



**The New York City  
Department of Education**

**Grade 6 English Language Arts  
(ELA) Benchmark Assessment**

**Teacher Guide  
Fall 2012**

**November 26, 2012–January 11, 2013**



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## Test Design and Instructional Purpose

The English Language Arts (ELA) Benchmark Assessment is designed to help you collect *some* information about your students' progress toward meeting the Common Core expectations for sixth grade.

There are two ELA Benchmark Assessments available—one for the fall and one for the winter. The question types and complexity of the texts reflect what we anticipate will be on the Grade 6 Common Core Learning Standards-aligned New York State test over the next two years. The test contains the following item types:

- Multiple choice
- Short answer constructed response
- Extended response/performance task

These items are designed to provide evidence of students' skills in reading comprehension, critical thinking, and answering text-dependent questions. The extended response/performance task items require comparison, analysis, synthesis, and/or opinion or argumentation.

These Benchmark Assessments provide an objective measure of your students' performance on cognitively rich tasks based on complex grade-level texts without scaffolding or support. In other words, these assessments provide information on what your students can accomplish independently and their mastery of the Common Core Learning Standards. They look at how well students can transfer skills they've learned to new situations. Additionally, the assessments allow grade-level teams to look at student work across classes to identify learning trends and to develop strategies to address key areas of need.

No single test, including this Benchmark Assessment, can cover all skills and concepts contained within the Common Core Learning Standards. Therefore, it is best to analyze this assessment along with evidence collected from daily observation, class work, homework, and school- or teacher-made assessments.

## Test Content

The ELA Benchmark Assessment is designed to take two full 40-minute class periods. On the first day, students read two passages and answer 6–10 multiple-choice questions and two short-response questions. On the second day, students re-read the same two passages and complete an extended response/performance task linking the two passages.

The passages and questions of the ELA Benchmark Assessment are designed to embody three key shifts at the heart of the ELA Literacy Standards:

- *Reading and writing grounded in evidence from the text(s).* The multiple-choice, short-response, and extended-response/performance task questions are designed to provide students opportunities to make explicit the evidence that supports their close analysis of a specific text and, in some cases, of multiple texts.

- *Regular practice with complex text and academic vocabulary.* Texts were selected in accordance with the quantitative and qualitative requirements of the Common Core Learning Standards.
- *Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts.* Text passages represent a greater emphasis on nonfiction and informational texts.<sup>1</sup>

## Passages

This Grade 6 Benchmark Assessment has two passages:

- *Telling Plastic to Bag It:* an informational passage that argues in favor of a ban on plastic bags.
- *Plastic-Bag Ban Full of Holes:* an informational passage that presents arguments opposing bans on plastic bags.

These passages were chosen to align to genres and text types specified in the Grade 6 PARCC Model Content Framework.<sup>2</sup>

## Standards Alignment

The items associated with this assessment are aligned to the following Common Core Learning Standards:

6.RI.1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

6.RI.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

6.RI.6. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

6.W.1. Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> In Grades 3–5, the Fall Benchmark Assessments focus on fiction passages, and the Winter Benchmark Assessments focus on informational and nonfiction passages. In Grades 6–8, both the Fall and Winter Benchmark Assessments focus on informational and nonfiction passages.

<sup>2</sup> The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a collaborative effort among 23 states to develop a common set of K–12 assessments in English and Math that align to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The PARCC Model Content Frameworks, designed by content experts, are voluntary resources to support implementation of the CCSS and to guide development of assessments in Grades 3–12. For more information, refer to:  
[http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCC%20MCF%20for%20ELA%20Literacy\\_Fall%202011%20Release%20%28rev%29.pdf](http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCC%20MCF%20for%20ELA%20Literacy_Fall%202011%20Release%20%28rev%29.pdf)

If you have any questions, contact the NYC Acuity Helpdesk at 866-NYC-6550 or [NYCAcuity@ctb.com](mailto:NYCAcuity@ctb.com).

