

Grade 11 Literary Nonfiction Mini-Assessment

“Living Like Weasels” by Annie Dillard

This grade 11 mini-assessment is based on the literary nonfiction text, “Living Like Weasels,” by Annie Dillard. Because literary nonfiction is classified as informational text in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), this assessment will address the Reading Standards for Informational Texts. The text is worthy of students’ time to read and meets the expectations for text complexity at grade 11. Assessments aligned to the CCSS will employ quality, complex texts such as this.

*Note for teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs): This assessment is designed to measure students’ ability to read and write in English. Therefore, educators will not see the level of scaffolding typically used in instructional materials to support ELLs—these would interfere with the ability to understand their mastery of these skills. If ELL students are receiving instruction in grade-level ELA content, they should be given access to unaltered practice assessment items to gauge their progress. Passages and items should not be modified; however, **additional information about accommodations you may consider when administering this assessment to ELLs is available in the teacher section of this resource.***

Questions aligned to the CCSS should be worthy of students’ time to answer and therefore do not focus on minor points of the text. Several standards may be addressed within the same question because complex texts tend to yield rich assessment questions that call for deep analysis. In this mini-assessment there are 6 questions that address the Reading Standards below. We encourage educators to give students the time that they need to read closely and write to sources. The questions align to the following standards:

RI.11-12.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
RI.11-12.2	Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
RI.11-12.3	Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
RI.11-12.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

RI.11-12.5	Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.
RI.11-12.6	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

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The assessment questions in this document align with the CCSS and reflect the instructional shifts implied by the standards. To learn more about these topics, please go to the following link:

www.achievethecore.org

Grade 11 Mini-Assessment – “Living Like Weasels”

Today you will read a passage about an author’s encounter with a wild animal. You will then answer several questions based on the passage. I will be happy to answer questions about the directions, but I will not help you with the answers to any questions. You will notice as you answer the questions that some of the questions have two parts. You need to answer Part A of the question before you answer Part B, but you may go back to Part A if you wish to after answering Part B.

Take as long as you need to read and answer the questions. It is likely that it will take you at least an hour to finish the questions. If you do not finish, we will discuss ways to secure some extra time to complete.

Now read the passage and answer the questions. I encourage you to write notes in the margin as you read the passages.

Passage: “Living Like Weasels”

by Annie Dillard

1 A weasel is wild. Who knows what he thinks? He sleeps in his underground den, his tail draped over his nose. Sometimes he lives in his den for two days without leaving. Outside, he stalks rabbits, mice, muskrats, and birds, killing more bodies than he can eat warm, and often dragging the carcasses home. Obedient to instinct, he bites his prey at the neck, either splitting the jugular vein at the throat or crunching the brain at the base of the skull, and he does not let go. One naturalist refused to kill a weasel who was socketed into his hand deeply as a rattlesnake. The man could in no way pry the tiny weasel off, and he had to walk half a mile to water, the weasel dangling from his palm, and soak him off like a stubborn label.

2 And once, says Ernest Thompson Seton—once, a man shot an eagle out of the sky. He examined the eagle and found the dry skull of a weasel fixed by the jaws to his throat. The *supposition* is that the eagle had pounced on the weasel and the weasel swiveled and bit as instinct taught him, tooth to neck, and nearly won. I would like to have seen that eagle from the air a few weeks or months before he was shot: was the whole weasel still attached to his feathered throat, a fur pendant? Or did the eagle eat what he could reach, gutting the living weasel with his talons before his breast, bending his beak, cleaning the beautiful airborne bones?

3 I have been reading about weasels because I saw one last week. I startled a weasel who startled me, and we exchanged a long glance.

4 Twenty minutes from my house, through the woods by the quarry and across the highway, is Hollins Pond, a remarkable piece of shallowness, where I like to go at sunset and sit on a tree trunk. Hollins Pond is also called Murray's Pond; it covers two acres of bottomland near Tinker Creek with six inches of water and six thousand lily pads. In winter, brown-and-white steers stand in the middle of it, merely dampening their hooves; from the distant shore they look like miracle itself, complete with miracle's nonchalance. Now, in summer, the steers are gone. The water lilies have blossomed and spread to a green horizontal plane that is terra firma to plodding blackbirds, and tremulous ceiling to black leeches, crayfish, and carp.

