

Elementary School Parent Activity: The Common Core Standards and Changing State Tests

Math Assessment Items	
What do the questions ask students to do?	
Old NY State Test Item	Sample 2012-13 Common Core-aligned NY State Test Item
Key Differences	
What are the key differences between the sample questions? How do the Common Core-aligned questions connect with the skills students need to prepare for college and career?	
English Language Arts Assessment Items	
What do the questions ask students to do?	
Old NY State Test Item	Sample 2012-13 Common Core-aligned NY State Test Item
Key Differences	
What are the key differences between the sample questions? How do the Common Core-aligned questions connect with the skills students need to prepare for college and career?	

Grade 4 Math: Actual 2009-10 NY State Test Question

43. Ms. Upton spends a total of \$42 for 3 sweaters for her children. Each sweater costs the same amount. How much does each sweater cost?

Show your work.

Answer \$ _____

Grade 4 Math: Sample 2012-13 Common Core-aligned NY State Test Question

44. Candy wants to buy herself a new bicycle that costs \$240. Candy has already saved \$32, but she needs to make a plan so she can save the rest of the money she needs. She decides to save the same amount of money, x dollars, each month for the next four months.

Part A: Write an equation that helps Candy determine the amount of money she must save each month.

Equation _____

Part B: Solve the equation to find the amount of money she must save each month to meet her goal of buying a bicycle.

Show your work.

Answer \$ _____

Grade 4 English Language Arts: Actual 2009-10 NY State Test Question

35. Imagine if the girl in “Butterfly House” had found a tadpole instead of a butterfly. What would the girl have done to take care of the tadpole? Do you think it would be more interesting to take care of a tadpole or a butterfly? Use details from **both** passages to support your answer.

In your answer be sure to

- describe how the girl would take care of a tadpole
- explain whether you think it would be more interesting to take care of a tadpole or a butterfly
- use details from **both** passages to support your answer

Check your writing for correct spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation.

Grade 4 English Language Arts: Sample 2012-13 Common Core-aligned NY State Test Question

14. The myth and the article both provide explanations for why evergreen trees keep their leaves in winter. How are the explanations similar and different? Use specific examples from the myth and the article to support your answer.

In your response be sure to include the following:

- describe what the **myth** says about why evergreen trees keep their leaves in winter
- describe what the **article** says about why evergreen trees keep their leaves in winter
- compare and contrast the two explanations
- include details from both the myth and the article to support your answer

Grade 4 Math: Actual 2009-10 NY State Test Question (sample student responses below)

43. Ms. Upton spends a total of \$42 for 3 sweaters for her children. Each sweater costs the same amount. How much does each sweater cost?

Show your work.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 14 \\
 3 \overline{)42} \\
 \underline{-3} \\
 12 \\
 \underline{-12} \\
 0
 \end{array}$$

Answer \$ 14

- Students can solve the problem in one step
- It is difficult to assess from student responses whether they understand the key concepts

Grade 4 Math: Sample 2012-13 Common Core-aligned NY State Test Question

44. Candy wants to buy herself a new bicycle that costs \$240. Candy has already saved \$32, but she needs to make a plan so she can save the rest of the money she needs. She decides to save the same amount of money, x dollars, each month for the next four months.

Part A: Write an equation that helps Candy determine the amount of money she must save each month.

Equation $32 + 4X = 240$

Part B: Solve the equation to find the amount of money she must save each month to meet her goal of buying a bicycle.

Show your work. Every month for 4 months she has to save X dollars.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 32 + 4X = 240 \\
 \underline{-32} \\
 0
 \end{array}
 \quad
 \begin{array}{r}
 4X = 208 \\
 \underline{4} \quad \underline{4} \\
 208
 \end{array}
 \quad
 \begin{array}{r}
 X = \frac{208}{4} \\
 4
 \end{array}
 \quad
 \begin{array}{r}
 52 \\
 4 \overline{)208} \\
 \underline{-20} \\
 08 \\
 \underline{-8} \\
 0
 \end{array}$$

Answer \$ 52

- Students are required to make sense of and solve a problem with multiple steps
- Students are required to demonstrate their ability to represent a real-world scenario with an algebraic equation, showing whether or not they understand the key concepts

Grade 4 English Language Arts: Actual 2009-10 NY State Test Question

35. Imagine if the girl in “Butterfly House” had found a tadpole instead of a butterfly. What would the girl have done to take care of the tadpole? Do you think it would be more interesting to take care of a tadpole or a butterfly? Use details from **both** passages to support your answer.

