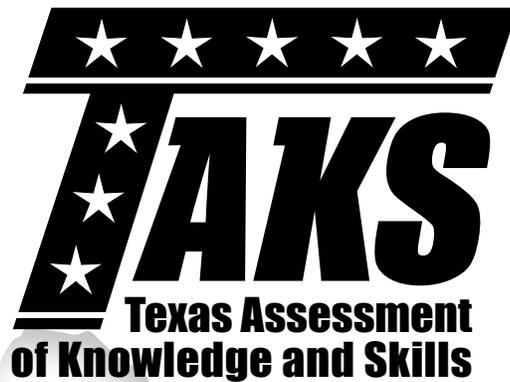


August 2004



Information Booklet

READING

Grade 8

Revised

Texas Education Agency • Student Assessment Division

INTRODUCTION

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) is a completely reconceived testing program. It assesses more of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) than the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) did and asks questions in more authentic ways. TAKS has been developed to better reflect good instructional practice and more accurately measure student learning. We hope that every teacher will see the connection between what we test on this new state assessment and what our students should know and be able to do to be academically successful. To provide you with a better understanding of TAKS and its connection to the TEKS and to classroom teaching, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has developed this newly revised edition of the TAKS information booklet. The information booklets were originally published in January 2002, before the first TAKS field test. Now, after several years of field tests and live administrations, we are able to provide an even more comprehensive picture of the testing program. We have clarified some of the existing material and, in some cases, provided new sample items and/or more explanations of certain item types. However, it is important to remember that these clarifications do not signify any change in the TAKS testing program. The objectives and TEKS student expectations assessed on TAKS remain unchanged. We hope this revised version of the TAKS information booklet will serve as a user-friendly resource to help you understand that the best preparation for TAKS is a coherent, TEKS-based instructional program that provides the level of support necessary for all students to reach their academic potential.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The development of the TAKS program included extensive public scrutiny and input from Texas teachers, administrators, parents, members of the business community, professional education organizations, faculty and staff at Texas colleges and universities, and national content-area experts. The agency involved as many stakeholders as possible because we believed that the development of TAKS was a responsibility that had to be shared if this new assessment was to be an equitable and accurate measure of learning for all Texas public school students.

The three-year test-development process, which began in summer 1999, included a series of carefully conceived activities. First, committees of Texas educators identified those TEKS student expectations for each grade and subject area assessed that should be tested on a statewide assessment. Then a committee of TEA Student Assessment and Curriculum staff incorporated these selected TEKS student expectations, along with draft objectives for each subject area, into eleventh grade exit level surveys. These surveys were sent to Texas educators at the middle school and secondary levels for their review. Based on input we received from more than 27,000 survey responses, we developed a second draft of the objectives and TEKS student expectations. In addition, we used this input during the development of draft objectives and student expectations for grades 3 through 10 to ensure that the TAKS program, like the TEKS curriculum, would be vertically aligned. This vertical alignment was a critical step in ensuring that the TAKS tests would become more rigorous as students moved from grade to grade. For example, the fifth grade tests would be more rigorous than the fourth grade tests, which would be more rigorous than the third grade tests. Texas educators felt that this increase in rigor from grade to grade was both appropriate and logical since each subject-area test was closely aligned to the TEKS curriculum at that grade level.

In fall 2000 TEA distributed the second draft of the objectives and TEKS student expectations for eleventh grade exit level and the first draft of the objectives and student expectations for grades 3 through 10 for review at the campus level. These documents were also posted on the Student Assessment Division’s website to encourage input from the public. Each draft document focused on two central issues: first, whether the objectives included in the draft were essential to measure on a statewide assessment; and, second, whether students would have received enough instruction on the TEKS student expectations included under each objective to be adequately prepared to demonstrate mastery of that objective in the spring of the school year. We received more than 57,000 campus-consensus survey responses. We used these responses, along with feedback from national experts, to finalize the TAKS objectives and student expectations. Because the state assessment was necessarily limited to a “snapshot” of student performance, broad-based input was important to ensure that TAKS assessed the parts of the TEKS curriculum most critical to students’ academic learning and progress.

In the thorough test-development process that we use for the TAKS program, we rely on educator input to develop items that are appropriate and valid measures of the objectives and TEKS student expectations the items are designed to assess. This input includes an annual educator review and revision of all proposed test items before field testing and a second annual educator review of data and items after field testing. In addition, each year panels of recognized experts in the fields of English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies meet in Austin to critically review the content of each of the high school level TAKS assessments to be administered that year. This critical review is referred to as a content validation review and is one of the final activities in a series of quality-control steps to ensure that each high school test is of the highest quality possible. A content validation review is considered necessary at the high school grades (9, 10, and 11) because of the advanced level of content being assessed.

