

Grade 9

Nonfiction Passage for Selected and Constructed Response Questions

Priority and Supporting Standards:

By the end of grade 9, students will read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range (9.R.I.10), according to Unit 5.

Students will develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose or audience (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 9-10) (9.W.5), according to Unit 6.

Students will present information, findings and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task (9.S.L.4), according to Unit 7.

This assessment fits three units of study:

Shaping, Developing, and Supporting Meaning by Understanding our World (Unit 5)

Analyzing and Using Varied Crafts and Structures (Unit 6)

Extending Ideas and Presenting Meaning (Unit 7).

Politics 101, Without the Classroom

By Ian Lovett

LOS ANGELES — Alexis Greco has not attended a class all semester at Occidental College here. She has not so much as thumbed through a book. No time, she said.

Instead, Ms. Greco, a senior, has spent nearly all of her waking hours at the Senate campaign headquarters for Mazie Hirono in Honolulu, where she has been working as the volunteer coordinator.

Her reading has consisted of endless lists of phone numbers and tough-to-pronounce Hawaiian names, which she gives to volunteers to call. When she feels cooped up inside, she might walk door to door to ask voters if they plan to support Ms. Hirono, a Democratic congresswoman who is battling a tough Republican challenger for a Senate seat her party has held for decades.

“The sheer number of hours is really hard,” said Ms. Greco, 21. “But I wouldn’t change my decision to come here for the world, even knowing that it’s been overwhelming at times.”

Ms. Greco is one of the 32 Occidental undergraduates who fanned out across the country this fall on “campaign semester,” a program that allows students to earn a semester of college credit for working on political campaigns.

Campaign semester, which began in 2008 (when Occidental’s most famous former student, Barack Obama, was running for the presidency), is apparently the only program of its kind in the country, college officials said. And this year, it has offered students a front-row view of one of the tightest presidential contests in memory.

“You can read all the textbooks in the world about campaigns and elections, but until you’ve worked on one, you don’t realize how chaotic and exciting it is,” said Peter Dreier, a professor of politics and chairman of the urban and environmental policy department at Occidental. After Election Day, the students return to campus, where they take part in a seminar, discussing their experiences and reading about the more theoretical aspects of campaigns. “We try to get them to think analytically about it,” Mr. Dreier said. “We are a college after all.”

For the first 10 weeks of the semester, though, all learning is hands-on. Fueled by coffee and adrenaline, students put in 15-hour days, all unpaid, often doing unglamorous grunt work that may not be exactly as intellectually rigorous as parsing the nuances of Immanuel Kant.

Tyler Rosen, a sophomore, has been working in the finance department for Senator Sherrod Brown, a Democrat running for re-election in Ohio. On weekends, as a break from researching donors, he canvasses, walking the suburbs outside Cincinnati.

He said he had been buoyed through the long hours by the chance to exert some influence — and in Ohio, any influence, however small, could prove profound — on the arc of this country's history. "This is a battleground state, and it does feel like a battle," Mr. Rosen said. "I feel like I'm making a difference."

For Ms. Greco, the lessons in Hawaii have been about work ethic and independence.

Like the other students, she had to find her own place to live. And when she grew bored of answering phones and refilling coolers, she spoke to the campaign field director, who invited her to sit in on senior staff meetings, and soon put her in charge of a daily e-mail to Ms. Hirono's supporters in Washington.

"I've learned that in the workplace it's O.K. to ask for things," she said. "I wanted to be more aware of what the campaign looked like from a bird's-eye view. And you can learn so much just being around senior staff."

Students at Occidental tend to be Democrats, so the college makes a point of encouraging those with more conservative views to take advantage of the program.

While Mr. Rosen and Ms. Greco were already set in their political beliefs when they arrived, Shannon O'Hara was not initially even sure which party she wanted to support when she signed up for campaign semester.

She eventually decided on Linda Lingle, the moderate Republican former governor of Hawaii who is now Ms. Hirono's opponent in the Senate race. And her time with the Lingle campaign has solidified her political views.