In your answer be sure to

- describe how the girl would take care of a tadpole
- explain whether you think it would be more interesting to take care of a tadpole or a butterfly
- use details from **both** passages to support your answer

Check your writing for correct spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation.

- *Texts are relatively simple*
- *Students are asked to express a personal opinion relating to the topics of the texts*
- *Students are asked to use details from the texts to support their personal opinion*

Grade 4 English Language Arts: Sample 2012-13 Common Core-aligned NY State Test Question

15. The myth and the article both provide explanations for why evergreen trees keep their leaves in winter. How are the explanations similar and different? Use specific examples from the myth and the article to support your answer.

In your response be sure to include the following:

- describe what the **myth** says about why evergreen trees keep their leaves in winter
- describe what the **article** says about why evergreen trees keep their leaves in winter
- compare and contrast the two explanations
- include details from both the myth and the article to support your answer

- *Texts are more challenging (e.g., in structure and vocabulary)*
- *Response asks students to analyze texts rather than form a personal opinion*
- *Students are asked to use details from the texts to support their analysis*

From Tadpole to Frog

by Kathleen Weidner Zoehfeld



In the spring, you may see frog eggs in the still water of a pond. Each egg is a ball of clear jelly with a small, dark center.

Hundreds of eggs stick together in a clump called frog spawn. Inside the eggs, tiny tadpoles are growing. At first, they look like small, dark specks. In a few days, little heads and tails take shape. Soon, the tadpoles are big enough to wiggle out of their eggs. After feeding on the jelly of their eggs for a while, the tadpoles wave their tails and swim away. Gills on the outside of a tadpole's body help it breathe underwater.

The tadpole's main job is to eat and grow. Many of the tadpoles will be eaten by hungry bugs, fish, or turtles. But a few escape. They will grow to be frogs.

Tadpoles do not look much like the frogs they will become! A tadpole has a strong tail for swimming. The tadpole has a hard mouth. It uses its mouth to scrape soft plants from the rocks and pebbles in the pond.

After a few weeks, the tadpole has grown two hind legs. And the tadpole's gills have moved inside its body.

Lungs are beginning to form inside the tadpole's body, too. Now and then, it swims up. The tadpole puts its head out of the water. It takes little breaths of air. As the tadpole's lungs grow stronger, its gills shrink away.

Two front legs begin to grow where its gills once were. By the time it is about two months old, the tadpole's mouth has become wider. The tadpole starts to eat small bugs.

For a few more weeks, the tadpole's tail shrinks and shrinks. Now the tadpole's strong legs and its webbed feet help it swim. The tadpole has changed into a small frog!

Butterfly House

by *Eve Bunting*
illustrated by *Greg Shed*

When I was just a little girl I saw a small black creature like a tiny worm, and saved it from a greedy jay who wanted it for lunch.

I carried it inside, safe on its wide green leaf. My grandpa said it was a larva and soon would be a butterfly.

We laid the larva carefully on thistle leaves inside an empty jar, put in a twig for it to climb—then made a lid of soft white paper all stuck around with glue.

My grandpa knew exactly what to do. “I raised a butterfly myself,” he said, “when I was just your age.”

How strange to think my grandpa once was young like me. “We would have been best friends if I’d been there back then,” I said.

My grandpa smiled. “It worked out anyhow. We’re best friends now.”

Up in his room we found a box. I cut a window in its side, then covered it with screen. Soon I could look inside and see my larva looking back at me.

What would she see? A human face so big and scary, strange and starey? What would she think?

