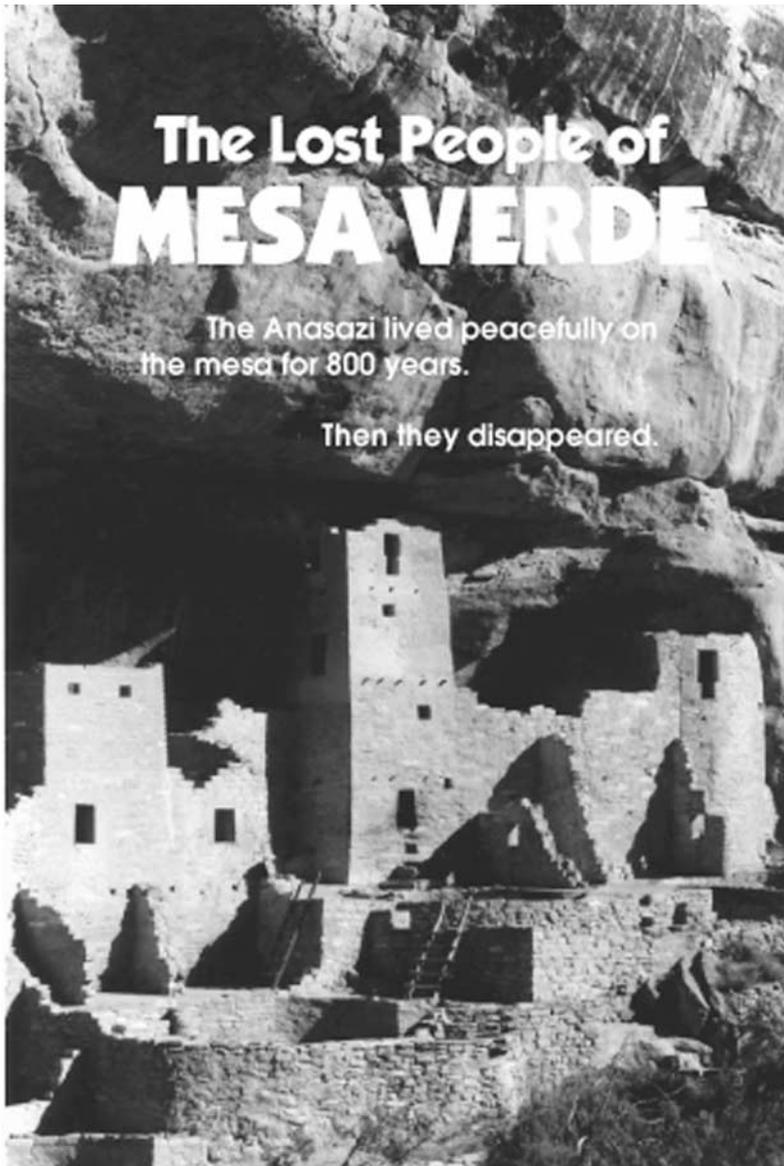
When you are asked to write your response be sure that your handwriting is clear. Think carefully about each question and make your answers as complete as possible, using as many lines as you need.

You may go back to the story, article, or document when answering any of the questions. If you finish before time is called, be sure to read your work again and change anything that you think will make your answers better.



Sample Reading Questions

Grade 8



By Elsa Marston

The Image Bank

In the dry land of southwestern Colorado a beautiful plateau rises. It has so many trees that early Spanish explorers called it Mesa Verde, which means “green table.” For about eight hundred years Native Americans called the Anasazi lived on this mesa. And then they left. Ever since the cliff houses were first discovered a hundred years ago, scientists and historians have wondered why.

Anasazi is a Navajo word meaning “the ancient ones.” When they first settled there, around 500 A. D., the Anasazi lived in alcoves in the walls of the high canyons. Later they moved to the level land on top, where they built houses of stone and mud mortar. As time passed, they constructed more elaborate houses, like apartment buildings, with several families living close together.

