

GRADE 8

English Language Arts

Actual New York State Test Item, 2009-10

Passage with written response items

“Rufus” by C.W. Gussewelle

Notes:

1. Readability: Lexile 720 (see Figure 3 from CCSS Appendix A below)
2. Total word count: 406
3. Average words per sentence: 11.2
4. Passage: Narrative; academic vocabulary is given with sufficient context to determine meaning (e.g., “negotiable” and preceding sentence)
5. Sample items are aligned to grade-level New York State Standards

Figure 3: Text Complexity Grade Bands and Associated Lexile Ranges (in Lexiles)

Text Complexity Grade Band In the Standards	Old Lexile Ranges	Lexile Ranges Aligned to CCR expectations
K-1	N/A	N/A
2-3	450-725	450-790
4-5	645-845	770-980
6-8	860-1010	955-1155
9-10	960-1115	1080-1305
11-CCR	1070-1220	1215-1355

Appendix A , Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Rufus

by C.W. Gusewelle



The bird dog is lost again.

Not lost in the literal, physical sense. He's still around, and still a friend. But I have lost him as a useful working animal, which hunting dogs are supposed to be. It happened during this summer's spell of blistering heat when he discovered air conditioning.

The bedroom has a window unit. When the awful heat came, he immediately noticed the difference between the pleasant nights in his chair and the sweltering days outside. And it occurred to him he might correct this situation. Were not the cats in there and cool? Was not the old dog snoozing in the lap of air-conditioned comfort? Then why should he, a dog of real utility, provider of fowl for the family table, not have some of this luxury?

He pressed his hopeful face against the outer glass, but our hearts were hard. To present his case in a more dramatic way, he began sitting on a patio table, glaring in accusingly at eye level through a kitchen window. It yielded nothing, though. He remained outside.

So he learned to open the back door. That's right, *learned to open it himself!* One afternoon I looked up from my typewriter and there he was, indisputably inside, looking immensely pleased by his new competence. **As far as he's concerned, the case is closed.** He's in where it's cool, and it's not **negotiable**. He makes himself as small as possible and rarely moves.

The other day Katie called him, suggesting it might be time to trot outside on a sanitary errand. He didn't budge—just looked around the room to see if, by some coincidence, she might be speaking to another dog of the same name. So I called him, and he growled.

As you probably know, the main virtue of a fine bird dog, apart from a keen nose, is unquestioning obedience. The master's command is his highest law. Defiance is unthinkable. He is indifferent to the elements. If game is downed, he will endure any discomfort to find and bring it to hand. In a word, there is nothing a bird dog will not do for his master.

Wrong! This one will not even leave his chair in an air-conditioned room.

When he was chosen from his littermates several years ago, I was looking for a pup with intelligence and staying power. That's exactly what I got. Rufus is no fool. And he's staying cool.

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In the passage “Rufus,” the author describes Rufus as having intelligence and staying power. Using details from the passage, complete the chart below with **one** example of Rufus’s intelligence and **one** example of his staying power.

Quality Exhibited by Rufus	Example from the Passage
Intelligence	
Staying Power	

Go On

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The author of the passage says that he lost Rufus as a useful working animal during a summer heat spell. Explain why the author makes this comment about his dog. Use details from the passage to support your answer.

GRADE 8

English Language Arts

Sample New York State Test Item, 2012-13

Passage with written response items

“Story of My Life” by Helen Keller

Notes:

1. Readability: Lexile 980 (see Figure 3 from CCSS Appendix A below)
2. Total word count: 642
3. Average words per sentence: 17.1
4. Passage: Autobiographical/informational; language is sophisticated, employing complex metaphorical and figurative phrases with minimum context
5. Sample items are aligned to grade-level Common Core standards

Figure 3: Text Complexity Grade Bands and Associated Lexile Ranges (in Lexiles)

Text Complexity Grade Band in the Standards	Old Lexile Ranges	Lexile Ranges Aligned to CCR expectations
K-1	N/A	N/A
2-3	450-725	450-790
4-5	645-845	770-980
6-8	860-1010	955-1155
9-10	960-1115	1080-1305
11-CCR	1070-1220	1215-1355

Appendix A , Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Paired Passages

Story of My Life

by Helen Keller

The morning after my teacher came she led me into her room and gave me a doll. The little blind children at the Perkins Institution had sent it and Laura Bridgman had dressed it; but I did not know this until afterward. When I had played with it a little while, Miss Sullivan slowly spelled into my hand the word “d-o-l-l.” I
5 was at once interested in this finger play and tried to imitate it. When I finally succeeded in making the letters correctly I was flushed with childish pleasure and pride. Running downstairs to my mother I held up my hand and made the letters for doll. I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed; I was simply making my fingers go in monkey-like imitation. In the days that followed I
10 learned to spell in this uncomprehending way a great many words, among them *pin, hat, cup* and a few verbs like *sit, stand* and *walk*. But my teacher had been with me several weeks before I understood that everything has a name.

One day, while I was playing with my new doll, Miss Sullivan put my big rag doll into my lap also, spelled “d-o-l-l” and tried to make me understand that “d-o-l-l”
15 applied to both. Earlier in the day we had had a tussle over the words “m-u-g” and “w-a-t-e-r.” Miss Sullivan had tried to impress it upon me that “m-u-g” is *mug* and that “w-a-t-e-r” is *water*, but I persisted in confounding the two. In despair she had dropped the subject for the time, only to renew it at the first opportunity. I became impatient at her repeated attempts and, seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the
20 floor. I was keenly delighted when I felt the fragments of the broken doll at my feet. Neither sorrow nor regret followed my passionate outburst. I had not loved the doll. In the still, dark world in which I lived there was no strong sentiment of tenderness. I felt my teacher sweep the fragments to one side of the hearth, and I had a sense of satisfaction that the cause of my discomfort was removed. She brought me my hat,
25 and I knew I was going out into the warm sunshine. This thought, if a wordless sensation may be called a thought, made me hop and skip with pleasure.

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Some one was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my
30 whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is
35 true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to **quiver** with life. That was because I saw everything with the

40 strange, new sight that had come to me. On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow.

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Words that may be defined for students are presented in bold.

Short Answer Constructed Response Questions for "Story of My Life"

Closely reread the following sentences from lines 37–39 of the passage:

"Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life."

How do these sentences reflect the author's changing relationship with language? Use **two** details from the passage to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.

Describe how the author's attitude toward the doll symbolizes her changing attitude toward learning words throughout the story. Use **two** details from the passage to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.