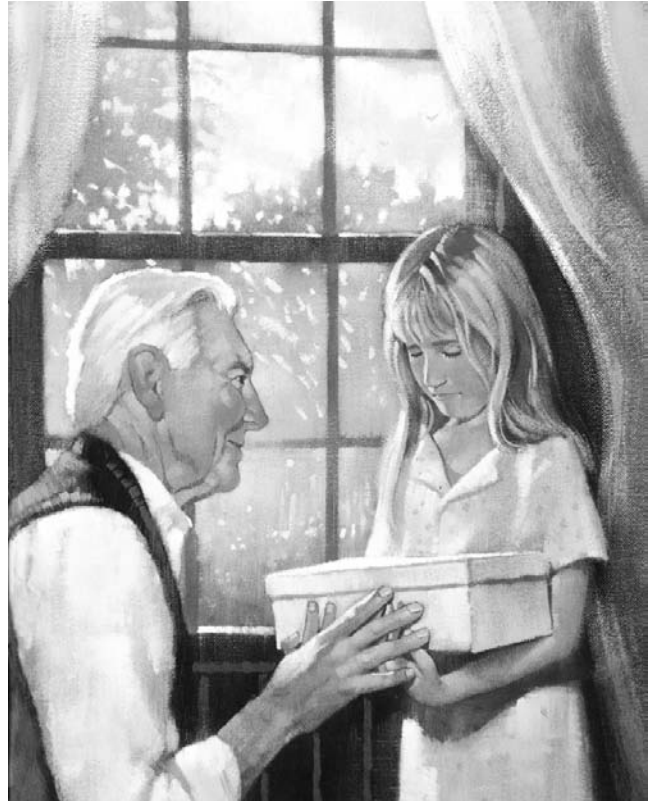
“I want it pretty till she goes,” I said.

And so Grandpa and I drew flowers on colored paper. Cone flowers, purple-blue, and marigolds, lantana, bright as flame, and thistles, too.

We wedged a garden twig inside the box for her to walk on, so her wings could dry once she became a butterfly.

My grandpa knows the flowers butterflies like best.

The ones where they can rest and drink the sweet, clear nectar.



We glued the painted flowers inside the box so it was bright with color. Made a sky above, the lid all blue with small white cotton clouds, and green with tops of trees that seemed to sway in soundless air.

I made a curve of rainbow like a hug to keep her safe while she was there. We set the jar inside and closed the painted lid. Through the screened window I could see the garden house. A place of flowers and space and waiting stillness.

Each day I put out leaves for food and watched my larva change.

My grandpa knew when it was time to gently pull away the paper top she hung from. I taped it to the wall inside her house and let her be. She would hang free inside the chrysalis that kept her hidden from the world.

chrysalis = cocoon

Inside that magic place she grew, transformed herself, came out, drooped, limp and slack, with crumpled wings. She was a butterfly, all spotted, orange, black, and brown as if someone had shaken paints and let the drops fall down.

“Our Painted Lady,” Grandpa said. “It’s time.”

He meant that it was time for her to leave for her new life. I swallowed tears. From the beginning I had known today would come. Now it was here.

My grandpa took my hand. “Cry if you like,” he said. “We understand.”

We carried out the box and raised the lid. I watched her falter as she felt the first warm touch of sun, saw trees, felt breezes brush across her wings. She rose, then rested on the fig tree branch. I saw her fly.

“Good-bye.”

Go On

Passage 1: Myth

Why the Evergreen Trees Never Lose Their Leaves

by Florence Holbrook

1 Winter was coming, and the birds had flown far to the south, where the air was warm and they could find berries to eat. One little bird had broken its wing and could not fly with the others. It was alone in the cold world of frost and snow. The forest looked warm, and it made its way to the trees as well as it could, to ask for help.

2 First it came to a birch-tree. "Beautiful birch-tree," it said, "my wing is broken, and my friends have flown away. May I live among your branches till they come back to me?"

3 "No, indeed," answered the birch-tree, drawing her fair green leaves away. "We of the great forest have our own birds to help. I can do nothing for you."

4 "The birch is not very strong," said the little bird to itself, "and it might be that she could not hold me easily. I will ask the oak." So the bird said, "Great oak-tree, you are so strong, will you not let me live on your boughs till my friends come back in the springtime?"