ORGANIZATION OF THE TAKS TESTS

TAKS is divided into test objectives. It is important to remember that the objective statements are not found in the TEKS curriculum. Rather, the objectives are “umbrella statements” that serve as headings under which student expectations from the TEKS can be meaningfully grouped. Objectives are broad statements that “break up” knowledge and skills to be tested into meaningful subsets around which a test can be organized into reporting units. These reporting units help campuses, districts, parents, and the general public understand the performance of our students and schools. Test objectives are not intended to be “translations” or “rewordings” of the TEKS. Instead, the objectives are designed to be identical across grade levels rather than grade specific. Generally, the objectives are the same for third grade through eighth grade (an elementary/middle school system) and for ninth grade through eleventh grade (a high school system). In addition, certain TEKS student expectations may logically be grouped under more than one test objective; however, it is important for you to understand that this is not meaningless repetition—sometimes the organization of the objectives requires such groupings. For example, on the TAKS writing tests for fourth and seventh grades, some of the same student expectations addressing the conventions of standard English usage are listed under both Objective 2 and Objective 6. In this case, the expectations listed under Objective 2 are assessed through the overall strength of a student’s use of language conventions on the written composition portion of the test; these same expectations under Objective 6 are assessed through multiple-choice items attached to a series of revising and editing passages.

ORGANIZATION OF THE INFORMATION BOOKLETS

The purpose of the information booklets is to help Texas educators, students, parents, and other stakeholders understand more about the TAKS tests. These booklets are not intended to replace the teaching of the TEKS curriculum, provide the basis for the isolated teaching of skills in the form of narrow test preparation, or serve as the single information source about every aspect of the TAKS program. However, we believe that the booklets provide helpful explanations as well as show enough sample items, reading and writing selections, and prompts to give educators a good sense of the assessment.

Each grade within a subject area is presented as a separate booklet. However, it is still important that teachers review the information booklets for the grades both above and below the grade they teach. For example, eighth grade reading teachers who review the seventh grade information booklet as well as the ninth grade information booklet are able to develop a broader perspective of the reading assessment than if they study only the eighth grade information booklet.

The information booklets for each subject area contain some information unique to that subject. However, all booklets include the following information, which we consider critical for every subject-area TAKS test:

- an overview of the subject within the context of TAKS
- a blueprint of the test—the number of items under each objective and the number of items on the test as a whole
- information that clarifies how to read the TEKS
- the reasons each objective and its TEKS student expectations are critical to student learning and success
- the objectives and TEKS student expectations that will be included on TAKS
- additional information about each objective that helps educators understand how it is assessed on TAKS
- sample items that show some of the ways objectives are assessed

TAKS READING

INFORMATION BOOKLET

The purposes for reading are as varied and diverse as the people who read, but the ability to read effectively is essential for all students in the increasingly complex world in which we live. Reading is one of the most important foundations for learning, not only in English language arts but also in other content areas, such as science, social studies, and mathematics. Students who can understand what they read and who can make connections between what they read and what they already know will more likely be successful—in the classroom, on the test, and in the real world. Strong reading skills are necessary for academic achievement, for the fundamental tasks of daily living, and for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

The TAKS reading assessments evaluate a subset of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the state-mandated curriculum. This curriculum is specifically designed to help students make progress in reading by emphasizing the knowledge and skills most critical for student learning. Because the TAKS reading tests are closely aligned with the TEKS, students who effectively learn the TEKS will become proficient readers who are able to perform successfully on the test without unnecessary emphasis on test preparation. A system of support has been designed to ensure that all students master the TEKS. The Student Success Initiative (SSI) requires that students meet the standard on TAKS to be eligible for promotion to the next grade level as specified below:

- the reading test at grade 3, beginning in the 2002–2003 school year;
- the reading and mathematics tests at grade 5, beginning in the 2004–2005 school year; and
- the reading and mathematics tests at grade 8, beginning in the 2007–2008 school year.

To prepare students for the SSI requirements and to promote vertical alignment, it is essential that teachers collaborate and coordinate across grade levels.

The TEKS student expectations eligible for testing on the third through eighth grade TAKS reading assessments are grouped under four TAKS objectives.

Objective 1: The student will demonstrate a basic understanding of culturally diverse written texts.

Objective 2: The student will apply knowledge of literary elements to understand culturally diverse written texts.

Objective 3: The student will use a variety of strategies to analyze culturally diverse written texts.

Objective 4: The student will apply critical-thinking skills to analyze culturally diverse written texts.

These objectives are consistent from third grade through eighth grade, and the TEKS student expectations assessed under each TAKS objective are vertically aligned, meaning that they build logically from one grade level to the next. An example of this logical movement follows.

Example from Objective 2

Grade 3 TEKS 3.11 (H) states that *the student is expected to analyze characters, including their traits, feelings, relationships, and changes.*

Grade 4 TEKS 4.12 (H) states that *the student is expected to analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts, points of view, relationships, and changes they undergo.*

Many of the TEKS student expectations are expressed in similar language from grade to grade, but the level of student performance required at each grade increases. Reading selections become longer and more challenging, and the critical thinking required of students becomes more complex and sophisticated. Although elementary and middle school teachers are not directly responsible for student success on TAKS at the high school level, it is important for them to familiarize themselves with the reading (ninth grade) and English language arts (tenth and eleventh grades) assessments. Without strong elementary and middle school reading programs, students will not have had the opportunity to acquire the literacy skills they need to be successful at the high school level.

