

# Assessment Content at Grade 8

All three contexts for reading were assessed at grade 8. The proportion of assessment questions devoted to reading for literary experience was lower than the proportion at grade 4. At grade 8, equal proportions of assessment questions were devoted to reading for literary experience and reading for information. The remaining assessment questions were devoted to reading to perform a task, which was allotted one-half as much time as either literary or informational reading. The 2007 eighth-grade reading assessment included a total of 13 reading passages and 140 questions.

## READING ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS AT GRADE 8

The following descriptions are abbreviated versions of the full achievement-level descriptions for grade 8 reading. The cut score depicting the lowest score representative of that level is noted in parentheses. The full descriptions can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/achieve.asp>.

**Basic** (243): Eighth-grade students performing at the *Basic* level should demonstrate a literal understanding of what they read and be able to make some interpretations. When reading text appropriate to eighth grade, they should be able to identify specific aspects of the text that reflect the overall meaning, extend the ideas in the text by making simple inferences, recognize and relate interpretations and connections among ideas in the text to personal experience, and draw conclusions based on the text.

**Proficient** (281): Eighth-grade students performing at the *Proficient* level should be able to show an overall understanding of the text, including inferential as well as literal information. When reading text appropriate to eighth grade, they should be able to extend the ideas in the text by making clear inferences from it, by drawing conclusions, and by making connections to their own experiences—including other reading experiences. *Proficient* eighth-graders should be able to identify some of the devices authors use in composing text.

**Advanced** (323): Eighth-grade students performing at the *Advanced* level should be able to describe the more abstract themes and ideas of the overall text. When reading text appropriate to eighth grade, they should be able to analyze both meaning and form and support their analyses explicitly with examples from the text, and they should be able to extend text information by relating it to their experiences and to world events. At this level, student responses should be thorough, thoughtful, and extensive.

## What Eighth-Graders Know and Can Do in Reading

The item map below illustrates the range of reading ability demonstrated by eighth-graders. For example, students performing in the middle of the *Basic* range (with an average score of 261) were likely to be able to identify the

appropriate text recommendation for a specific situation. Students performing near the top of the *Proficient* range (with an average score of 318) were likely to be able to infer and explain traits of a character using specific examples.

### GRADE 8 NAEP READING ITEM MAP

	Scale score	Question description
	500	
	~	
Advanced	365	<i>Use understanding of character to interpret author's purpose</i>
	357	Use examples to explain importance of setting to plot
	337	Search dense text to retrieve relevant explanatory facts
	329	Recognize narrative device and explain function in story
	326	Follow directions to fully complete task
	323	
Proficient	321	Integrate story details to explain central conflict
	318	Use specific examples to infer and explain character traits (shown on page 41)
	315	Apply text information to real life situation
	312	Infer and provide lesson based on historical biography
	308	Describe difficulty of a task in a different context
	299	<i>Recognize explicit information from highly detailed article</i> (shown on page 39)
	298	Use metaphor to interpret character
	293	<i>Recognize author's device to convey information related to a task</i>
	288	<i>Identify genre of story</i>
	284	<i>Recognize what story action reveals about a character</i>
281		
Basic	279	Use task directions and prior knowledge to make a comparison
	278	Infer character's action from plot outcome
	272	Describe central problem faced by the main character
	265	<i>Recognize author's purpose for including a quotation</i> (shown on page 38)
	262	<i>Identify causal relation between historical events</i>
	261	<i>Use context to identify meaning of vocabulary</i>
	261	<i>Identify appropriate text recommendation for a specific situation</i>
	259	Provide specific text information to support a generalization
	253	Read across text to provide explanation
	248	<i>Recognize information included by author to persuade</i>
	244	Support opinion with text information or related prior knowledge
	243	
	235	<i>Recognize explicitly stated reason for action in an article</i>
	230	<i>Recognize reason for character's central emotion</i>
218	<i>Identify inference based on part of the document</i>	
215	<i>Recognize an explicitly stated embedded detail</i>	
206	<i>Identify appropriate description of character's feelings</i>	
205	Use global understanding of the article to provide explanation (shown on page 40)	
	~	
	0	

NOTE: Regular type denotes a constructed-response question. *Italic* type denotes a multiple-choice question. The position of a question on the scale represents the average scale score attained by students who had a 65 percent probability of successfully answering a constructed-response question, or a 74 percent probability of correctly answering a four-option multiple-choice question. For constructed-response questions, the question description represents students' performance rated as completely correct. Scale score ranges for reading achievement levels are referenced on the map.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 Reading Assessment.