5 "In the springtime!" cried the oak. "That is a long way off. How do I know what you might do in all that time? Birds are always looking for something to eat, and you might even eat up some of my acorns."

6 "It may be that the willow will be kind to me," thought the bird, and it said, "Gentle willow, my wing is broken, and I could not fly to the south with the other birds. May I live on your branches till the springtime?"

7 The willow did not look gentle then, for she drew herself up proudly and said, "Indeed, I do not know you, and we willows never talk to people whom we do not know. Very likely there are trees somewhere that will take in strange birds. Leave me at once."

8 The poor little bird did not know what to do. Its wing was not yet strong, but it began to fly away as well as it could. Before it had gone far, a voice was heard. "Little bird," it said, "where are you going?"

9 "Indeed, I do not know," answered the bird sadly. "I am very cold."

10 "Come right here, then," said the friendly spruce-tree, for it was her voice that had called. "You shall live on my warmest branch all winter if you choose."

11 “Will you really let me?” asked the little bird eagerly.

12 “Indeed, I will,” answered the kind-hearted spruce-tree. “If your friends have flown away, it is time for the trees to help you. Here is the branch where my leaves are thickest and softest.”

13 “My branches are not very thick,” said the friendly pine-tree, “but I am big and strong, and I can keep the north wind from you and the spruce.”

14 “I can help too,” said a little juniper-tree. “I can give you berries all winter long, and every bird knows that juniper berries are good.”

15 So the spruce gave the lonely little bird a home, the pine kept the cold north wind away from it, and the juniper gave it berries to eat.

16 The other trees looked on and talked together **scornfully**.

17 “I would not have strange birds on my boughs,” said the birch.

18 “I shall not give my acorns away for any one,” said the oak.

19 “I never have anything to do with strangers,” said the willow, and the three trees drew their leaves closely about them.

20 In the morning all those shining green leaves lay on the ground, for the cold north wind had come in the night, and every leaf that it touched fell from the tree.

21 “May I touch every leaf in the forest?” asked the wind in its frolic.

22 “No,” said the forest king. “The trees that have been kind to the little bird with the broken wing may keep their leaves.”

23 This is why the leaves of the spruce, the pine, and the juniper are always green.

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Words that could be defined for students are in bold.

Why are evergreen trees green all year round?

1 Evergreen trees (also known as conifers because of the cones that hold their seeds) include spruce, fir and pine trees. Evergreen trees do lose leaves, but not all at the same time the way that deciduous trees (trees that lose their leaves) do. These trees are specially adapted to live in climates where there may be limited annual sunshine and/or available water.

2 The evergreen thrives in cold climates and its leaves are adapted to make the most of its environment. The leaves of evergreen trees are often small and narrow, like needles. Evergreen leaves can remain on a tree for anywhere from 1-20 years depending on the species of tree, but most leaves remain on the tree for less than five years. It is thought that by keeping its leaves year round the plant might be able to take advantage of periods of thaw during the winter to make food. It also means that the plant does not need to waste energy re-growing a full set of leaves each year.

3 The leaves of an evergreen have the same function as leaves of other trees, mainly to make food for the plant through photosynthesis. The leaves are often a dark green color indicating that a lot of the sun-absorbing compound chlorophyll is present. By having a lot of small leaves packed with chlorophyll, the plant gathers as much energy as it can from the sparse sunlight. It uses this energy to make food in the form of **glucose**. The dark color also helps keep the plant warm in its cold environment (think about wearing dark clothing on sunny day versus light or white clothing. The dark clothing absorbs more sunlight and is hotter to wear).

4 The cold climate where evergreens often live means that even if there is a large amount of precipitation, the water is often frozen and therefore unavailable to the plant. The small surface area and the thick coating of wax on the needle-like leaves allow the plant to retain more water (there is less surface area available for evaporation). The small leaves also have small holes called stomata that are used for gas exchange; these can be closed very tightly to stop water loss. Lastly the small pointy leaves and the cone-like shape of the tree itself shed snow more easily than other trees so the evergreens are not as likely to break under the weight of snow and ice.

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Words that could be defined for students are in bold.