6.L.1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

6.L.4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 6 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

## Rubrics for Scoring Short-Response and Extended-Response/Performance Task Items

### Item # 3

| Key Elements  |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b><u>Inferences from the article:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mark Daniels may be opposed to bans because he works for a plastics maker.</li> <li>2. The article says that bans jeopardize jobs in the plastic-bag manufacturing industry, and Mark Daniels may be worried that he will lose his job.</li> <li>3. or any other reasonable text-based response</li> </ol> <p><b><u>Details from the article:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Most Americans reuse plastic bags as garbage bags, to pack school lunches, and to store household items.</li> <li>2. People will use less environmentally friendly options, such as paper bags or reusable bags.</li> <li>3. or any other reasonable text-based response</li> </ol> |   |
| Criteria  |   |
| 2   | <p><b>Proficient</b></p> <p>A <i>proficient</i> response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gives sufficient evidence of the ability to give inferences and/or details to support an opinion in the text</li> <li>• Includes inferences and/or details that make clear reference to the text</li> <li>• Adequately supports the inferences and/or details with clearly relevant information from the text</li> </ul> |
| 1   | <p><b>Partial</b></p> <p>A <i>partial</i> response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gives limited evidence of the ability to give an inference or detail to support an opinion in the text</li> <li>• Includes at least one inference or detail that makes reference to the text</li> <li>• Supports the inference(s) or detail(s) with limited information from the text</li> </ul>                               |
| 0   | <p><b>No credit</b></p> <p>A response gets no credit if it provides no evidence of the ability to give an inference or detail to support an opinion in the text, includes no relevant information from the text, or is vague.</p>   |
| Exemplars   |   |
| 2   | <p>Mark Daniels opposes the bans on plastic bags because he thinks plastic bags are being reused and are better for the environment than paper or reusable bags. He says that most Americans reuse their plastic bags for garbage or to pack school lunches. He points out that if there was a ban on plastic bags, Americans would be forced to use paper bags or reusable bags that are less friendly to the environment.</p> |
| 1   | <p>Mark Daniels opposes the ban because people would start using paper bags. Paper bags take a lot of energy to make.</p>   |
| 0   | <p>Mark Daniels opposes the ban because plastic bags are not good.</p>  |

Item # 6

| <b>Key Elements</b>  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b><u>The author's argument from the article:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The author does not believe that the ban is helpful.</li> <li>2. The author believes the best answer to the paper or plastic question is neither.</li> <li>3. or any other reasonable text-based response</li> </ol> <p><b><u>Details from the article that support the author's argument:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Paper and compostable bags cost more than plastic bags to produce. Plastic bags cost about a penny each, paper bags costs about a nickel, and compostable bags can run as high as 10 cents each.</li> <li>2. Compostable bags may not be available quickly.</li> <li>3. Paper bags generate 70% more air pollutants and 50 times more water pollutants than plastic bags.</li> <li>4. Paper bags require four times as much energy to produce and 85 times as much energy to recycle as plastic bags.</li> <li>5. Paper takes up nine times as much space in landfills as plastic does, and it doesn't break down there at a substantially faster rate.</li> <li>6. The better solution is for each person to reuse plastic bags or buy a canvas sack to carry goods.</li> <li>7. Public education campaigns about littering and recycling can help more than ineffective bans on products.</li> <li>8. or any other reasonable text-based response</li> </ol> |   |
| <b>Criteria</b>  |   |
| 2  | <p><b>Proficient</b><br/>A <i>proficient</i> response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gives sufficient evidence of the ability to determine an author's point of view and explain how it is conveyed in the text</li> <li>• Includes specific details that make clear reference to the text</li> <li>• Adequately supports the details with clearly relevant information from the text</li> </ul> |
| 1  | <p><b>Partial</b><br/>A <i>partial</i> response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gives limited evidence of the ability to determine an author's point of view and explain how it is conveyed in the text</li> <li>• Includes at least one detail that makes reference to the text</li> <li>• Supports the detail(s) with limited information from the text</li> </ul>                              |
| 0  | <p><b>No credit</b><br/>A response gets no credit if it provides no evidence of the ability to determine an author's point of view and explain how it is conveyed in the text, includes no relevant information from the text, or is vague.</p>   |
| <b>Exemplars</b>   |   |
| 2  | <p>The author argues that banning plastic bags is not the best solution. He gives many reasons to support his argument. One reason is that the process of making other types of bags (paper, compostable) is more expensive. Plastic bags cost about a penny to make, but paper bags cost about five cents each, and compostable bags can be as high as ten cents each to</p>                                   |