TAKS READING SELECTIONS—GRADES 3–8

TAKS reading selections are designed to be interesting, meaningful, and reflective of the Texas population and our culturally diverse world. Cultural diversity includes regional, economic, social, and ethnic differences and may be represented through subject matter and/or characters. In addition, reading selections will be similar to those that students encounter in their classrooms and in their everyday lives.

Four kinds of selections are developed for TAKS:

- Narrative selections, which are fictional stories presented with a clear progression of events. Letters or diary entries, as well as stories, may represent narrative writing.
- Expository (informative) selections, which provide information about noteworthy people and/or events or explain topics related to content areas such as science, social studies, art, or music.
- Mixed selections, which combine two types of writing into a single passage. For example, a mixed selection may be a story about Martin Luther King, Jr., that includes both factual information (expository) and invented dialogue (narrative). Or a selection may mix narrative and functional writing. For example, an advertisement, a recipe, instructions, or the directions for a game (functional) may be presented within the context of a story (narrative).
- Paired selections, which are two selections designed to be read together. Paired selections provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate an understanding of the connections across texts. Selections may be paired for many different reasons; for example, a paired selection may be based on the same story told from two different points of view or a science article and a science fiction story that address a common theme or idea. It is important to remember that paired selections are linked by more than a superficial connection, such as common subject matter or characters. Paired selections contain a deep link, so that students can recognize the strong connection across the two pieces.

Word counts for each selection will vary according to age and grade-level appropriateness. Some selections may require students to turn pages in order to complete the reading selection and/or to answer test items.

- Selections for third and fourth grades will be approximately 500 to 700 words.
- Selections for fifth grade will be approximately 600 to 900 words.
- Selections for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades will be approximately 700 to 1,000 words.

Two notes regarding word counts:

- (1) Selections written as a pair will be comparable in length to singly developed selections.
- (2) Because of the differences in language, the Spanish reading selections may be somewhat longer than the English versions.

Other important information about TAKS reading selections:

- Paragraphs will be numbered when doing so does not interfere with the layout of the text. For example, a selection that includes an advertisement with bulleted information most likely would not have numbered paragraphs.
- When appropriate, each selection will be preceded by a title.
- Additional information will be provided in an introduction or a postscript when this information will help the reader better understand the selection.
- In sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, narrative selections will be formatted so that students have the option of taking notes, keeping track of important information, or asking themselves questions as they read. This margin is labeled *My notes about what I am reading* and is located on the right-hand side of each page in the selection.

**TEXAS ASSESSMENT OF
KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (TAKS)
BLUEPRINT FOR GRADE 8 READING**

TAKS Objectives	Number of Items
Objective 1: Basic understanding	12
Objective 2: Literary elements	10
Objective 3: Analysis using reading strategies	10
Objective 4: Analysis using critical-thinking skills	16
Total number of items	48

A Key to Understanding the TEKS Included on TAKS Grade 8 Reading

Example from Objective 4

- A** → (8.11) **Reading/literary response.** The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts. The student is expected to
- B** → (C) support responses by referring to relevant aspects of text [and his/her own experiences] (4–8).
- C** → [and his/her own experiences]
- D** → (4–8)

KEY

A. Knowledge and Skills Statement

This broad statement describes what students should know and be able to do for eighth grade reading. The number preceding the statement identifies the grade level and number of the knowledge and skills statement.

B. Student Expectation

This specific statement describes what students should be able to do to demonstrate proficiency in what is described in the knowledge and skills statement. Students will be tested on skills outlined in the student expectation statement.

C. [bracketed text]

Although the entire student expectation has been provided for reference, text in brackets indicates that this portion of the student expectation will not be tested on TAKS.

D. (4–8)

The student expectation is taught from fourth grade through eighth grade.

NOTE: The full TEKS curriculum can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/>.

TEKS STUDENT EXPECTATIONS—IMPORTANT VOCABULARY

For every subject area and grade level, two terms—*such as* and *including*—are used to help make the TEKS student expectations more concrete for teachers. However, these terms function in different ways. To help you understand the effect each of the terms has on specific student expectations, we are providing the following:

- a short definition of each term
- an example from a specific student expectation for this subject area
- a short explanation of how this term affects this student expectation

Such as

The term *such as* is used when the specific examples that follow it function only as representative illustrations that help define the expectation for teachers. These examples are just that—examples. Teachers may choose to use them when teaching the student expectation, but there is no requirement to use them. Other examples can be used in conjunction with those listed or as replacements for those listed.

Example from Objective 2

(8.12) (J) *recognize and interpret literary devices such as flashback, foreshadowing, and symbolism*

This student expectation requires students to recognize and interpret literary devices. Three literary devices—flashback, foreshadowing, and symbolism—are listed in this student expectation because they are common examples that students will likely be most familiar with. However, this list is not exhaustive or exclusive. Teachers may use these examples or others to teach students how authors use literary devices to craft a story.

Including

The term *including* is used when the specific examples that follow it must be taught. However, other examples may also be used in conjunction with those listed.

Example from Objective 2

(8.12) (F) *analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts, points of view, relationships, and changes they undergo*

In this student expectation, students must analyze the ways in which an author creates and develops the characters in a story. In teaching this expectation, teachers must focus on the characters' traits, motivations, conflicts, points of view, relationships, and changes they undergo. However, teachers are not limited to teaching only these aspects.