5 This is, mind you, suburbia. It is a five-minute walk in three directions to rows of houses, though none is visible here. There's a 55 mph highway at one end of the pond, and a nesting pair of wood ducks at the other. Under every bush is a muskrat hole or a beer can. The far end is an alternating series of fields and woods, fields and woods, threaded everywhere with motorcycle tracks—in whose bare clay wild turtles lay eggs.

6 So. I had crossed the highway, stepped over two low barbed-wire fences, and traced the motorcycle path in all gratitude through the wild rose and poison ivy of the pond's shoreline up into high grassy fields. Then I cut down through the woods to the mossy fallen tree where I sit. This tree is excellent. It makes a dry, upholstered bench at the upper, marshy end of the pond, a plush jetty raised from the thorny shore between a shallow blue body of water and a deep blue body of sky.

7 The sun had just set. I was relaxed on the tree trunk, ensconced in the lap of lichen, watching the lily pads at my feet tremble and part dreamily over the thrusting path of a carp. A yellow bird appeared to my right and flew behind me. It caught my eye; I swiveled around—and the next instant, inexplicably, I was looking down at a weasel, who was looking up at me.

8 Weasel! I'd never seen one wild before. He was ten inches long, thin as a curve, a muscled ribbon, brown as fruitwood, soft-furred, alert. His face was fierce, small and pointed as a lizard's; he would have made a good arrowhead. There was just a dot of chin, maybe two brown hairs' worth, and then the pure white fur began that spread down his underside. He had two black eyes I didn't see, any more than you see a window.

9 The weasel was stunned into stillness as he was emerging from beneath an enormous shaggy wild rose bush four feet away. I was stunned into stillness twisted backward on the tree trunk. Our eyes locked, and someone threw away the key.

10 Our look was as if two lovers, or deadly enemies, met unexpectedly on an overgrown path when each had been thinking of something else: a clearing blow to the gut. It was also a bright blow to the brain, or a sudden beating of brains, with all the charge and intimate grate of rubbed balloons. It emptied our lungs. It felled the forest, moved the fields, and drained

the pond; the world dismantled and tumbled into that black hole of eyes. If you and I looked at each other that way, our skulls would split and drop to our shoulders. But we don't. We keep our skulls. So.

11 He disappeared. This was only last week, and already I don't remember what shattered the enchantment. I think I blinked, I think I retrieved my brain from the weasel's brain, and tried to memorize what I was seeing, and the weasel felt the yank of separation, the careening splash-down into real life and the urgent current of instinct. He vanished under the wild rose. I waited motionless, my mind suddenly full of data and my spirit with pleadings, but he didn't return.

12 Please do not tell me about "approach-avoidance conflicts." I tell you I've been in that weasel's brain for sixty seconds, and he was in mine. Brains are private places, muttering through unique and secret tapes—but the weasel and I both plugged into another tape simultaneously, for a sweet and shocking time. Can I help it if it was a blank?

13 What goes on in his brain the rest of the time? What does a weasel think about? He won't say. His journal is tracks in clay, a spray of feathers, mouse blood and bone: uncollected, unconnected, loose leaf, and blown.

14 I would like to learn, or remember, how to live. I come to Hollins Pond not so much to learn how to live as, frankly, to forget about it. That is, I don't think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular--shall I suck warm blood, hold my tail high, walk with my footprints precisely over the prints of my hands?--but I might learn something of mindlessness, something of the purity of living in the physical sense and the dignity of living without bias or motive. The weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons. I would like to live as I should, as the weasel lives as he should. And I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will.

15 I missed my chance. I should have gone for the throat. I should have lunged for that streak of white under the weasel's chin and held on, held on through mud and into the wild rose, held on for a dearer life. We could live under the wild rose wild as weasels, mute and uncomprehending. I could very calmly go wild. I could live two days in the den, curled, leaning on mouse fur, sniffing bird bones, blinking, licking, breathing musk, my hair tangled in the roots of grasses. Down is a good place to go, where the mind is single. Down is out, out of your ever-loving mind and back to your careless senses. I remember muteness as a prolonged and giddy fast, where every moment is a feast of utterance received. Time and events are merely poured, unremarked, and ingested directly, like blood pulsed into my gut through a jugular vein. Could two live that way? Could two live under the wild rose, and explore by the pond, so that the smooth mind of each is as everywhere present to the other, and as received and as unchallenged, as falling snow?