## Sample Reading Passage

The article below is an example of what an eighth-grader might read for information. The article uses a human interest approach to relate the investigative efforts of a middle school student and how her efforts helped her community. The four sample questions that follow were based on this reading passage.

### **KID FIGHTS CHEATER METERS AND WINS!**

*The true story of a girl with a stopwatch and a bag of nickels who uncovered a local parking scandal and helped change the laws of her state . . .*

Ellie Lammer wasn't trying to spark a revolt, she just wanted a haircut. That was in the fall of 1997. Ellie was 11 years old at the time, and she was getting her tresses trimmed in her hometown of Berkeley, California. When Ellie and her mom returned to their car, they found a parking ticket stuck to the windshield. It didn't seem possible: Less than an hour earlier, Ellie had pumped an hour's worth of coins into the meter. But now the needle was at zero, and Ellie's mom owed \$20.

Feeling cheated, Ellie dropped another nickel in the meter and twisted the knob. The needle clicked over to the four-minute mark. Ellie stared at her watch while her mom watched the meter. Less than three minutes later, all of the time had expired. There it was: proof that they'd been cheated. The city tore up the ticket when Ellie's mom complained about the meter.

But the experience left Ellie wondering how many other meters were inaccurate. Six months later, she decided to find out. She'd been looking around for a good science-fair project—and that meter in Berkeley still bothered her. So armed with a bag of nickels and a stopwatch, she hit the streets.

Ellie didn't have the time or money to test every meter, so she focused on a sample of 50 meters located in different parts of the city. To avoid inconveniencing motorists, she did her research after 6 P.M. and on Sundays, when the meters were not in use. She put in eight minutes' worth of nickels in each meter, then measured how much time it really gave.

The results were not pretty. Ellie's findings suggested that more than nine out of every ten meters in the city were inaccurate—and that every fourth parking meter was running out of time too quickly. With 3,600 parking meters in the city, that meant a lot of undeserved tickets. As Ellie wrote in her science-project report, "I learned which meters cheat you and which meters cheat the City of Berkeley. But I learned that almost all meters cheat someone, so beware."



When the science fair rolled around, Ellie presented her findings with computer-generated charts and graphs. Her classmates weren't very interested in her project. "It's not like they have to drive a car or put money in a parking meter," she explains. But her project was a huge hit with parents. More than 50 of them lined up that night to share their own parking-meter horror stories with Ellie.

After that, word about Ellie's meter project spread fast. Within a few weeks, Ellie got a call from local politician Diane Woolley. At the time, Berkeley was considering replacing its meters with more accurate digital ones. Ellie shared her findings at city hall, and the politicians were impressed. "We don't get reports this thorough when we pay consultants hundreds of thousands of dollars," one remarked. Based on Ellie's study, they decided to purchase 2,000 new meters.

The California state legislature also decided to crack down on cheater meters. After Ellie presented her findings, they enacted "Lammer's Law," which requires California's 26 counties to test the accuracy of parking meters. Any meter found to be inaccurate must be fixed or dismantled.

California Governor Pete Wilson signed the law on November 1, 1998. At the time, he commented, "Ellie's ingenuity and dedication has earned her the gratitude of those Californians who've dug through their purses and pockets in search of exact change to feed the meters, only to return to find their cars bearing the dreaded green envelope of a parking ticket."

Ellie became a celebrity. She was in newspapers all over the country and featured on local television news during the summer and fall of 1998. CNN did a story about her. She was even a guest on the *Late Show* with David Letterman. "It was kind of a weird moment of being a celebrity," she says.

Ellie, who's now an eighth-grader at Martin Luther King Middle School, is proud of the work she's done. But she doesn't see meter monitoring as her life's work: "Right now I don't mind being known as the parking-meter girl, but I'm sure that later in life I'll want something different."



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## Sample Question on Supporting Idea

This sample question asked students to take a critical perspective on a sentence from the article. The focus is not on the information itself, but on how that information functions in relation to other information in the article. This question was classified under the reading aspect, *examining content and structure*.

Fifty-nine percent of AI/AN eighth-graders selected the correct answer (choice C), recognizing that this supporting information was included to highlight the main subject of the article. Of the incorrect answers, choice B was selected by 20 percent of AI/AN eighth-graders, perhaps making a literal connection between the money amount and the word “budget.”