Remember

- Any example preceded by the term *such as* in a particular student expectation may or may not provide the basis for an item assessing that expectation. Because these examples do not necessarily have to be used to teach the student expectation, it is equally likely that other examples will be used in assessment items. The rule here is that an example will be used only if it is central to the knowledge, concept, or skill the item assesses.
- It is more likely that some of the examples preceded by the term *including* in a particular student expectation will provide the basis for items assessing that expectation, since these examples must be taught. However, it is important to remember that the examples that follow the term *including* do not represent all the examples possible, so other examples may also provide the basis for an assessment item. Again, the rule here is that an example will be used only if it is central to the knowledge, concept, or skill the item assesses.

Grade 8 TAKS Reading—Objective 1

The TEKS and corresponding student expectations listed under Objective 1 will help students as they learn to read for the basic meaning of a text. To develop an initial understanding of what they read, students must be able to do three things: (1) use context and other word-identification strategies to help them understand the meaning of the words they read, (2) recognize important supporting details, and (3) understand the main idea of a selection. These skills are the building blocks that students need to develop a deeper understanding of what they read.

TAKS Objectives and TEKS Student Expectations

Objective 1

The student will demonstrate a basic understanding of culturally diverse written texts.

- (8.6) **Reading/word identification.** The student uses a variety of word recognition strategies. The student is expected to
- (B) use structural analysis to identify words, including knowledge of Greek and Latin roots and prefixes/suffixes (7–8).
- (8.9) **Reading/vocabulary development.** The student acquires an extensive vocabulary through reading and systematic word study. The student is expected to
- (B) draw on experiences to bring meanings to words in context such as interpreting [idioms,] multiple-meaning words, and analogies (6–8);
 - (D) determine meanings of derivatives by applying knowledge of the meanings of root words such as *like*, *pay*, or *happy* and affixes such as *dis-*, *pre-*, or *un-* (4–8); and
 - (F) distinguish denotative and connotative meanings (6–8).
- (8.10) **Reading/comprehension.** The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies. The student is expected to
- (F) determine a text’s main (or major) ideas and how those ideas are supported with details (4–8); and
 - (G) paraphrase and summarize text to recall, inform, or organize ideas (4–8).

Objective 1—For Your Information

Tested vocabulary words will be above grade level. Students will always be provided with enough context clues to allow them to identify the correct meaning of the word as it is used in the reading selection. Students should also be able to use a variety of word-identification strategies, such as word structure (prefixes, roots, and suffixes), word origin (Greek and Latin roots), analogies (a comparison of two words or phrases that suggests a similarity between them), or connotation (the emotional impact of a word beyond its dictionary definition), to help them understand the words they are

reading. Because a student may use context only or a combination of context and strategies, items will not be constructed to test skills in isolation (e.g., “The prefix in the word unacceptable means —”).

Items testing multiple-meaning words might require students to identify the correct answer from a sample dictionary entry. The entry will include the tested word, its pronunciation key, its part of speech, and four definitions of the word. Students will use the information given and context clues to choose the correct meaning of the word as it is used in the reading selection.

Students may be asked to identify the context clues in a selection that help them to understand the meaning of a tested word. Answer choices for these items will contain context clues taken verbatim from the text rather than definitions of the tested word. These answer choices will be italicized.

NOTE: The sample vocabulary item provided at each grade level will help teachers understand some of the different ways in which vocabulary will be assessed on the TAKS reading tests.

Items that measure students’ basic comprehension of a reading selection are of three types: items that focus on supporting details, items that focus on identifying the main idea, and items that summarize a selection. Detail items will focus on important information that is directly stated or paraphrased from a text. Main idea/gist items will be written so that students clearly understand that they are focusing on broad or central ideas. In narrative selections main idea items will focus on either a single paragraph or a series of paragraphs. However, expository and mixed selections may also include items that focus on the main idea of the entire selection. Summary items will focus on a reading selection as a whole. A summary is a short paragraph that includes the main idea and the most important details of a text. For this type of item, all answer choices will be constructed authentically as short paragraphs. However, the answer choices will be appropriate for eighth graders in that they will include enough information without being too long or dense.

Grade 8 TAKS Reading—Objective 2

Developing an understanding of literary elements makes stories both more accessible and more meaningful to readers. Learning to make connections between events, characters, and other elements of a story helps students relate what they have read to their own lives and experiences. At the same time, knowing about a story’s characters, setting, and problem gives students an opportunity to relate to the story in concrete terms while learning about emotions and events that are beyond their own personal experiences.

TAKS Objectives and TEKS Student Expectations

Objective 2

The student will apply knowledge of literary elements to understand culturally diverse written texts.

(8.12) **Reading/text structures/literary concepts.** The student analyzes the characteristics of various types of texts (genres). The student is expected to

- (F) analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts, points of view, relationships, and changes they undergo (4–8);
- (G) recognize and analyze story plot, setting, and problem resolution (4–8); and
- (J) recognize and interpret literary devices such as flashback, foreshadowing, and symbolism (6–8).

