Boston Latin Academy

- One of three exam public schools for the city of Boston
- Grades 7 – 12
- One of most racially diverse populations (approx. 1800 students) in Massachusetts
- Classical curriculum
- Academic rigor
Maintaining Instructional Quality: Strengths of the ELA Curriculum

• Common curriculum for each grade level
• Curriculum is marked by rigor (e.g., students begin their study of Shakespeare in grade 7 and continue through grade 12)
• Common final exams
• Writing program in grade 10
• Summer reading component – with some required readings
• Honors program begins at grade 10 and continues with AP 11 and AP 12
Professional Learning Community

- English department collegiality—teachers share instructional practices, curriculum materials

- Built in vehicle for sharing is contract mandated professional development time (30 hours per year)

- Thirty hours: department meetings, common planning time, whole school meetings
Instructional Leadership: The Department Meeting
A Time of Sharing

- Sharing exemplary lessons
- Looking at student data – MCAS, PSAT – item analysis
- Discussing problems
- Deciding on curriculum content
- Discussing administrative concerns
The Writing Program – 10th grade

- Mandated for all sophomores
- Taken in addition to 10th grade English
- Writing instructors teach this course exclusively (“one prep” scenario)
- Writing instructors have high degree of autonomy in designing curriculum
Goals of the Course

- To improve students’ analytical and expressive skills in writing for various purposes and audiences
- To prepare students for the MCAS, PSAT, and SAT
- To foster students’ self-perception as authentic writers
- To encourage cross-grade connections (10th & 7th grade “Writing Buddies”)

Goal: Students prepare for the Reading Comprehension segment of the MCAS by creating their own “test item” (i.e., a text, related multiple choice questions, and open response prompt)
Part 1. Using previous years’ tests and actual student responses as models, students:

- Identify the types and the tricks of multiple choice questions
- Study the qualities of open response prompts
- Recognize a high versus low scoring open response, using MCAS rubrics
Part 2. Using these learnings, students adopt the role of test-maker to create a test item, including:

- an original text written by the student previously
- multiple choice questions of various types relating to the text, with answer key
- open response prompt and top-scoring model response
TOY STORY

by JOSH SENS

1 In 1998, as the last yo-yo craze was winding down, a NASA mechanical designer named Rob Thate put a new spin on the old toy by adding a peg and changing two vowels. His invention, the YaYa, was a cross between a yo-yo and a top. You spin it on the ground and controlled it with a string.

2 Thate patented the idea and pitched it to toy-makers. But no one nibbled. Five years later, the YaYa is in production. But like the toy itself, there’s a string attached. Thate has put up the money himself.

3 “It’s been a long road and a real learning experience, but well worth all the effort,” says Thate, who works at Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland. “In a sense, I’d rather design a toy that millions of people play with than a satellite that no one sees.”

4 Every year, in basements and garages across the country thousands of inventors like Thate

Rainclouds

By: Nate Perkins

Coming from the northern skies,
They bring the sadness that has built up
along their journey.
Where they release their emotions
is random.
They travel aimlessly, waiting for the
perfect spot.
3. The poem states that there are three emotions connected to the different characteristics of the clouds. According to the poem, which emotion was connected to the cloud’s stillness?
   A. Boredom
   B. Slowness
   C. Nonchalant
   D. Nostalgia

5. What is one reason why this passage is a poem and not a short story?
   A. It’s about clouds and not people
   B. It’s shorter than a short story.
   C. It rhymes
   D. It utilizes the use of imagery.

6. Which of the following best describes the author’s tone?
   A. Poetic
   B. Sad
   C. Reflective
   D. Thoughtful

4. In lines 16-19, the author uses personification in order to describe how the clouds bring these different emotions everywhere they go. Why do you think the author did this?
   A. To show the author’s deep connection to the weather.
   B. To allow the reader to fully understand how the rainclouds bring about different emotions.
   C. To express the emotions of the rainclouds.
   D. To satisfy the requirements set by his teacher.

7. What is the attitude of the passage after the first 13 lines?
   A. Inevitable
   B. Happy
   C. Hopeful
   D. Emotional

8. In lines 1-3 there is an example of what literary device?
   E. Paradox
   F. Imagery
   G. Foreshadow
   H. Simile

Grade 10 English Language Arts
Language and Literature
Released Items:
Reporting Categories, Type of Question, and Correct Answers

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MCAS
Grade 10 English Language Arts
Question 10 - Score Point 4

This response is clear, complete, and accurate. It provides an overall explanation of why the personification used in the poem is understandable to the reader, as well as several examples from the poem showing the how personification was used. It includes relevant and specific textual evidence, which is paraphrased as well as presented through direct quotation.

In the poem, Rainclouds, written by Nate Perkins, the author describes rainclouds and explains how he feels about them. He does this by personifying the rainclouds. The author uses personification to describe the rainclouds as they travel the world in various ways.

The first way the author uses personification is in line 15. He describes the rainclouds as having long faces which they use to cast darkness over the world. This use of personification works in describing the rainclouds because whenever you look up towards clouds, they shade the world from the sun, which causes a shadow to be placed on the world around them. It is understandable that the author uses the term "long faces" to describe this because when ever someone is down about something, their heads are slightly faced down which causes a shadow to be placed on their face if you look at them from a certain angle.

The second way the author uses personification to describe the rainclouds is in line 16 where he says that boredom comes from the stillness of the rainclouds bodies. This use of personification works because when you look at rainclouds it looks as though they're just on the sky, even though if you look close enough they are actually moving. It is understandable that the author uses this personification because when you think of stillness you think of having nothing to do which is synonymous with boredom.

The final use of personification can be seen in line 17 where the author says, "Wetness comes from the many tears they have shed". Here the author is trying to compare tears to raindrops and how they make everything wet when the fall. When it rains it's almost as if the clouds are crying causing the ground beneath them to be wet.

The personification that is used to describe rainclouds in this poem helps the reader understand fully how the author feels about and the emotions he has when they come around. The personification also deepens the poem, giving new perspectives on how rainclouds are seen to the readers and to people who haven't really taken the time to stop and reflect on how they really feel when rainclouds come around.

Question 10 is an open-response question.

• Read the question carefully.
• Explain your answer.
• Add supporting details.
• Double-check your work.

Write your answer to question 10 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

10. In the poem "Rainclouds" the author uses personification to describe what the rainclouds do as they travel the world. Identify three examples of this use of personification and for each example explain why the personification understandable to the reader. Use relevant and specific information from the excerpt to support your answer.
Part 3.
10th grade test-makers try out their work on 7th grade “Writing Buddy” test-takers

One week prior to the March 2009 MCAS test
“The work done was useful because I used similar language that was used in the actual MCAS. Not only that, but I was able to be in the shoes of the test maker. :) ”

“[The project] was interesting because I got to make my own test, based on my own piece, and then answer it. It was as if I was taking on about 3 or 4 roles in this project, which was kind of hard but fun. :) ”

“It was rewarding to see my buddy take my test and actually do well on it ... and then tell me she enjoyed my story.”
Challenges

- Writing program eliminated for 2009-10
- Student motivation in the English classroom, especially given the rigorous curriculum
- Establishing a strong, school-wide culture of academic achievement
- Diversity of teaching styles and philosophies