

Reading

COMPASS/ESL Reading Placement Test

The reading comprehension items are of two general categories: referring and reasoning. Within each of these two general categories are several content categories that further specify the skills and knowledge assessed by each item. Referring items pose questions about material explicitly stated in a passage. Reasoning items assess proficiency at making appropriate inferences, developing a critical understanding of the text, and determining the specific meanings of difficult, unfamiliar, or ambiguous words based on the surrounding context.

Samples of items in the primary content categories of the COMPASS Reading Placement Test are provided on the following pages.

Sample Passage 1

What Methods Do Andean Farmers Use?

Public debate around climate change and its effects on agriculture tends to focus on the large-scale industrial farms of the North. Farmers who work on a small scale and use traditional methods have largely been ignored. However, as the world slowly comes to terms with the threat of climate change, Native farming traditions will warrant greater attention.

In the industrial model of agriculture, one or two crop varieties are grown over vast areas. Instead of trying to use local resources of soil and water optimally and sustainably, the natural environment is all but ignored and uniform growing conditions are fabricated through large-scale irrigation and the intensive use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides. For example, a handful of basically similar potato varieties, all of which require nearly identical soil conditions, temperature, rainfall, and growing seasons, account for almost all global production. When these global crops are no longer suited to the environment in which they are grown, when their resistance to disease and pests begins to fail, or the climate itself changes, the best way to rejuvenate the breeding stock will be to introduce new genetic material from the vast diversity of crop varieties still maintained by indigenous peoples.

In contrast to the industrial model, Andean potatoes and other Andean crops such as squash and beans grown by Quechuan farmers exhibit extraordinary genetic diversity, driven by the need to adapt crops to the extraordinary climatic diversity of the region.

Along the two axes of latitude and altitude, the Andes encompasses fully two-thirds of all possible combinations of climate and geography found on Earth. The Andean potato has been adapted to every environment except the depth of the rainforest or the frozen peaks of the mountains. Today, facing the likelihood of major disruptions to the climatic conditions for agriculture worldwide, indigenous farmers provide a dramatic example of crop adaptation in an increasingly extreme environment. More importantly, Native farmers have also safeguarded the crop diversity essential for the future adaptations.

Adapted from Craig Benjamin, "The Machu Picchu Model: Climate Change and Agricultural Diversity." © 1999 by Craig Benjamin.

Reading Placement Test Sample Items

1. What is the main idea of the first paragraph?

A. Attention to Native farming practices will lead to greater awareness of the threat of climate change.

B. Popularity of small-scale farming in the North will lead to greater attention to Native farming practices.

C. Global demand for food will lead to increasing efficiency of large-scale farming in

the North.

D. It will be worthwhile to include a greater focus on Native farming practices in public discussions concerning the threat of climate change.

E. Despite potential climate change, public debate will have little effect on industrial farming practices.

2. In the second paragraph, the information about potato-growing practices in the industrial model of agriculture serves to:

A. give an example of a potential problem that Native farming practices could help to alleviate.

B. show the likely global consequences of a possible food shortage caused by industrial farming practices.

C. show how pests and disease are less effectively resisted by crops grown in the industrial farming model.

D. give an example of how public debate has had little effect on the agricultural practices of the North.

E. give an example of how Native farming practices and industrial farming practices derive from different climatic conditions.

3. The passage states that which of the following is true of the small number of potato varieties that account for most of the potatoes produced on Earth currently?

A. They are grown in the Andean region.

B. They all require very similar soil and climate conditions.

C. They are no longer suited to their environment.

D. They are based on genetic material from crops developed by indigenous peoples.

E. They make optimal use of available soil and water resources.

4. As it is used in the passage, the underlined word *fabricated* most nearly means:

A. woven. **B.** falsely stated. **C.** fully clothed. **D.** manufactured. **E.** unwrapped.

Sample Passage 2

Fortune Tellers

A young couple entered the restaurant in Andy's view. They were holding hands. Andy sat back down in his chair. He felt sick. He turned and faced his father, who was eating *xô*.

"What's the matter, son?" asked his father. "I thought you were going to the birthday party."

"It's too late."

"Are you sure?"

Andy nodded. He looked at the plate of *xô*. He wanted to bury his face in it.

"Hi, Andy." A voice came from behind.

Andy looked up. He recognized the beautiful face, and he refused to meet her eyes. "Hi, Jennifer," muttered Andy, looking at the floor.

"You didn't miss much, Andy. The party was dead. I was looking for you, hoping you could give me a ride home. Then I met Tim, and he was bored like me. And he said he'd take me home.... Andy, do you want to eat with us? I'll introduce you to Tim."

Andy said, "No, I'm eating *xô* with my father."

"Well, I'll see you in school then, okay?"

"Yeah." And Andy watched her socks move away from his view.