Objective 2—For Your Information

Items that test characterization focus on the degree to which students understand the characters in a story: who they are, why they feel and act as they do, how they perceive or relate to the people around them, how they view the events or circumstances they find themselves in, and how they are changed by the things they experience. Students will not be asked characterization questions that are overly sophisticated or too far beyond their developing understanding of other people and themselves.

Items in this objective that assess point of view will focus on characters and their points of view. Items in Objective 3 will focus on author’s perspective (the writer’s attitude toward his/her subject) or point of view.

Items that focus on setting are of two types. The first type simply measures whether a student can identify the time and place of a story. However, most setting items will focus on whether a student understands how time and place contribute to the meaning of a story.

Items that focus on plot will require students to recognize the events in a story that significantly affect the story line. The depth of analysis required will be appropriate for eighth graders.

To understand a story, students must learn to interpret literary devices. Students must first be able to recognize literary devices so that they may analyze how the author uses them to shape a reader's understanding of characters, events, and the meaning of a story. Items that assess a student's knowledge of such literary devices as foreshadowing, flashback, and symbolism will be grade-level appropriate; that is, students will not be asked questions about literary devices that are overly sophisticated or too far beyond their developing understanding of author's craft. Students will be asked to apply their knowledge of literary elements rather than identify the definition of literary terminology.

For the most part, Objective 2 items will appear with narrative selections or with mixed or expository selections that include literary elements such as characters and plot.

Grade 8 TAKS Reading—Objective 3

All texts are not equally challenging. For students, reading a story may be much easier than reading a text that is based on science or social studies. However, to make academic progress, students must develop the ability to comprehend and process material from a wide range of texts. That is why it is important for students to develop the ability to know the purpose of the written text they are reading, how the author has organized information, how this organization affects the way the reader reads the text, and what distinctive features characterize a particular type of text. These are the skills students must learn if they are to become independent readers who can move beyond the literal meaning of a text, who have the ability to develop the deeper understandings needed to think critically about what they read, to connect what they know to new information, and to become independent learners.

TAKS Objectives and TEKS Student Expectations

Objective 3

The student will use a variety of strategies to analyze culturally diverse written texts.

- (8.10) **Reading/comprehension.** The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies. The student is expected to
- (E) use the text’s structure or progression of ideas such as cause and effect or chronology to locate and recall information (4–8);
 - (I) find similarities and differences across texts such as in treatment, scope, or organization (4–8); and
 - (L) represent text information in different ways such as in outline, timeline, or graphic organizer (4–8).
- (8.12) **Reading/text structures/literary concepts.** The student analyzes the characteristics of various types of texts (genres). The student is expected to
- (A) identify the purposes of different types of texts such as to inform, influence, express, or entertain (4–8);
 - (C) compare communication in different forms such as [contrasting a dramatic performance with a print version of the same story or] comparing story variants (2–8); and
 - (H) describe how the author’s perspective or point of view affects the text (4–8).

Objective 3—For Your Information

To answer items about a text’s structure or progression of ideas, students will need to understand how events relate to one another and how these relationships affect a reader’s approach to reading and understanding a particular text. To use a text’s structure or progression of ideas to locate and recall information, students must first recognize how the author has organized the text. Then they must use

their familiarity with this pattern to help them understand the relationships between ideas. Knowing how one idea relates to another allows students to arrange ideas in an order that makes sense to them so that they are able to locate and synthesize important information.

Items that require a student to recognize similarities and differences across texts will test the student's ability to identify how two different selections compare in their approach, their organization, and their development of a common topic or theme. These items will be written only for paired selections.

Items that focus on representing text information in different ways may require students to select the answer choice that best completes a missing portion of a timeline, outline, or graphic organizer. Other items might require a student to interpret information from a graphic source and use that information to make an inference or draw a conclusion.

Items assessing author's purpose will require students to analyze how an author presents his or her ideas. To determine the purpose of a text—whether that purpose is informative, persuasive, expressive, or entertaining—students must recognize that the way authors organize their writing depends on which organizational pattern will best convey what they want the reader to understand.

Items assessing story variants require students to read two stories presented as paired selections. Story variants are created when the same story is told from two different characters' perspectives or when, despite obvious similarities, the stories are different in some way. This difference can be evident in the plot, setting, characters, or conflict. Like other paired selections, story variants are based on deep thematic links. Students must first be able to recognize how the stories are connected. Once students understand this connection, they must then identify how the two stories are similar and different and determine what impact these similarities and differences have on their understanding of the stories. (See Grade 5 for an example of story variants.)

To answer questions about how an author's perspective or point of view affects the text, students will need to examine the author's attitude toward his/her subject or topic. The perspective or point of view the author brings to the selection not only affects the tone of the piece but also the way the author shapes and develops his/her ideas. These items will be developed for selections only when the writer's attitude is obvious and clearly has an effect on the text.