16 We could, you know. We can live any way we want. People take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience—even of silence—by choice. The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse. This is yielding, not fighting. A weasel doesn't "attack" anything; a weasel lives as he's meant to, yielding at every moment to the perfect freedom of single necessity.

17 I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you. Then even death, where you're going no matter how you live, cannot you part. Seize it and let it seize you up aloft even, till your eyes burn out and drop; let your musky flesh fall off in shreds, and let your very bones unhinge and scatter, loosened over fields, over fields and woods, lightly, thoughtless, from any height at all, from as high as eagles.

“Living Like Weasels” from *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, published by HarperCollins (1998, 2008, or 2013 editions), pages 65-71.

Questions

1. What are two most likely reasons that Dillard begins the passage with paragraphs 1 and 2, rather than with her encounter with the weasel?

- A. To suggest that her own contact with the weasel is less significant than those described in the opening paragraphs
- B. To provide the reader with background information on the natural tendencies of weasels
- C. To persuade the reader that weasels often behave in an aggressive manner
- D. To create a dark and ominous mood that foreshadows her meeting with the weasel
- E. To capture the attention of the reader with vivid and perhaps surprising details
- F. To prove that encounters with weasels are common and often result in learning

2. The following question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.

Part A: In paragraph 1 of the text, the author states that the weasel “was socketed into [the naturalist’s] hand.” What is the meaning of the word *socketed* in this paragraph?

- A. held inside
- B. firmly embedded
- C. crashed against
- D. snuggled near

Part B: Which two phrases from paragraph 1 best help the reader determine the meaning of *socketed*?

- A. refused to kill
- B. deeply as a rattlesnake
- C. could in no way pry
- D. tiny weasel
- E. had to walk half a mile
- F. stubborn label

3. The following question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.

Part A: Which word best describes the tone of paragraph 7, which tells about the author's first few minutes at Hollins Pond?

- A. discouraged
- B. questioning
- C. peaceful
- D. enthusiastic

Part B: Which two words in paragraph 7 provide the best evidence for the answer in Part A?

- A. relaxed
- B. ensconced
- C. tremble
- D. dreamily
- E. thrusting
- F. inexplicably

4. The details in paragraph 10 contribute to the overall meaning of the passage by

- A. enhancing the author's credibility in her claims about the nature of the weasel.
- B. explaining why the author dreams of living like a weasel in the wild.
- C. conveying the power of the author's experience with the weasel.
- D. delineating a clear separation between the author and the weasel.

5. The secluded natural setting in which Dillard becomes acquainted with the weasel is significant in that she *alone* establishes a connection with the animal. Draw a ring around a paragraph in the passage that serves to develop the feeling of seclusion in the setting.

6. The following question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.

Part A: Which two statements best express the central ideas of “Living Like Weasels”?

- A. The simplicity of animals acting on instinct should provide a model for humankind.
- B. Learning about one’s environment inspires one to take action to improve it.
- C. Humans and animals are meant to comprehend one another.
- D. Animals live in constant fear of their surroundings.
- E. Pursuing one’s own purpose is imperative to one’s sense of being.
- F. Humankind is encroaching on nature’s boundaries in a harmful way.

Part B: Which two quotations from the passage provide the best evidence for the answers to Part A?