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|   | make. Also, the environment would be affected because more energy is needed to make and recycle paper bags. The author believes that the better solution is for people to reuse plastic bags or buy a canvas sack to carry goods. |
| 1 | The author argues that a ban causes too many problems. The environment would be affected because paper takes up more space in landfills than plastic bags.  |
| 0 | The author doesn't like plastic bags.   |

**Item # 7**

| Key Elements  |  |
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| <p><b><u>Details from both articles that support the ban:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Plastic bags increase America's dependence on oil.</li> <li>2. Plastic bags take up a lot of space in landfills.</li> <li>3. Plastic bags mostly end up as litter in our cities.</li> <li>4. Plastic bags do not decompose quickly.</li> <li>5. Plastic bags can contaminate soil and water.</li> <li>6. Plastic bags are dangerous to marine life that may eat them.</li> <li>7. A lot of money is spent cleaning up the litter of plastic bags.</li> <li>8. Cities where plastic bags are banned have less litter.</li> <li>9. or any other reasonable text-based response</li> </ol> <p><b><u>Details from both articles that do not support the ban:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Many people reuse plastic bags for other purposes.</li> <li>2. Paper bags require more energy to produce, transport, and recycle.</li> <li>3. Reusable bags are not recyclable.</li> <li>4. Many employees who help to produce plastic bags would lose their jobs.</li> <li>5. Paper and compostable bags cost more to produce than plastic bags.</li> <li>6. or any other reasonable text-based response</li> </ol> |  |
| Criteria  |  |
| 4   | <p><b>Meets Standard (Meets criteria at grade level):</b></p> <p><b>Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides introduction to claim(s).</li> <li>• Reasons and evidence are <b>clearly</b> organized.</li> </ul> <p><b>Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources.</li> <li>• Demonstrates an understanding of the topic or text.</li> </ul> <p><b>Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationship among claim(s) and reasons.</li> </ul> |

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|   | <p><b>Establish and maintain a formal style.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishes and maintains a formal style.</li> </ul> <p><b>Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.</li> </ul> <p><b>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</li> </ul>   |
| 3 | <p><b>Near Standard</b> (Mostly meets criteria):</p> <p><b>Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides a <b>mostly</b> adequate introduction to claim(s).</li> <li>Most reasons and evidence are organized clearly.</li> </ul> <p><b>Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Mostly</b> supports claim(s) with mostly clear and relevant reasons and evidence, using several credible sources.</li> <li>Demonstrates understanding of the topic or text with few inaccuracies.</li> </ul> <p><b>Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses words, phrases, and clauses to <b>mostly</b> clarify the relationship among claim(s) and reasons.</li> </ul> <p><b>Establish and maintain a formal style.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishes and maintains a formal style in <b>most</b> of the text.</li> </ul> <p><b>Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides a concluding statement or section that <b>mostly</b> follows from the argument presented.</li> </ul> <p><b>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates fairly good command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</li> </ul> |
| 2 | <p><b>Approaching Standard</b> (Partially meets criteria):</p> <p><b>Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides a <b>partial</b> introduction to claim(s).</li> <li>Some reasons and evidence are organized clearly, while others remain unclear.</li> </ul>  |