Grade 8 TAKS Reading—Objective 4

To be successful in school, students must have the ability to bring different levels of understanding to the texts they read. Good readers can do more than “read the lines.” They ask themselves questions, make initial predictions, and create meanings as they move through a text. Good readers also know that as they read, they will likely change their mind about some of their early ideas and assumptions. Why? Because as they read and acquire a more complete “picture” of the text, their understanding deepens and grows. They are able to answer their own questions, think critically about what they’ve read, develop their own interpretations, and use relevant parts of the text to support these interpretations. In essence, reading is a complex process that requires students not only to read “between the lines” but also to read “beyond the lines,” relating what they’ve read to what they already know. In this way reading becomes an important tool for thinking and learning, both in school and in real life.

TAKS Objectives and TEKS Student Expectations

Objective 4

The student will apply critical-thinking skills to analyze culturally diverse written texts.

- (8.10) **Reading/comprehension.** The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies. The student is expected to
- (H) draw inferences such as conclusions or generalizations and support them with text evidence [and experience] (4–8); and
 - (J) distinguish fact and opinion in various texts (4–8).
- (8.11) **Reading/literary response.** The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts. The student is expected to
- (C) support responses by referring to relevant aspects of text [and his/her own experiences] (4–8); and
 - (D) connect, compare, and contrast ideas, themes, and issues across text (4–8).
- (8.12) **Reading/text structures/literary concepts.** The student analyzes the characteristics of various types of texts (genres). The student is expected to
- (I) analyze ways authors organize and present ideas such as through cause/effect, compare/contrast, inductively, deductively, or chronologically (6–8); and
 - (K) recognize how style, tone, and mood contribute to the effect of the text (6–8).

Objective 4—For Your Information

Items that assess the ability to read and think inferentially will require students to move beyond their basic understanding of a text to demonstrate a deeper, more complete understanding of what they’ve

read. These types of items can take many forms; for example, items may require students to draw a conclusion, make a reasonable prediction, understand the relationship between two parts of a text, understand how a text relates to their own lives, or understand the deeper meanings implied by a text.

Items that assess the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion will require students to recognize when an author uses opinions or persuasive techniques to influence the thinking or actions of readers or when an author is merely presenting facts. Fact/opinion items will be assessed only in expository or mixed selections in which it is clear that the author’s intent is to persuade.

Items that require students to support interpretations or conclusions with evidence from the text will include paraphrased ideas or sentences taken verbatim from the text. However, an individual item will never mix these answer-choice options; that is, paraphrased ideas and verbatim quotes will not be combined in the same item. Answer choices using words, phrases, or sentences taken verbatim from the text will be italicized.

To move beyond a basic understanding of a text or texts, students must compare, connect, and contrast ideas, themes, and issues from the text with one another and across texts. These items will most commonly be developed for paired selections, but may be developed for single selections when this kind of comparison is appropriate.

Items that assess a student’s ability to recognize that authors organize information in specific ways will focus on the organizational patterns authors choose to arrange and link ideas. It is important for students to know that authors organize ideas in various ways, depending upon how they want the reader to understand those ideas. Familiarity with common organizational patterns—for example, sequencing, description, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, and problem/solution—helps students learn how these patterns can affect the meaning of a text. If students are able to recognize this connection, they will develop their ability to comprehend, evaluate, and appreciate a wide variety of texts. For items of this type, students will be expected to identify general patterns rather than use specific terminology. For example, for an item assessing an understanding of an author’s use of sequencing, the student might be required to know that the author has presented ideas in the order in which they occur. However, the student would not be required to know the term *chronological*.

To determine how style, tone, and mood contribute to the effect of a text, students must be able to recognize how an author uses these elements to make a text unique. Students must understand that the way an author uses words, phrases, and sentences to make a text distinctive from others represents his/her style. The author creates a particular tone when his/her attitude toward the content is reflected in the text, affecting the way the student reads and understands it. For example, a text that has an objective tone would be very different from one that has a sentimental tone. Mood is somewhat different from tone: mood is the feeling or atmosphere the writer creates through the details or language he/she uses. Items of this type will be developed only when these elements are clearly present in the text. Items that assess style, tone, and mood will not be too sophisticated for eighth graders or too far beyond their developing understanding of author’s craft.

TAKS
GRADE 8 READING
Sample Selections and Items

A Man by Sunrise

My notes about what I am
reading

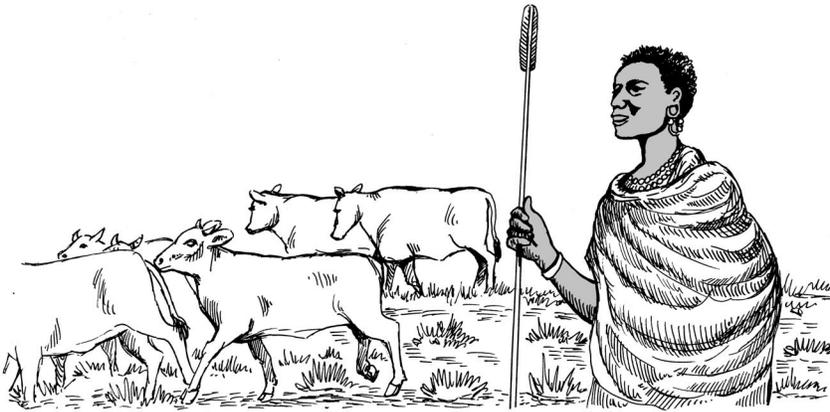
1 Lekeni opened his eyes and smiled. The day he had been waiting for had finally arrived! Before it was over, he would be a *morani*, the title given Masai boys when they turned 15 years old. For weeks now he had been working on a headdress made of ostrich plumes and eagle feathers. This evening his head would be shaved so that the headdress would fit just right. Then a tribal elder would place the headdress on him during a special ritual. Lekeni thought of the songs, dances, and stories that would be told, and he smiled again.