- A. I was relaxed on the tree trunk, ensconced in the lap of lichen, watching the lily pads at my feet tremble and part dreamily over the thrusting path of a carp.
- B. The weasel was stunned into stillness as he was emerging from beneath an enormous shaggy wild rose bush four feet away.
- C. I think I blinked, I think I retrieved my brain from the weasel’s brain, and tried to memorize what I was seeing, and the weasel felt the yank of separation, the careening splash-down into real life...
- D. What goes on in his brain the rest of the time? What does a weasel think about? He won’t say. His journal is tracks in clay, a spray of feathers, mouse blood and bone: uncollected, unconnected, loose leaf, and blown.
- E. That is, I don’t think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular—shall I suck warm blood, hold my tail high, walk with my footprints precisely over the prints of my hands?
- F. The weasel doesn’t “attack” anything; a weasel lives as he’s meant to, yielding at every moment to the freedom of single necessity.
- G. The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse.

Information for Teachers about Text Complexity

Regular practice with complex texts is necessary to prepare students for college and career readiness. “Living Like Weasels” has been placed at grade 11 for the purpose of this exemplar. This section of the exemplar provides an explanation of the process that was used to place the text at grade 11, illustrating why this text meets the expectations for text complexity in Reading Standard 10. “Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards” and the “Supplement to Appendix A: *New Research on Text Complexity*” lay out a research-based process for selecting complex texts. According to Appendix A of the CCSS, the first step in selecting grade level appropriate texts is to place a text within a grade band according to a quantitative text complexity score.

The quantitative data for “Living Like Weasels” is below:

“Living Like Weasels”	Quantitative Measure #1	Quantitative Measure #2
	Flesch-Kincaid: 6.6	Lexile: 1040

After gathering the quantitative measures, the next step is to place the quantitative scores in the Conversion Table found in the Supplement to Appendix A (<http://www.corestandards.org/resources>) and determine the **grade band** of the text. Note that some literary texts may fall below ranges indicated by the data because of complex concepts explained through the use of rather everyday language.

Figure 1: Updated Text Complexity Grade Bands and Associated Ranges from Multiple Measures⁷

Common Core Band	ATOS	Degrees of Reading Power [®]	Flesch-Kincaid [§]	The Lexile Framework [®]	Reading Maturity	SourceRater
2 nd – 3 rd	2.75 – 5.14	42 – 54	1.98 – 5.34	420 – 820	3.53 – 6.13	0.05 – 2.48
4 th – 5 th	4.97 – 7.03	52 – 60	4.51 – 7.73	740 – 1010	5.42 – 7.92	0.84 – 5.75
6 th – 8 th	7.00 – 9.98	57 – 67	6.51 – 10.34	925 – 1185	7.04 – 9.57	4.11 – 10.66
9 th – 10 th	9.67 – 12.01	62 – 72	8.32 – 12.12	1050 – 1335	8.41 – 10.81	9.02 – 13.93
11 th – CCR	11.20 – 14.10	67 – 74	10.34 – 14.2	1185 – 1385	9.57 – 12.00	12.30 – 14.50

To find the **grade level** of the text within the designated grade band, engage in a systematic analysis of the characteristics of the text. The characteristics that should be analyzed during a qualitative analysis can be found in Appendix A of the CCSS. (www.corestandards.org)

Sample Qualitative Analysis of “Living Like Weasels”:

Category	Notes and comments on text, support for placement in this band	Where to place within the band?				
		NOT suited to band	early-mid 11	end 11-early 12	mid-end 12	CCR
Structure (story structure or form of piece or sentence demands if notable)	The structure of this text is fairly straightforward: Basic information is provided in the first two paragraphs and then setting is established in the next few paragraphs while the author describes an encounter with a weasel. After that come her reflections on the experience.					
Language Clarity and Conventions (including vocabulary load)	The vocabulary in the text is quite sophisticated, in use of both academic and figurative language. The sentences are also complex, requiring careful analysis and close reading.					
Knowledge Demands (life, content, cultural/literary)	There are some very advanced concepts developed in the text and some abstract adult themes. Students familiar with the stresses of adult life will be advantaged when uncovering themes. The subject of the weasel itself is not problematic, as the author provides background information and sufficient detail to aid understanding, even if a student has never seen a weasel.					
Levels of Meaning/Purpose	There are several levels of meaning within the text, some rather obscure and others rather obvious. The text will be difficult for students who must synthesize information to infer rather than just rely on stated themes, although there are a couple that are very clear. The purpose is fairly simple to infer: This is an experience that inspired reflection.					
Overall placement	Despite low readability data, this text is quite complex. The numerous themes and difficult vocabulary and use of rhetoric push this text into the 11-12 grade band.					