The Anasazi made beautiful pottery, turquoise jewelry, fine sashes of woven hair, and baskets woven tightly enough to hold water. They lived by hunting and by growing corn and squash. Their way of life went on peacefully for several hundred years.

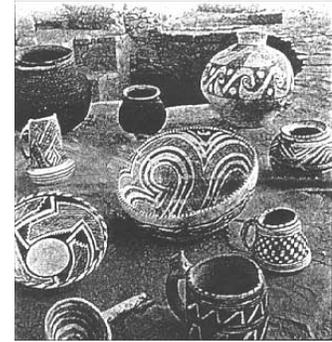
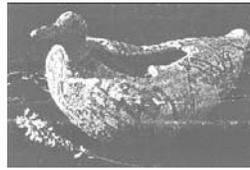
Then around 1200 A.D. something strange happened, for which the reasons are not quite clear. Most of the people moved from the level plateau back down into alcoves in the cliffs. The move must have made their

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lives difficult because they had to climb back up to the plateau to do the farming. But it seems the Anasazi planned to stay in the canyon walls, for they soon filled the alcoves with amazing cliff dwellings. “Cliff Palace,” the most famous of these, had more than two hundred rooms.

For all the hard work that went into building these new homes, the Anasazi did not live in them long. By 1300 A.D. the cliff dwellings were empty. Mesa Verde was deserted and remained a ghost country for almost six hundred years. Were the people driven out of their homes by enemies? No sign of attack or fighting, or even the presence of other tribes, has been found.

Archaeologists who have studied the place now believe there are other reasons. Mesa Verde, the beautiful green table, was no longer a good place to live. For one thing, in the second half of the thirteenth century there were long periods of cold, and very little rain fell—or else it came at the wrong time of year. Scientists know this from examining the wood used in the cliff dwellings. The growth rings in trees show good and bad growing seasons. But the people had survived drought and bad weather before, so there must have been another reason.

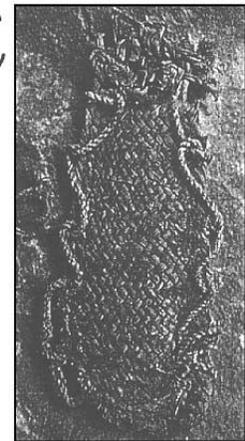
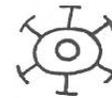


The sturdy baskets, woven sandals, and beautiful pottery left behind by the Anasazi may be 1,000 years old.

As the population grew, more land on the mesa top had to be farmed in order to feed the people. That meant that trees had to be cut to clear the land and also to use for houses and fuel. Without the forests, the rain began to wash away the mesa top.

How do we know about erosion problems that happened about eight hundred years ago? The Anasazi built many low dams across the smaller valleys on the mesa to slow down rain runoff. Even so, good soil washed away, and the people could no longer raise enough food. As the forests dwindled, the animals, already over-hunted, left the mesa for mountainous areas with more trees.

And as the mesa “wore out,” so did the people. It appears that the Anasazi were not healthy. Scientists



Bureau of Land Management -Anasazi Heritage Center Collections

can learn a lot about ancient people’s health by studying the bones and teeth found in burials. The mesa dwellers had arthritis, and their teeth were worn down by the grit in corn meal, a main part of their diet.

As food became scarce, people grew weaker. Not many lived

beyond their twenties. Women died very young, and few babies survived. Living so close together in the cliff houses, where everyone was hungry and worried, the people must have suffered from emotional strain. They probably quarreled often.

In the end the Anasazi must have given up hope that things would get better. Families packed

up and went away. Of course, the “ancient ones” did not simply disappear. They moved south-east to another area and mingled with other peoples. After a while their heritage as the people of the Mesa Verde was forgotten.

In time the trees grew back and the plateau became green once more. But, for the Anasazi it was too late. Although they respected

nature and tried to farm wisely, land that was used too hard could not support them forever.