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|   | <p><b>Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Partially</b> supports claim(s) with some clear and relevant reasons and evidence, using a few credible sources.</li> <li>• Demonstrates some understanding of the topic or text.</li> </ul> <p><b>Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses transition words and phrases to <b>partially</b> clarify the relationship among claim(s) and reasons.</li> </ul> <p><b>Establish and maintain a formal style.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes and maintains a formal style in <b>portions</b> of the text.</li> </ul> <p><b>Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a concluding statement or section that <b>partially</b> follows from the argument presented.</li> </ul> <p><b>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates partial command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</li> </ul>   |
| 1 | <p><b>Below Standard</b> (Barely meets criteria):</p> <p><b>Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a <b>minimal</b> introduction to claim(s).</li> <li>• Reasons and evidence are unclear.</li> </ul> <p><b>Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Barely</b> supports claim(s) with reasons and/or evidence or attempts to support claims with unclear reasons and/or irrelevant evidence.</li> <li>• Demonstrates <b>minimal</b> understanding of the topic or text.</li> </ul> <p><b>Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses simple transition words (e.g., <i>next</i>, <i>since</i>) in an attempt to clarify the relationship among claim(s) and reasons.</li> </ul> <p><b>Establish and maintain a formal style.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes and maintains a <b>minimal and sporadic</b> use of formal style.</li> </ul> <p><b>Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a concluding statement or section that <b>barely</b> follows from the argument presented.</li> </ul> <p><b>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English</b></p> |

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
|                  | <p><b>grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates minimal command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</li> </ul>   |
| 0                | <p><b>Far Below Standard:</b></p> <p><b>Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides no introduction of claim(s).</li> <li>• Writing contains no organization of reasons and evidence.</li> </ul> <p><b>Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides <b>no</b> support for claim(s).</li> <li>• Demonstrates no understanding of the topic or text.</li> </ul> <p><b>Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses no transition words, phrases, or clauses to clarify the relationship among claim(s) and reasons.</li> </ul> <p><b>Establish and maintain a formal style.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not establish and maintain a formal style.</li> </ul> <p><b>Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides no concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.</li> </ul> <p><b>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates no command of standard English writing mechanics.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Exemplars</b> |   |
| 4                | <p>I agree that plastic bags should be banned in New York City. Why? Because people won't change unless you shake things up and make them change. Just asking people to reuse or recycle isn't enough.</p> <p>The articles make it clear that there are many reasons why plastic bags are not good. They are made from oil and we don't need to use more oil. They make up way too much of our landfill waste. They are a huge portion of the litter here and around the world. In South Africa, they call them "the national flower" because they "sprout" everywhere. The second article explains that it takes a thousand years for them to break down, so they are with us for what might as well be forever! Worst of all, some animals like whales may be dying because they are eating them. Why would anyone want to use a product that causes this many problems?</p> <p>I know that the author of the second article says that if people were just educated and reused their bags, the problem would be better solved that way, but he's wrong. There are tons of reuse and recycle ads on TV, and we are always learning about this in school, but the problem still exists. If we ban the bags, people will have to make other choices, like reusable and washable canvas bags.</p>   |

|   |  |
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| 3 | <p>I don't agree that we should ban plastic bags in New York City. Banning something never works. People just find ways around a ban.</p> <p>The articles mention that plastic bags should be reused instead. I agree. If you ban them, people will switch to paper. That's no help because paper is expensive and doesn't break down fast, either. I agree with the author of the second text. He says that educating people will be better. If you teach people to reseyecul you won't need to ban plastic bags.</p> <p>In conclusion, I say no ban!</p> |
| 2 | <p>I think plastic bags should be banned. They our litter and fill up landfills. They can be eaten, by sea animals. I think plastic bags are dangerous.</p>  |
| 1 | <p>I say no ban. There aren't good enough reasons for a ban. No good for anyone.</p>   |
| 0 | <p>I don't like them much.</p>   |









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