Teacher Guide to the Mini-Assessment

Annotations of the Questions for Teachers

Question Number	Correct Answer(s)	Standards	Rationales for Answer Options
1	B, E	RI.11-12.5, RI.11-12.1	<p>A. Dillard does not suggest her encounter is less significant, but just different, from those described in the opening paragraphs.</p> <p>B. This is a correct answer. Dillard wants readers to have some basic knowledge of weasels to better allow them to understand her experience.</p> <p>C. Dillard offers the first two paragraphs as informational, not persuasive, text.</p> <p>D. Dillard does not use these paragraphs to create a dark mood or foreshadow her meeting, but rather to provide basic facts about the behaviors of weasels.</p> <p>E. This is a correct answer. Dillard wishes to draw the reader into her experience by providing vivid and surprising details about the nature of weasels.</p> <p>F. Dillard does not include the paragraphs to show how common weasel sightings are, but rather to provide basic background on weasels.</p>
2 Part A	B	RI.11-12.4, RI.11-12.1	<p>A. Although <i>held inside</i> offers a sense of connection between the weasel and the hand, <i>held inside</i> is not the same as <i>socketed</i>, which means <i>tightly attached</i>.</p> <p>B. This is a correct answer. When the weasel is <i>socketed</i> in the naturalist's hand, it is <i>firmly embedded</i>.</p> <p>C. Although <i>crashed against</i> shows a strong sense of force on the weasel's part, it is not the same as <i>socketed</i>, which means <i>tightly attached</i>.</p> <p>D. Although <i>snuggled near</i> shows a connection between the weasel and the naturalist's hand, <i>snuggled near</i> connotes a soft connection, not a sense of being <i>socketed</i> or <i>tightly attached</i>.</p>
2 Part B	B, C		<p>A. <i>Refused to kill</i> describes the feelings of the naturalist, not the connection between his hand and the weasel.</p> <p>B. This is a correct answer. <i>Deeply as a rattlesnake</i> shows that the weasel has bitten into the naturalist's hand, becoming embedded.</p> <p>C. This is a correct answer. <i>Could in no way pry</i> demonstrates the strength of the physical connection between the teeth of the weasel and the flesh of the hand.</p>

Question Number	Correct Answer(s)	Standards	Rationales for Answer Options
			<p>D. <i>Tiny weasel</i> simply describes the size of the animal, not how the animal is strongly connected to the hand.</p> <p>E. <i>Had to walk half a mile</i> shows how determined the naturalist was to not injure the weasel after it had bitten him, but it doesn't show how strong the connection was.</p> <p>F. <i>Stubborn label</i> shows that the animal is stuck to the natural's hand, but it doesn't show that its teeth are embedded in his flesh.</p>
3 Part A	C		<p>A. Although one may seek nature when one is discouraged, the narrator is feeling peaceful about her experience rather than discouraged.</p> <p>B. Although the author at first questions what she is seeing, she is simply surprised by the appearance of the weasel.</p> <p>C. This is the correct answer. As the author soaks up the nature around her, she is feeling peaceful.</p> <p>D. Although the narrator is excited about the encounter with the weasel, when she first arrives at Hollins Pond (paragraph 7) she is feeling peaceful.</p>
3 Part B	A, D	RI.11-12.6, RI.11-12.4, RI.11-12.1	<p>A. This is a correct answer. The word <i>relaxed</i> shows that the author is feeling tranquil as she begins her experience.</p> <p>B. While the author may feel <i>ensconced</i> in her environment, this word does not reinforce a tone of tranquility.</p> <p>C. The author uses the word <i>tremble</i> to describe the lily pads, not to reinforce a tone of calmness.</p> <p>D. This is a correct answer. The author uses <i>dreamily</i> to further establish a tone of tranquility.</p> <p>E. The author uses the word <i>thrusting</i> to describe the movement of the carp, not to reinforce a tone of tranquility.</p> <p>F. The author uses the word <i>inexplicably</i> to show her surprise when the weasel appears, not to reinforce a tone of tranquility.</p>
4	C	RI.11-12.3, RI.11-12.1	<p>A. The details do not enhance the author's credibility, but rather help convey what the experience means to her.</p> <p>B. The details do not explain why the author dreams of living like a weasel in the wild, but rather help convey the significance of the experience.</p> <p>C. This is the correct answer. The details, hyperbolic statements like <i>bright blow to the brain</i> and <i>felled the forest</i>, help illustrate how powerful the encounter with the weasel was.</p>