Yet in their cliff houses and crafts the “ancient ones” left us a superb monument. It is truly one of the most fascinating pictures of America’s past.

WO000822

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WO000823

1. After reading this article, what do you think is the most important information about the Anasazi?

Their ways of life went on peacefully for several hundreds of years.

(Misspelling and grammar reflect actual student response.)

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WO000824

2. The three moves made by the Anasazi are listed below. Explain the possible reasons that were suggested in the article for each move.

500-1200 A.D. - The Anasazi moved from the alcoves to the top of Mesa Verde.

1200 A.D. - The Anasazi moved back down into the alcoves in the cliffs.

1300 A.D. - The Anasazi left Mesa Verde.

WO000826

3. If you had lived with the Anasazi at Mesa Verde, would you have preferred living on the top of the mesa or in the cliff houses built into the alcoves? Explain your preference by using information from the article.

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WO000827

4. If you could talk to the author of this article, what is one question you could ask her about the Anasazi that is not already answered in the article? Explain why you would want to know this information.

WO000828

5. Which idea from the text about the Anasazi do the photographs support?

- They were able to create many useful objects.
- Farming was probably their major source of food.
- Wood seems to have been their primary building material.
- Their life became much easier when they moved into the cliff dwellings.

WO000829

6. Imagine that you are living with the people of Mesa Verde during the 1200's when they left the mesa. Some of your friends and neighbors do not want to leave the area. Based on information in the article, what would you tell these people to convince them to leave?



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WO000831

7. The Anasazi's life before 1200 A.D. was portrayed by the author as being
- Ⓐ dangerous and warlike
 - Ⓑ busy and exciting
 - Ⓒ difficult and dreary
 - Ⓓ productive and peaceful

VB000833

8. The title and photograph on the first page of the article are probably meant to make the disappearance of the Anasazi seem to be
- Ⓐ a personal tragedy
 - Ⓑ a terrible mistake
 - Ⓒ an unsolved mystery
 - Ⓓ an important political event

WO000832

9. Some people say that the Anasazi's success as a civilization may have actually caused their own decline. Using information in the article, explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.



The Writing Assessment

The NAEP writing assessment measures three purposes of writing: narrative, informative, and persuasive. The narrative tasks comprise first-person and third-person fictional stories. The informative tasks comprise description, explanation, and analysis. The persuasive tasks comprise writing to convince, writing to construct an argument, and writing to refute a position.

Across the three purposes for writing, students are asked to respond in a variety of forms. These forms include essays, letters, reports, stories, and articles. Some tasks require students to write for a specified audience; for example, to a teacher, to a committee, or to a friend. Writing tasks in the 2006 assessment incorporate an array of stimulus materials, such as color photographs, comic strips, newspaper articles, and poems.

Each student participating in the assessment will receive one test booklet. At grade 8, students will receive two 25-minute writing tasks. All booklets contain a Planning Page, thus providing students with the opportunity to make notes and organize their ideas. In addition, all participating students are provided with a writing strategies brochure to remind them of various ways to plan and review their writing. For more information regarding the writing assessment framework please visit <http://nagb.org>.

NAEP Writing Framework Distribution of Time to Be Spent on Tasks for Each Writing Purpose

	Grade 8
Narrative	33%
Informative	33%
Persuasive	33%

Writing Booklet Directions

Sections 1 and 2 each contain one writing assignment. You will have 25 minutes to complete each assignment.

In each section, read the page that tells you your writing assignment. Then go on to the planning page where you can make notes and plan what to write. Do not write your paper on the planning page. After the planning page, there are lined pages where you should write your paper.

The following example shows what these pages look like.

The diagram illustrates the layout of three pages in a writing booklet. Page 2 is on the left, containing the text "Your assignment is to write about . . ." and "Page 2" at the bottom. Page 3 is in the middle, titled "PLANNING PAGE" and containing instructions on how to use the page for notes and planning, with a warning not to write the response on this page. Page 4 is on the right, titled "BEGIN WRITING YOUR RESPONSE ON THIS PAGE" and featuring several horizontal lines for writing, with "Page 4" at the bottom.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE

Remember to start writing your papers on the lined pages that begin on page 4 of each section that has a writing assignment.

For each assignment, you will probably need all of the 25 minutes to plan and write. Use as many lined pages as you need to write your paper. You may want to use ideas from the brochure you have been given to help you plan and review your paper.

If you finish before time is called, read your paper again and make any changes that you think will make it better.

Do not go past the  sign at the end of each section until you are told to do so.



Grade 8 Sample Writing Prompts

Writing Prompt 1 (with sample response) Informative: Save a Book

For *Save a Book*, students were asked to explain what book they would save by memorization if they lived in a society where reading was not allowed. Since any book could be chosen, a wide range of responses was acceptable. In this booklet we provide a sample of an “Excellent” response.

A novel written in the 1950’s describes a world where people are not allowed to read books. A small group of people who want to save books memorize them, so that the books won’t be forgotten. For example, an old man who has memorized the novel *The Call of the Wild* helps a young boy memorize it by reciting the story to him. In this way, the book is saved for the future.

If you were told that you could save just one book for future generations, which book would you choose?

Write an essay in which you discuss which book you would choose to save for future generations and what it is about the book that makes it important to save. Be sure to discuss in detail why the book is important to you and why it would be important to future generations

Sample “Excellent” Response

“Excellent” responses provided well-chosen details and exhibited sentence variety and precise word choices across the response. In the sample response below, consistently well-chosen detail is provided to support his or her views about *The Giver*. The response is very well organized, with strong transitions. The student’s choice of words and comfort with varied sentence structure add power to his or her insights about the importance of books and reading. The “Excellent” rating was given to 4 percent of the responses to this task.

Sample "Excellent" Response

If I could only save one book, I would save The Giver by Lois Lowry. The Giver is one of my favorite books. I think it would benefit future generations, because it shows human faults, gives hope, and it models the "real-life" situation.

The Giver is about a very secluded community of people. The government chooses spouses, children, jobs, and determines every course of everyone's lives, except for the Receiver of Memory. He or she alone has all the knowledge of the past. The Receiver can see in color, feels true pain, recognizes animals, he or she holds the world's history in his or her mind. The people of old had chosen to give up color, weather, choosing. Everything was a state of "sameness." Everyone believes everything the government says, everyone follows the rules. This shows how gullible and dependent the human race truly is. To lead an entire community by the nose for countless generations is

Sample "Excellent" Response (Continued)

amazing, and the people themselves had chosen their fate.

Even though this book tells of a very deprived community it does give hope. Jonas, the protagonist, and Gabriel, his adoptive brother, run away from this community. After many days of running from the searching of the community. Jonas hears something. He hears music. Singing and music were not allowed in the community. When Jonas hears the singing he remembers a memory he had received. It was a memory of love. The book closes with Jonas riding towards the new community he sees radiating love.

This book is also very similar to the situation presented. Although there are books, they are not read. Reading for pleasure is simply not done. Books open passages for people. They shed light

Sample “Excellent” Response (Continued)

on different countries, culture, ideas, and much more. Jonas's community is so sheltered. None of the ordinary citizens can remember a time of choosing of differentness. Everything is the same for everyone. If these people had had books, then they would have known what they were missing. They could have felt true emotions and really lived the life they were given.

The Giver is an outstanding book. It has morals, a story, and is very realistic. If I could I would save The Giver.

Writing Prompt 2
Persuasive: Music Labels

Recently, the music industry started to put rating labels on record albums, compact discs, and tapes. These labels describe the content and language of the music. A local committee is considering a rating label law that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to buy recordings with negative ratings.

Write a letter to the committee telling whether or not you think that negative rating labels should be used to restrict teenagers from buying certain music. Give specific reasons to support your opinion.