Sitting in a car with Ms. Lingle soon after she arrived in Honolulu, Ms. O'Hara was voicing her frustration with party labels, which left some voters unwilling to consider supporting the former governor. Ms. Lingle offered her some advice.

"She said: 'Remain an independent thinker. Never let someone define you. Never let a party define you. Remain independent,' " Ms. O'Hara said.

Mr. Dreier said he hoped that for some students, the work they did this semester would become a calling, as it did for Margot Seigle, who spent the fall of 2008 working on the Obama campaign in Virginia.

After only a few weeks, she was sent off on her own to run a new campaign office in a rural area of the state. The town remained largely segregated, she said, and one neighborhood had such a long history of racism that the campaign would not send volunteers there to canvass.

But Ms. Seigle said disparate segments of the community all got involved in the campaign. After her graduation, Ms. Seigle spent three years organizing residents of public housing in New York, putting some of the skills she learned on the Obama campaign to use and hoping to foster that same sense of community.

“People that would never have spoken before really came together,” she said of her experience in Virginia. “That was one of my favorite things.”

In less than a week, the students will begin heading back to campus. For most of them, it will be, well, kind of a letdown. And the ones whose candidates lost, Mr. Dreier said, often return depressed and unmotivated.

“They have been in these incredibly exciting, close races where everything matters, and now reading books and writing papers seems less real,” he said. “But they all overcome it. At the very least, they will never feel overworked again.”

Michelle Broder Van Dyke contributed reporting from Honolulu.

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Selected Response Questions – Nonfiction

Politics 101, Without the Classroom

By Ian Lovett

1. What does the word “thumbed” mean as used in the opening paragraph?
 - a. read
 - b. turned
 - c. skimmed
 - d. discussed

2. Based on information in the article, what inference can be made about Ms. Greco’s education?
 - a. It is not traditional.
 - b. She learned while not in a traditional setting.
 - c. She was exhausted by the hours spent working.
 - d. It is not an education that suits everyone.

3. What does the word “fanned” mean as used in the fifth paragraph?
 - a. spread out
 - b. visited
 - c. walked
 - d. toured

4. Based on information in the story, what conclusion can be made about students’ learning?
 - a. It takes more time and effort.
 - b. It takes less time and effort.
 - c. It provides knowledge typically found in books and from teachers’ notes.
 - d. It provides knowledge not typically found in books or teachers’ notes.

5. What relationship does the title have with the content?
 - a. It alludes to the name of a typical college course and explains the difference.
 - b. It alludes to the hands-on, direct approach this course espouses.
 - c. It refers to the political election only.
 - d. It refers to the topic being studied.

6. What effect does the third person point of view have on the article?
 - a. It attempts to offer a biased opinion.
 - b. It provides insight into the author's motives.
 - c. It attempts to offer a non-biased presentation of facts.
 - d. It provides details about a college opportunity beneficial to all.

7. What diction or syntax best describes the author's point?
 - a. "He said he had been buoyed through the long hours by the chance to exert some influence"
 - b. "She has not so much as thumbed through a book"
 - c. "When she feels cooped up inside, she might walk door to door to ask voters if they plan to support Ms. Hirono"
 - d. "On weekends, as a break from researching donors, he canvasses, walking the suburbs outside Cincinnati."

8. What does the word "canvasses" mean as used in the article?
 - a. talking to people on the street
 - b. walking around neighborhoods
 - c. talking to politicians in the area
 - d. going door-to-door talking to people

Grade 9

Constructed Response Questions – Nonfiction

9. Analyze the advantages and disadvantages of a "program that allows students to earn a semester of college credit for working on political campaigns" (Lovett) rather than sit in the traditional classroom. Based on information from the article, cite directly at least three advantages and at least disadvantages.

10. Support, refute or qualify the idea of students working hands-on in field rather than learn in a traditional classroom setting. Utilize at least three valid sources in addition to the New York Times article as evidence for your opinion.