Andy grabbed a chunk of *xô*. The rice and beans stuck to his fingernails. He

placed the chunk in his mouth and pulled it away from his fingers with his teeth. There was a dry bitter taste. But nothing could be as bitter as he was, so he chewed some more. The bitterness faded as the *xôi* became softer in his mouth, but it was still tasteless. He could hear the young couple talk and giggle. Their words and laughter and the sounds of his own chewing mixed into a sticky mess. The words were bitter and the laughter was tasteless, and once he began to understand this, he tasted the sweetness of *xôi*. Andy enjoyed swallowing the sticky mess down. Andy swallowed everything down—sweetness and bitterness and nothingness and what he thought was love. Adapted from Nguyen Duc Minh, “Fortune Tellers.” in the collection *American Eyes*. ©1994 by H. Holt

1. Who is telling this story?
A. Jennifer B. Andy C. Tim D. Andy’s father E. An unnamed narrator
2. What is the most reasonable conclusion to make from the statement in the first paragraph, “He felt sick.”?
A. Eating *xôi* with his father gave Andy a stomachache.
B. Andy was upset when he saw Jennifer holding hands with Tim.
C. Andy was unhappy about the restaurant his father had selected.
D. Andy was upset with Jennifer for making him miss the party.
E. Andy mistakenly thought that Tim was his best friend.
3. According to the passage, Tim would most likely describe the party as:
A. mysterious. B. lively. C. dull. D. upsetting. E. remarkable.
4. Based on the last paragraph, it can be most reasonably inferred that Andy’s increasing enjoyment of eating *xôi* was related to:
A. hearing Tim and Jennifer laughing and talking.
B. the fact that it stuck to his fingernails.
C. sitting at a table with Tim and Jennifer while he ate.
D. the fact that his father made the *xôi*.
E. seeing Tim and Jennifer eating *xôi*.
5. This passage is mainly about the relationship between:
A. Andy and his father. B. Andy and Tim. C. Andy’s father and Tim. D. Jennifer and Tim.
E. Jennifer and Andy.

Sample Passage 3

In the 1930s, why did author Zora Neale Hurston choose Eatonville, Florida, to be the first source for her collection of folklore?

I was glad when somebody told me, “You may go and collect Negro folklore.” In a way, it would not be a new experience for me. When I pitched headforemost into the world I landed in the crib of Negroism. It was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn’t see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of anthropology to look through.

I was asked where I wanted to work and I said, “Florida. It’s a place that draws people—Negroes from every Southern state and some from the North and West.” So I knew that it was possible for me to get a cross section of the Negro South in one state. And then I realized that I felt new myself, so it looked sensible for me to choose familiar ground. I started in Eatonville, Florida, because I knew that the town was full of material and

that I could get it without causing any hurt or harm. As early as I could remember, it was the habit of the men particularly to gather on the store porch in the evenings and swap stories. Even the women would stop and break a breath with them at times. As a child when I was sent down to the store, I'd drag out my leaving to hear more.

Folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The ideal source is where there are the fewest outside influences, but these people are reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. I knew that even *I* would have some hindrance among strangers. But here in Eatonville I knew everybody was going to help me.

Adapted from Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*. ©1935 by J.B. Lippincott Company.

1. Which of the following does the author use as a metaphor for the culture in which she was born?

A. College **B.** Garment **C.** Southern state **D.** Spy-glass **E.** Story

2. Based on the first paragraph, it is most reasonable to conclude that while in college the author:

- A.** decided to become a professor of anthropology.
- B.** decided that she did not want to live permanently in Eatonville, Florida.
- C.** felt that her teachers prevented her from studying what she wanted.
- D.** became disenchanted with anthropology.
- E.** understood her own culture in new and different ways.

3. As it is used in the passage, the highlighted word *material* most nearly means:

A. diversity. **B.** fabric. **C.** information. **D.** money. **E.** energy.

4. In the second paragraph, the author indicates that one reason she chose to work in Florida was that she wanted to collect folklore:

- A.** from people of different geographical backgrounds.
- B.** where her teachers suggested she do so.
- C.** from a place she had never visited.
- D.** in a state far from where she grew up.
- E.** in a state with a large urban population.

5. In the first paragraph, the author's claim, "In a way, it would not be a new experience for me," refers to the fact that:

- A.** she had already attended college in Florida.
- B.** she had already collected folklore in Florida for a college course.
- C.** she had already experienced new cultures by leaving home.
- D.** she was already familiar with the folklore she was to collect.
- E.** she had already received permission to conduct the study.

6. Based on information in the third paragraph, which of the following statements about the interactions on the porch can be most reasonably inferred?

- A.** The adults encouraged the author (as a child) to stay and tell stories.
- B.** Men were more frequent participants than were women.
- C.** Most of the storytellers had not grown up in Eatonville.
- D.** The author's parents sent her to the porch to hear the stories.
- E.** One man in particular told most of the stories.

7. In the last paragraph, the author writes that folklore collecting:

A. is less difficult than it appears.

- B.** is easiest to accomplish in isolated places because people there freely reveal their innermost thoughts.
- C.** can be difficult in isolated places, even though the people there are the best sources.
- D.** is more difficult than publishing what has been collected.
- E.** is the best way to reveal what is important to people.

8. Which of the following is NOT among the reasons the author gives for her decision to collect folklore in Eatonville?

- A.** The people of Eatonville would be grateful that she published their stories.
- B.** The people of Eatonville would have many stories for her collection.
- C.** Eatonville and its people are familiar to her.
- D.** She believes that she can collect stories without doing harm.
- E.** She believes that the people of Eatonville will help her in her project.

Correct Answers for Sample Reading Items

Sample Passage 1

Question # Correct Answer Content Category

1) D 2) A 3) B 4) D

Sample Passage 2

Question # Correct Answer Content Category

1) E 2) B 3) C 4) A 5) E

Sample Passage 3

Question # Correct Answer Content Category

1) B 2) E 3) C 4) A 5) D 6) B 7) C 8) A