2 Rolling out of his bed of woven branches, Lekeni walked, bent over, to the fire where his mother and his sister Muriet were cooking cornmeal for the morning meal. His mother looked up at him and smiled. Her smile, usually so sunny, seemed a little sad. It was the last morning that he would be a *layoni*, a young boy. He looked around at the hut that had been his home for as long as he could remember. It was like all the others in the village—too low to stand up in, but warm and filled with the smells of food cooking. It was hard to believe he would not be living there anymore. Beginning that night, he would live in the *boma*, the circle of huts where boys who had crossed over into young manhood lived for five to seven years until they became *moran*, adult men. He was anxious to see how his life would change. Would he miss home, or would he be too busy training to be a warrior? The thought filled Lekeni with pride, and he imagined himself adorned with red paint, wearing the traditional braids and beads.

3 Lekeni walked to the doorway of the hut and peered out over the rolling plains. The sun had not yet risen, but the sky was awakening in a mixture of gold, purple, and red. He could see the silhouettes of giraffes and zebras in the distance against the morning sky. Their shadowy forms seemed to glide over the land. Far off he heard a rhinoceros lumbering across the ground. It seemed he could feel the earth rumbling under his feet as the mighty beast passed. Nearby, Muriet and her friends were getting ready to set off on their daily search for firewood. They would spend most of the day and walk many miles collecting firewood for the entire tribe. When they returned, they would spend the rest of the day milking the animals, fetching water, and cleaning the gourds for storing milk, honey, and cornmeal. Lekeni knew that his sister would be leaving home soon, too. Just last week his father had spoken with a young Masai warrior who hoped to marry Muriet.

4 Lekeni sniffed the air and was pleased that it held no hint of rain. He wanted the sky filled with bright stars for his special night. It was hard not to think about the exciting events that awaited him that evening, but Lekeni knew he must go about his work as if it were any other day. The sun was spilling over the horizon now, and it was time for him to gather his father's cattle and take them out into the savannah to graze. He was honored that his father deemed him worthy of such an important responsibility. The Masai measured their wealth by the number of cattle they owned, so Lekeni was careful to make sure that none of the cattle wandered away from the herd. Since the Masai believed it brought bad luck, Lekeni never counted the herd. Instead he had become familiar with each one and knew at a glance when any were missing or in trouble. He had learned how to deal with almost any problem the cattle might encounter. Once he had even helped a cow give birth to her calf. What an experience that had been!

5 Still, as Lekeni led the cows out from behind the thornbush wall, he found it difficult to concentrate on the herd. He tried hard to maintain discipline and keep his mind on his work. He knew he needed to keep a careful watch for predators, especially lions. Cattle thieves were also a big threat to the herd.



6 When they had finally reached the grazing area, Lekeni walked among the herd and checked each cow. He paid special attention to how their eyes looked, how they were walking, and whether they were eating. Then he carefully checked the area for any sign of danger.

7 When he was satisfied that the cattle were safe, Lekeni allowed himself some time to practice his spear throws, always keeping the herd in sight. He aimed at many different targets, and his spear almost always found its mark. It was a skill that he would need all of his life, so he

and his friends practiced whenever they had a chance. The Masai needed their weapons—and their excellent aim—for hunting game and for protecting their herds.

My notes about what I am
reading

- 8 Lekeni’s eyes gleamed as he thought of the night ahead. It would be an evening he would never forget. Lekeni knew that someday he would share this experience with his own sons around another campfire. He glanced up at the sun rising higher in the sky and wished it a swift journey so that darkness would come quickly. At sunset he would still be a child, but by the next sunrise the Masai would consider him a young man.

- 1 Read the dictionary entry below for the word discipline.

discipline \ 'di-sə-plən \ *n* **1.** punishment to correct or train **2.** area of study or learning **3.** control of oneself **4.** order based on authority

Which definition represents the meaning of discipline as used in paragraph 5?

- A Definition 1
- B Definition 2
- C* Definition 3
- D Definition 4

Objective 1

- 2 The fact that Lekeni’s father trusts him to care for the family’s cattle makes Lekeni proud because —

- A the work often involves great danger
- B* the cattle represent his family’s wealth
- C only warriors are allowed to herd cattle
- D the work is part of his training to become a warrior

Objective 1

- 3 What are paragraphs 4 through 6 of this story mainly about?

- A* How Lekeni watches over and takes care of his family’s cattle
- B Why Lekeni does not want it to rain that night
- C How Lekeni once helped a cow give birth to a calf
- D Why Lekeni’s father gives him an important responsibility

Objective 1

- 4 In paragraph 8, the author uses the words “wished it a safe journey” to communicate —

- A* Lekeni’s anticipation of the next day
- B the sun setting so quickly
- C Lekeni’s boredom with tending the cattle
- D the Masai traveling to a new home

Objective 1

- 5 Paragraphs 4, 5, and 6 are important because they show that —

- A* Lekeni deserves the confidence his father has in him
- B Lekeni’s father is a very important man in the tribe
- C Lekeni’s father will eventually give the cattle to Lekeni
- D Lekeni’s skill with spears and other weapons is improving

Objective 2

- 6** In paragraph 2, why does Lekeni’s mother’s smile seem somewhat sad?
- A** Lekeni is her favorite son.
 - B** Cornmeal is Lekeni’s favorite breakfast.
 - C*** It is the last day of Lekeni’s childhood.
 - D** She can tell Lekeni is sad.

Objective 2

- 7** Which of these statements reflects Lekeni’s attitude in this story?
- A** Lekeni is sad because he does not want to leave the home he has always known.
 - B** Lekeni thinks that guarding cattle is a job for a child.
 - C** Lekeni is worried that he will not succeed in becoming a warrior.
 - D*** Lekeni is looking forward to becoming a *morani* but wonders what it will be like.

Objective 2

- 8** The author uses the sun throughout the story to symbolize —
- A** a new place for the Masai to hunt
 - B*** Lekeni’s new status in the tribe
 - C** a new home for the Masai
 - D** Lekeni’s wish to stay in his mother’s hut

Objective 2

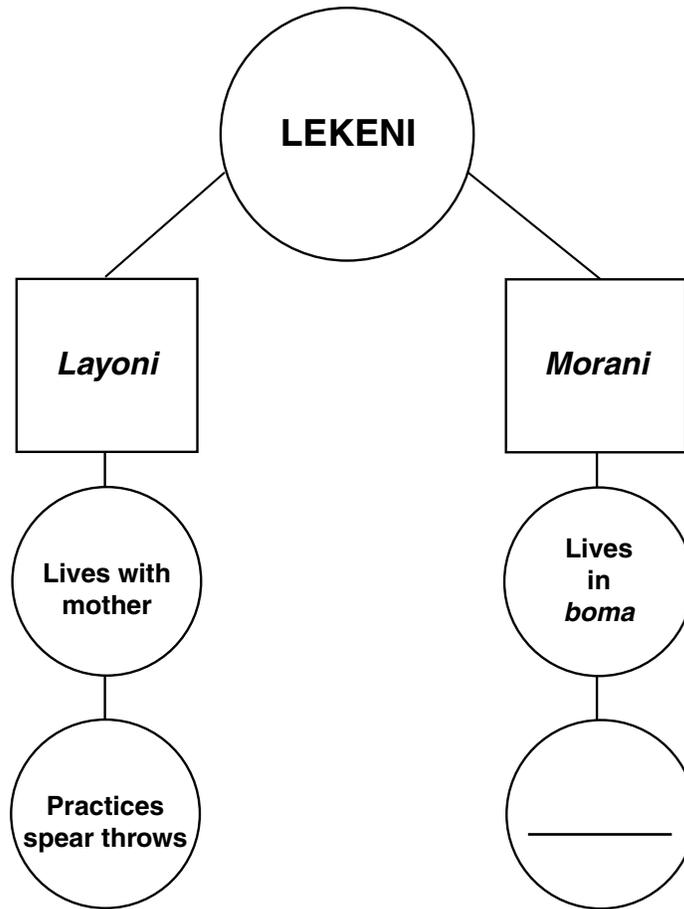
- 9** The author tells this story from Lekeni’s point of view to help the reader understand —
- A** the importance of the *morani* ritual
 - B** the duties of the Masai warriors
 - C** Lekeni’s responsibility to his family
 - D*** Lekeni’s internal conflict before the ritual

Objective 2

- 10** Why does Lekeni find it difficult to concentrate on the herd?
- A** He is worried about the cattle thieves in the area.
 - B** He is too busy watching for lions and other predators.
 - C** He is anxious to start practicing his spear throwing.
 - D*** He is thinking about what will happen that evening.

Objective 3

11 Read the following diagram of information about Lekení.



Which of the following ideas best completes the diagram?

- A Wears a feather headdress
- B* Trains to become a warrior
- C Cares for the cattle
- D Becomes a great hunter

Objective 3

12 The author’s choice of words in paragraph 1 of this story creates a mood of —

- A*** anticipation
- B** uncertainty
- C** concern
- D** triumph

Objective 4

13 From information about the Masai people provided in this story, the reader can conclude that —

- A** Masai warriors live in the *boma* until they are married
- B** most Masai boys do not live with their parents
- C*** Masai boys leave home when they reach 15 years of age
- D** most Masai families do not own cattle

Objective 4

14 Which sentence in the story shows the reader that the customs associated with crossing over into adulthood have been passed down from generation to generation?

- A*** *Lekeni knew that someday he would share this experience with his own sons around another campfire.*
- B** *He was honored that his father deemed him worthy of such an important responsibility.*
- C** *He looked around at the hut that had been his home for as long as he could remember.*
- D** *Lekeni thought of the songs, dances, and stories that would be told, and he smiled again.*

Objective 4