***“We don’t get reports this thorough when we pay consultants hundreds of thousands of dollars.”***

The author included this information to

- Ⓐ show how the city saves money
- Ⓑ describe the city budget
- Ⓒ emphasize Ellie’s achievement
- Ⓓ criticize the city of Berkeley

Percentage of eighth-grade students in each response category in 2007

Student group	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C	Choice D	Omitted
Nation (all students)	8	14	72	7	#
AI/AN students	10	20	59	11	#

# Rounds to zero.

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 Reading Assessment.



## Sample Question on Supporting Detail

This sample question asked students to negotiate the highly detailed text to focus on specific information related to the main idea of the article. This question was classified as *developing interpretation*.

Forty-seven percent of AI/AN eighth-graders selected the correct answer (choice A), demonstrating the ability to focus on and retrieve embedded detail. Of the incorrect answers, chosen most was option C, explicit numerical information about the meters.

Percentage of eighth-grade students in each response category in 2007

Student group	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C	Choice D	Omitted
Nation (all students)	52	14	30	4	#
AI/AN students	47	14	36	3	#

# Rounds to zero.

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 Reading Assessment.

According to the article, what did Ellie learn from doing her meter project?

- A Every fourth meter ran too quickly.
- B Nine out of ten digital meters were accurate.
- C 3,600 parking meters were inaccurate.
- D Almost none of the 50 meters ran too slowly.



## Sample Question on Major Idea

This sample question asked students to use their understanding of Ellie Lammer’s accomplishments to explain why her meter project attracted attention. This question was classified under the reading aspect, *developing interpretation*.

Eighty-five percent of AI/AN eighth-graders’ responses were rated as “Acceptable,” as they provided a text-based explanation that connected the success of Ellie’s meter project to the major idea of her discovery of the faulty meters.

Percentage of AI/AN eighth-grade students in each response category in 2007

Student group	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Omitted
Nation (all students)	88	10	1
AI/AN students	85	12	1

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. Detail may not sum to totals because a small percentage of responses that did not address the assessment task are not shown.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 Reading Assessment.

**Why did Ellie’s meter project attract so much attention? Explain why, using information from the article.**

**Response rated as “Acceptable”**

*Ellie's meter project attracted so much attention because other people also had the experience of being cheated like parents and they wanted to share their stories with her. It also attracted attention because well-paid adults couldn't figure it out and an eleven-year old did.*

## Sample Question on Drawing Conclusions

This sample question asked students to consider specific information provided in the article and to draw a conclusion from this information about the character of the person discussed in the article. This question was classified under the reading aspect, *developing interpretation*.

Student responses to this question were rated using the following four-level scoring guide:

**Extensive**—Responses use information in the article to provide a description of Ellie Lammer. Responses at this level provide at least two specific text-based examples of things that she did and explain what those things say about her character.

**Essential**—Responses at this level provide one example of something Ellie Lammer did and explain what that says about her character. Responses at this level may provide a generalization about Ellie’s actions without providing a specific example from the article; however, these responses do explain what her actions say about her character.

**Partial**—Responses at this level may focus on Ellie’s actions without explaining what the actions tell about her character.

**Unsatisfactory**—Responses at this level demonstrate no understanding of Ellie’s actions as described in the article or what those actions say about her character.

The first response on the right was rated “Extensive” because it uses two things that Ellie did as the bases for explaining two different aspects of her character. While the second response, rated “Essential,” gives two aspects of Ellie’s character, only the first is based on something Ellie did. Twenty-three percent of AI/AN eighth-graders provided a response rated as “Extensive” on this question.

Choose two things Ellie Lammer did and explain what those things tell about her. Use examples from the article to support your answer.

Response rated as “Extensive”

Ellie Lammer got cheated out of her money, and then decided that she wasn't going to give up, she was going to do experiments and take this problem to the next level. This shows perseverance, because she chose to keep going with the problem even though it was time-consuming, to help people.

She also chose to prove the meters wrong by fixing them using a stop watch. This shows intelligence, because she knew what methods to use in order to prove the meters inaccurate.

Response rated as “Essential”

She did her science fair project on meters to see how many other people got cheated. Which means she cares about other people and not just her self. At the end of her article it said she enjoyed being a super star, but wanted something more in life. She wants to be someone important.

Percentage of eighth-grade students in each response category in 2007

Student group	Extensive	Essential	Partial	Unsatisfactory	Omitted
Nation (all students)	32	17	41	5	5
AI/AN students	23	15	48	7	6

NOTE: AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. Detail may not sum to totals because a small percentage of responses that did not address the assessment task are not shown.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 Reading Assessment.