Question Number	Correct Answer(s)	Standards	Rationales for Answer Options
			<p>D. The details do not delineate a clear division between the author and the weasel, but instead show how their joined experience has an impact on the author.</p>
5	Paragraph 4 or 5 or 6	RI.11-12.6, RI.11-12.1	<p>Paragraphs 4, 5, and 6 all help develop the setting as important by describing the small, isolated area around Hollins Pond and contrasting it with the surrounding suburban area. These paragraphs also show that the author experiences the encounter alone, which allows it to be more impactful by giving her time to reflect.</p>
6 Part A	A, E	RI.11-12.2, RI. 11-12.1	<p>A. This is a correct answer. Dillard admires the simple nature of the weasel and wishes human life followed that model insofar as possible.</p> <p>B. Although there is some evidence of a connection to the environment, the text does not address the connection of learning about one’s environment to improving it.</p> <p>C. Although the author might agree that humans and animals are not meant to comprehend each other, it is not a theme in this text.</p> <p>D. Although there is some evidence that the weasel is fearful, that is not a theme in this text.</p> <p>E. This is a correct answer. Dillard weaves a theme throughout the text that one must pursue one’s own purpose in life in order to have a sense of being.</p> <p>F. Although the author shows some evidence of humankind encroaching on nature’s boundaries, it is not a theme in this text.</p>
6 Part B	F, G		<p>A. Although this option provides a plausible link for option F in Part A in that it shows a human in nature, it does not provide evidence of a theme of the text.</p> <p>B. Although this option provides a plausible link for option D in Part A in that it shows that the weasel is surprised and perhaps frightened, it does not provide evidence of a theme of the text.</p> <p>C. Although this option provides a plausible link for option C in Part A in that it implies a connection to the author trying to get into the weasel’s mind, it does not provide evidence of a theme of the text.</p> <p>D. Although this option provides a plausible link for option C in Part A in that it shows the author trying to comprehend what is happening in the weasel’s brain, it does not support a theme of the text.</p> <p>E. Although this option provides a plausible link to options B and C in Part A in that it mentions learning and stresses how people cannot be like animals, it does not support a theme of the text.</p> <p>F. This is a correct answer. This sentence provides evidence of the simplicity of the life of the animal and how appealing that it is to author (option A in Part A).</p> <p>G. This is a correct answer. This sentence provides evidence of the theme of following one’s calling to truly be in touch with one’s emotions and sense of being (option E in Part A).</p>

Using the Mini-Assessments with English Language Learners (ELLs)

Mini-Assessment Design and English Language Learners

Each mini-assessment is designed using the best practices of test design. English Language Learners will benefit from the opportunity to independently practice answering questions about grade-level complex texts.

Prior to delivering the mini-assessment, teachers should read through each item. If there is language in the question stems specific to the standards (e.g., plot, theme, point of view), make sure that students have been introduced to these concepts prior to taking the assessment. Teachers should not pre-teach specific vocabulary words tested in the assessment (e.g., words students are asked to define) and should only pre-teach language that would impede students from understanding what the question is asking.

The mini-assessments attend to the needs of all learners, and ELLs specifically, by including texts that:

- *Are brief and engaging:* Texts vary in length, but no individual text is more than three pages long.
- *Embed student-friendly definitions:* Footnotes are included for technical terms or words that are above grade level when those words are not surrounded by context that would help students determine meaning.

Informational text sets, such as those included in the mini-assessment, specifically attend to the needs of ELLs by:

- *Building student knowledge:* Mini-assessments often include multiple texts or stimuli on the same topic:
 - For sets with two texts or stimuli, the first text is generally broader, providing a foundation in the content and introducing key vocabulary, and the second text provides more detail or contrast on the same topic. This allows ELLs to dig into the features of the passage being assessed rather than being inundated with dissimilar content and vocabulary.
 - For sets with more than two texts or stimuli, there is an “anchor” text that provides introductory information on the topic.
- *Containing ideas that lend themselves to discussion from a variety of perspectives:* Often these pairs or sets of texts present multiple perspectives on the same topic.

The mini-assessments attend to the needs of all learners, and ELLs specifically, by including questions that:

- *Feature a variety of academic words:*
 - Each mini-assessment contains at least one vocabulary item. Items assessing vocabulary test one of the following:
 - The meaning of Tier 2 academic words in context.
 - The meaning of a figurative word/phrase in context.
 - The impact of word choice on meaning and/or tone.
 - MOST vocabulary items test Tier 2 words.
 - All tested words are chosen because:
 - They are central to the meaning of the text.
 - They are surrounded by sufficient context to allow students to determine meaning.
- *Highlight “juicy” sentences that feature grade-appropriate complex structures, vocabulary, and language features:* Most mini-assessments include at least one item assessing Reading for Literature or Reading: Informational text standard 5. These items point students to analyze the structure of the text. While standard 5 items specifically focus on the structure of the text, other items require the analysis of language features, vocabulary, and relationships between ideas, all of which build student understanding of texts.
- *Provide graphic organizers to help students capture and reflect on new knowledge:* Most mini-assessments include at least one item mimicking a “technology enhanced item.” These items include things like tables and charts.
- *Provide writing activities that allow students to use new vocabulary and demonstrate knowledge of new concepts:* Most mini-assessments include an optional writing prompt that allows students to write about the text(s).

Administration Guidelines for ELLs

When assessing ELL students, appropriate accommodations may be considered. Modifications to the assessment itself should not be made. According to the *Accommodations Manual: How to Select, Administer, and Evaluate Use of Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment of English Language Learners, First Edition*:

- “Modifications refer to practices or materials that change, lower, or reduce state-required learning expectations. Modifications may change the underlying construct of an assessment.”

- “Accommodations are accessibility supports [that] do not reduce learning expectations. They meet specific needs of students in instruction and assessment and enable educators to know that measures of a student’s work produce valid results.”

Teachers **may** choose to make accommodations that meet the unique needs of ELLs. Prior to delivering any practice assessment, especially if the mini-assessment is to be used in a more formal setting (e.g., as part of a district benchmark assessment), teachers should research what accommodations will be available to students during their state’s summative assessment. For example, some states allow ELLs to use a bilingual dictionary during an assessment; other states do not allow this. Ensure your ELLs are practicing with the accommodations they can expect to see on the summative. Some examples of appropriate accommodations include:

- Reading the directions aloud to students multiple times.
- Providing student directions in student native language.
- Allowing students additional time to complete the mini-assessments.
- Exposing students to item types prior to the assessment.
- Reading the scoring expectations for the writing prompt aloud to students.

Because the goal of literacy mini-assessments is to measure grade-level literacy as students progress toward college- and career-readiness, teachers must be careful **not** to make modifications that may be commonly used in classroom instruction. Examples of modifications that should **not** be used include:

- Reading passages aloud for students.
- Adding student glossaries of unfamiliar terms.
- Pre-teaching tested vocabulary words.

In any testing setting, teachers must be careful to choose accommodations that suit the needs of each individual student.

Additional Resources for CCSS Implementation

Close reading exemplar lesson to precede these end-of-lesson assessment questions:

<http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/close-reading-exemplars>

Shift 1 - Complexity: *Regular practice with complex text and its academic language*

- See Appendix B for examples of informational and literary complex texts http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf
- See the Text Complexity Collection on www.achievethecore.org

Shift 2 – Evidence: *Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational*

- See Close Reading Exemplars for ways to engage students in close reading on <http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/close-reading-exemplars>
- See the Basal Alignment Project for examples of text-dependent questions <http://www.achievethecore.org/basal-alignment-project>

Shift 3 – Knowledge: *Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction*

- See Appendix B of the Common Core for examples of informational and literary complex texts http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf