



**NATIONAL ASSESSMENT
OF EDUCATIONAL
PROGRESS**

Reading
2009

Grade 8 Released Items

Alligator Poem

by Mary Oliver

I knelt down
at the edge of the water,
and if the white birds standing
in the tops of the trees whistled any warning
I didn't understand,
I drank up to the very moment it came
crashing toward me,
its tail flailing
like a bundle of swords,
slashing the grass,
and the inside of its cradle-shaped mouth
gaping,
and rimmed with teeth—
and that's how I almost died
of foolishness
in beautiful Florida.
But I didn't.
I leaped aside, and fell,
and it streamed past me, crushing everything in its path
as it swept down to the water
and threw itself in,
and, in the end,
this isn't a poem about foolishness
but about how I rose from the ground
and saw the world as if for the second time,
the way it really is.
The water, that circle of shattered glass,
healed itself with a slow whisper
and lay back
with the back-lit light of polished steel,
and the birds, in the endless waterfalls of the trees,
shook open the snowy pleats of their wings, and drifted away
while, for a keepsake, and to steady myself,
I reached out,
I picked the wild flowers from the grass around me—
blue stars
and blood-red trumpets
on long green stems—
for hours in my trembling hands they glittered
like fire.

From New and Selected Poems: Volume One
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NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Literary	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	MC	8	Easy

1. What does the poem mainly describe?
 - A. A personal experience
 - B. An unusual dream
 - C. The danger of alligators
 - D. Traveling in Florida

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A*	Choice B	Choice C	Choice D	Omitted
National	79%	5%	11%	5%	#
Delaware	80%	8%	9%	3%	1%

Content Area: Literary	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Locate/Recall	MC	8	Easy

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2. What is the speaker doing at the beginning of the poem?
 - A. Watching the birds
 - B. Wading in a stream
 - C. Drinking the water
 - D. Picking wildflowers

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C*	Choice D	Omitted
National	25%	8%	65%	1%	#
Delaware	19%	8%	70%	2%	1%

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content area: Literary	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	SCR	8	Medium

3. The following lines are from the poem:

*I drank up to the very moment it came
crashing toward me,
its tail flailing
like a bundle of swords,
slashing the grass,
and the inside of its cradle-shaped mouth
gaping,
and rimmed with teeth—*

Choose an image from these lines and explain what it shows about the speaker's experience with the alligator.

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Little/No Comprehension	Partial Comprehension	Full Comprehension	Omitted	Off task
National	21%	48%	29%	1%	#
Delaware	15%	45%	37%	2%	1%

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Full Comprehension - Student Responses

The following lines are from the poem:

*I drank up to the very moment it came
crashing toward me,
its tail flailing
like a bundle of swords,
slashing the grass,
and the inside of its cradle-shaped mouth
gaping,
and rimmed with teeth—*

Choose an image from these lines and explain what it shows about the speaker's experience with the alligator.

The line that says, "like a bundle of swords..." showed how close the author must have been to the alligator to see the individual scales and spines. The "rimmed with teeth" line illustrates the same point.

Choose an image from these lines and explain what it shows about the speaker's experience with the alligator.

The speaker's experience with the alligator was a bad one. It was bad because the alligator kept creeping up with its tail flailing and its mouth wide-open.

Scorer Comments:

Both responses provide an image from these lines and explain what it shows about the speaker's experience with the alligator. The first response uses two images that show the proximity of the alligator. The second response uses an image to explain how bad the experience was.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Partial Comprehension - Student Responses

The following lines are from the poem:

*I drank up to the very moment it came
crashing toward me,
its tail flailing
like a bundle of swords,
slashing the grass,
and the inside of its cradle-shaped mouth
gaping,
and rimmed with teeth—*

Choose an image from these lines and explain what it shows about the speaker's experience with the alligator.

"like a bundle of swords"
the alligator has a dangerous tail

Choose an image from these lines and explain what it shows about the speaker's experience with the alligator.

This section from the poem tells me that
the speaker's experience with an alligator
was frightening. It also shows me that
speaker needs to be more careful and watch
what they are doing.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides an image and explains what it means but makes no connection to the speaker's experience. The second response explains the speaker's experience but does not choose an image to support this explanation.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Little or No Comprehension - Student Responses

The following lines are from the poem:

*I drank up to the very moment it came
crashing toward me,
its tail flailing
like a bundle of swords,
slashing the grass,
and the inside of its cradle-shaped mouth
gaping,
and rimmed with teeth—*

Choose an image from these lines and explain what it shows about the speaker's experience with the alligator.

The boy is by a lake, he falls into the water
so while he is in there, he sees the crocodile
under the water. The boy freaks out and
gets out, the crocodile won't hurt him
though. That is the image I see in my
head according to this passage.

Choose an image from these lines and explain what it shows about the speaker's experience with the alligator.

He is very creative and he uses a lot
of alliteration.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides a misinterpretation of what happens in the poem that does not answer the question. The second response provides an unsupported personal opinion about the author, followed by a reference to a poetic technique not relevant to the question.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Literary	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	SCR	8	Medium

4. After the alligator has gone, the speaker says:

*The water, that circle of shattered glass,
healed itself with a slow whisper
and lay back
with the back-lit light of polished steel,
and the birds, in the endless waterfalls of the trees,
shook open the snowy pleats of their wings, and drifted away*

Explain what these lines show about how the speaker views nature at this point in the poem.

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Little/No Comprehension	Partial Comprehension	Full Comprehension	Omitted	Off task
National	31%	32%	35%	2%	#
Delaware	26%	34%	39%	2%	#

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Full Comprehension - Student Responses

After the alligator has gone, the speaker says:

*The water, that circle of shattered glass,
healed itself with a slow whisper
and lay back
with the back-lit light of polished steel,
and the birds, in the endless waterfalls of the trees,
shook open the snowy pleats of their wings, and drifted away*

Explain what these lines show about how the speaker views nature at this point in the poem.

*This speaker views nature
as it repairs itself after
something. The water healed
itself, the birds in the trees,
and endless waterfall.*

Explain what these lines show about how the speaker views nature at this point in the poem.

*It explains that now she views it
with awareness and appreciation.
She sees it as beauty and life.
She appreciates the birds and the
nature. She understand that it's more
than just a tree or water, that it's
life.*

Scorer Comments:

Both responses use these lines to explain how the speaker views nature at this point in the poem. The first response focuses on nature healing itself. The second response focuses on the speaker's appreciation of nature's beauty.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Partial Comprehension - Student Responses

After the alligator has gone, the speaker says:

*The water, that circle of shattered glass,
healed itself with a slow whisper
and lay back
with the back-lit light of polished steel,
and the birds, in the endless waterfalls of the trees,
shook open the snowy pleats of their wings, and drifted away*

Explain what these lines show about how the speaker views nature at this point in the poem.

the speaker in my opinion
views nature as a peaceful
place with animals surrounding
them. A place where nothing
can go wrong. A place to
relax

Explain what these lines show about how the speaker views nature at this point in the poem.

The speaker is looking at the ripples in the water as
being glass. She said that it was shiny like steel.
She is saying that the trees' branches are full of
leaves and the never end like a water just
falling and falling. The birds wings looked like
snow floating in the air.

Scorer Comments:

The first response focuses on the peacefulness of nature, but the explanation is general. The second response interprets these lines but does not explain what they show about the speaker's view of nature.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Little or No Comprehension - Student Responses

After the alligator has gone, the speaker says:

*The water, that circle of shattered glass,
healed itself with a slow whisper
and lay back
with the back-lit light of polished steel,
and the birds, in the endless waterfalls of the trees,
shook open the snowy pleats of their wings, and drifted away*

Explain what these lines show about how the speaker views nature at this point in the poem.

In the poem "Alligator Poem" by Mary Oliver, the speaker views nature as "an endless waterfall of trees".

Explain what these lines show about how the speaker views nature at this point in the poem.

The speaker views nature as a dangerous place at this point in the poem.

Scorer Comments:

The first response repeats a line from the poem but does not explain it. The second response provides an incorrect interpretation of the poem.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Literary	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Critique/Evaluate	MC	8	Easy

5. On page 3, the speaker says, "and, in the end, this isn't a poem about foolishness."
What is the purpose of these lines in relation to the rest of the poem?
- A. To signal a turning point in the poem
 - B. To emphasize the speaker's confusion
 - C. To focus the reader on the first part of the poem
 - D. To show the speaker was embarrassed

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A*	Choice B	Choice C	Choice D	Omitted
National	65%	13%	17%	5%	1%
Delaware	63%	15%	16%	5%	2%

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Literary	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	ECR	8	Medium

6. Describe what happens to the speaker of the poem and explain what this experience makes the speaker realize.

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category						
Public Schools	Unsatisfactory	Partial	Essential	Extensive	Omitted	Off task
National	8%	56%	19%	15%	2%	#
Delaware	7%	49%	19%	20%	4%	#

Extensive - Student Responses

Describe what happens to the speaker of the poem and explain what this experience makes the speaker realize.

The speaker was drinking some water from a lake, when an alligator comes up with its mouth open ready to eat the speaker. The speaker falls to the ground and avoids the alligator. After that event, the speaker realizes how lucky he is to be alive. He looks around and sees the nature's true beauty. How beautiful the birds and flowers are. How the water just ripples back to normal where the alligator just was.

Describe what happens to the speaker of the poem and explain what this experience makes the speaker realize.

The speaker is attacked by an Alligator while getting a drink and narrowly escapes. It makes him realize that although nature is beautiful it is also dangerous so caution is important.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides narrative details to describe the speaker's experience and how it leads to her realization about luck and appreciation of nature. The second response summarizes events in the poem to explain the speaker's realization about the duality of nature.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Essential - Student Responses

Describe what happens to the speaker of the poem and explain what this experience makes the speaker realize.

In the poem the speaker is nearly attacked by an alligator. This makes the speaker think of the world differently.

Describe what happens to the speaker of the poem and explain what this experience makes the speaker realize.

It makes the speaker realise how lucky the speaker is that nothing happened that harmed him or her in any way. The speaker also realises the beauty around him or her and all the speaker has in his or her life.

Scorer Comments:

The first response describes what happens to the speaker of the poem, but the explanation of what the speaker realizes afterward is general. The second response explains what the speaker realizes but makes only an indirect reference to what happens to the speaker.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Partial - Student Response

Describe what happens to the speaker of the poem and explain what this experience makes the speaker realize.

the speaker was bird watching and
an alligator crashed out of the water
and on to land and the speaker was
scared and after the alligator went
back into the water all the birds flew
out of the trees like a waterfall!!

Describe what happens to the speaker of the poem and explain what this experience makes the speaker realize.

This experience made her realize
that the world was full of surprises.
Anything can happen at any moment
in time

Scorer Comments:

The first response describes what happens to the speaker of the poem but does not explain what the experience makes her realize. The second response describes what the speaker might have realized, but the explanation is not text-based.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Unsatisfactory - Student Response

Describe what happens to the speaker of the poem and explain what this experience makes the speaker realize.

The speaker didn't have anything happen to him he was all just having a dream thinking it was real But it wasn't real.

Describe what happens to the speaker of the poem and explain what this experience makes the speaker realize.

I think He's going to get eaten by the alligator.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides a misinterpretation of the poem. The second response provides a personal opinion that is not text based.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Literary	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	SCR	8	Easy

7. Do you think the alligator was trying to attack the speaker of the poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Little/No Comprehension	Partial Comprehension	Full Comprehension	Omitted	Off task
National	15%	27%	56%	2%	#
Delaware	11%	27%	58%	4%	#

Full Comprehension - Student Responses

Do you think the alligator was trying to attack the speaker of the poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

yes, because it came fast with
it's mouth open and ready to
attack. "crashing towards me,
it's tail flailing, like a bundle of
swords, slashing the grass, and the
inside of it's cradle-shaped mouth
graping, and rimmed with teeth"

Do you think the alligator was trying to attack the speaker of the poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

no because they jumped out of the alligator's
way and it went right by them and into the
water, when they moved out of it's way. If it
was really after her I think it would keep
chasing them after they moved.

Scorer Comments:

Both responses provide an opinion about whether the alligator was trying to attack the speaker and use references to the poem as support. The first response uses relevant descriptive phrases that indicate attack. The second response describes the action of the opening lines to support the opinion.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Partial Comprehension - Student Responses

Do you think the alligator was trying to attack the speaker of the poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

I think that the alligator
was trying to tell
the speaker the leave
his territory.

Do you think the alligator was trying to attack the speaker of the poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

I think it was, thats why it
was describing it's teeth and
how it looked.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides an opinion that is generally connected to what happens in the poem. The second response provides a general reference to the alligator's appearance but does not explain the opinion.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Little or No Comprehension - Student Responses

Do you think the alligator was trying to attack the speaker of the poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

No, the alligator was eating grass and doing its own thing. He didn't even mind the speaker.

Do you think the alligator was trying to attack the speaker of the poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

No I don't think the alligator was trying to attack the boy.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides an incorrect interpretation of the poem. The second response repeats the question.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Literary	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Critique/Evaluate	SCR	8	Medium

8. Explain how "Alligator Poem" could be seen as both a good title and a bad title for the poem. Support your answer with reference to what happens in the poem.

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Little/No Comprehension	Partial Comprehension	Full Comprehension	Omitted	Off task
National	20%	63%	14%	3%	1
Delaware	17%	64%	12%	6%	#

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Full Comprehension - Student Responses

Explain how "Alligator Poem" could be seen as both a good title and a bad title for the poem. Support your answer with reference to what happens in the poem.

It could be seen as a good title because the speaker is almost attacked by an alligator. A bad reason is that it was about him seeing life in a new way in the end not an alligator.

Explain how "Alligator Poem" could be seen as both a good title and a bad title for the poem. Support your answer with reference to what happens in the poem.

It is good in the way that it refers to the incident/experience of the speaker. Nevertheless, it does say in the poem that it isn't about the incident, but the speaker's new perspective of nature after the experience, and is a bad title because of this.

Scorer Comments:

Both responses explain how "Alligator Poem" can be seen as both a good and bad title and refer to what happens in the poem to support each part of the answer.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Partial Comprehension - Student Responses

Explain how "Alligator Poem" could be seen as both a good title and a bad title for the poem. Support your answer with reference to what happens in the poem.

good title because its about an alligator

Explain how "Alligator Poem" could be seen as both a good title and a bad title for the poem. Support your answer with reference to what happens in the poem.

"Alligator Poem" could be used as a good or bad title. The way it's good is that it is straight to the point. On the other hand it can be a bad title because it doesn't give enough information.

Scorer Comments:

The first response explains how "Alligator Poem" is a good title but does not discuss how it could be seen as a bad title. The second response provides general statements as to how the title could be seen as both good and bad, but neither statement is supported with references to what happens in the poem.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Little or No Comprehension - Student Responses

Explain how "Alligator Poem" could be seen as both a good title and a bad title for the poem. Support your answer with reference to what happens in the poem.

After the alligator stoped trying to
eat him and went away.

Explain how "Alligator Poem" could be seen as both a good title and a bad title for the poem. Support your answer with reference to what happens in the poem.

It's a good title but I think
they could of done something
different about the title.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides an irrelevant detail. The second response provides a personal opinion that does not answer the question.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Literary	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	MC	8	Easy

9. The speaker's description of flowers at the end of the poem is mainly meant to emphasize that the speaker
- A. believes nature is unpredictable
 - B. does not understand what is happening
 - C. is reliving a frightening experience
 - D. is seeing the world with a new intensity

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C	Choice D*	Omitted
National	21%	3%	14%	61%	#
Delaware	21%	1%	12%	66%	#

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.



© Reuters/David Gray # RP5DRIGCUSAA

Thousands of
cane toads are
wreaking havoc in
Australia.

ALIEN INVASION

In the 1930s, beetles with a sweet tooth gulped down a lot of sugarcane in Australia. Angry sugarcane farmers needed to do something quickly. Farmers in Hawaii gave them a tip: Cane toads like to munch on the beetles. Desperate Australian farmers imported a boxful of the fist-sized toads from Hawaii and let them loose.

Bad idea. Instead of chowing down on the beetles, cane toads gobbled anything they could swallow—pet food, garbage, honeybees, termites, snails, and mice.

The toads multiplied, spreading across the northern coast of Australia. Today toads are such a problem that a member of the Australian government recently suggested that citizens use golf clubs to whack the warty amphibians! Australia isn't the only country dealing with unwelcome animal guests. In the United States, hundreds of invasive species pose a threat to the environment.

The Aliens Are Coming

An invasive species is nonnative, or alien, to the ecosystem. An ecosystem is a group of plants, animals, and other living organisms that live together in the same area. Although invasive species don't damage their own ecosystem, they can cause massive destruction when they invade another area.

For example, fingernail-sized zebra mussels hitchhiked from Russia to the

Great Lakes in the water tanks of ships. When those ships landed in the United States, the zebra mussels began gobbling up food and oxygen, leaving nothing for other underwater creatures to eat.

They also irritated humans. Each year, a female zebra mussel can produce 30,000 to 1 million eggs. When those eggs hatch, the mussels clog pipes that provide drinking water to houses and schools.

A beetle called the emerald ash borer arrived in the United States from China in wood packing material carried aboard cargo ships or airplanes.

The adult emerald ash borer nibbles on the leaves of the ash tree. The larvae of the beetle, however, cause far more damage by chomping through the inner bark of ash trees. The insects destroy the tunnels that allow water and nutrients to travel from the roots to the leaves. Emerald ash borers have killed 8 million to 10 million trees in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana.

Another invasive species that is wreaking havoc is the snakehead fish.

Snakeheads arrived in the United States from Asia as exotic pets. When pet owners grew tired of the snakeheads, they threw the fish into nearby lakes and streams.

The snakehead fish now live in several states and can move over land from one body of water to another body. They dine greedily and can clear a pond of all its fish. The snakehead was recently spotted in

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SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

a lake in Queens, N.Y., a part of New York City.

“The world has changed so much in the last 100 years,” Jodie A. Ellis, a scientist at Purdue University, told *Senior Edition*.

“We are now able to share so many things with other countries, which is mostly a good thing. But there are costs, and one of those costs is the constant threat of invasive species.”

Why Should We Care?

In addition to destroying an ecosystem, the devastation caused by invasive species can be costly. In the United States, the damage caused by the pesky critters is roughly \$137 billion per year.

“Our natural ecosystems are the primary sources of our food and drinking water,” Lisa Gould, a senior scientist at the Rhode Island Natural History Survey, told *Senior Edition*. “Ecosystems help keep our air clean. They give us medicines and materials for our industries. Without

them, we could not exist for long.”



© Steve Ruark/AP Photo # 02090404582

The snakehead fish kills native fish in many waterways in the United States.

Battling the Cane Toad

Back in Australia, the government has devoted \$1 million to combating that country’s pesky toad problem. Scientists are researching what kinds of poisons can kill the creature.

Wildlife officials are also setting up traps to catch the toads, which are now hitchhiking across Australia in the backs of cars and trucks.

“We cannot tolerate a situation where cane toads are getting a free ride across the continent,” says one Australian official.

“Alien Invasion” from *Weekly Reader Senior*, September 2005, copyright © 2005 by Weekly Reader Corporation. Special permission granted. All Rights Reserved.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

HOME ON THE RANGE

Forget about traveling to Africa to go on a safari. If some scientists have their way, people might be able to spot lions and elephants roaming the Great Plains of North America. The Great Plains lie in the center of North America, extending from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and from Canada to Texas.

A team of scientists recently proposed the bold plan to save endangered animals from extinction in Africa. Many animal habitats there are disappearing. A habitat is the place where a plant or an animal lives.

Just “Plain” Smart

Supporters of the plan say that relocating the animals to the Great Plains would help restore the region’s biodiversity (the variety of different organisms found within a geographic region) closer to what it was before humans came along.

Most modern African animals never lived on the Great Plains. However, some other large animals, such as camels, saber-toothed cats, and mastodons, lived there thousands of years ago.

A mastodon was a furry, elephant-like creature with long tusks. Mastodons and other animals lived on the Great Plains until the last ice age ended, about 10,000 years ago. An ice age is a period of



Some people say the addition of elephants, lions, and other big game animals would make the Great Plains even greater.

(NAEP), 2007 READING ASSESSMENT.



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time when sheets of ice covered Earth.

Supporters of the project also say that relocating large animals to vast parks in the Great Plains could save hundreds of species in Africa and Asia that now face extinction. They say the animals could be introduced gradually on private land. Eventually, fenced animal reserves could be opened to tourists.

Bad Idea

Those against the plan argue that releasing different species into new environments can cause destruction.

Cane toads, for example, brought to Australia from Hawaii to control beetles in sugarcane fields, ate everything in sight. Cattle and sheep ranchers are also concerned that the wild animals might devour their herds.

Critics of the plan say that there are already a lot of endangered animals that need protection in North America. Scientist Donald Grayson says, “Why introduce . . . camels and lions when there are North American species that could benefit from the same kind of effort?”

VC174003

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nts. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

n Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	MC	8	Medium

10. What is the central purpose of "Alien Invasion"?

- A. To point out that invasive species come from many different countries
- B. To argue that invasive species are a serious problem that must be solved
- C. To describe the damage that invasive species cause in Australia
- D. To suggest that invasive species can be stopped only with the government's help

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A	Choice B*	Choice C	Choice D	Omitted
National	31%	55%	11%	2%	#
Delaware	26%	57%	13%	3%	1%

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Critique/Evaluate	MC	8	Easy

11. "Alien Invasion" relies primarily on what form of evidence as support for its argument?

- A. Quotations of famous scientists
- B. Multiple definitions of invasive species
- C. A series of examples of invasive species
- D. Descriptions of different methods of control

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C*	Choice D	Omitted
National	6%	11%	76%	7%	#
Delaware	4%	11%	78%	7%	#

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Locate/Recall	MC	8	Easy

12. According to "Alien Invasion," Australian farmers imported cane toads into Australia in order to

- A. help save their native beetle populations
- B. eat the sugarcane that was taking over their other crops
- C. stop an alien species of beetle imported from Hawaii
- D. eat beetles that were destroying sugarcane crops

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C	Choice D*	Omitted
National	6%	4%	7%	83%	#
Delaware	6%	3%	2%	89%	#

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	SCR	8	Easy

13. Using what you read in "Alien Invasion," explain why people should be concerned about invasive species.

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Little/No Comprehension	Partial Comprehension	Full Comprehension	Omitted	Off task
National	18%	28%	53%	1%	#
Delaware	15%	23%	61%	1%	#

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Full Comprehension - Student Responses

Using what you read in "Alien Invasion," explain why people should be concerned about invasive species.

Well, people should be concerned about invasive species because they can eat your crops and they damage a great deal of stuff which we have to pay for with a great deal amount of money and they also are destroying the ecosystem.

Using what you read in "Alien Invasion," explain why people should be concerned about invasive species.

If the number of a certain species got too big they could start to take over and start to eat other animals or bugs which could cause these species to die off.

Scorer Comments:

Both responses describe negative impacts of invasive species that should cause people to be concerned. The first response has several details from the article; the second has one.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Partial Comprehension - Student Responses

Using what you read in "Alien Invasion," explain why people should be concerned about invasive species.

Because that species could cause destruction

Using what you read in "Alien Invasion," explain why people should be concerned about invasive species.

When the species invade you have to watch out because the species grows fast.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides a general explanation for why people should be concerned about invasive species, but it does not use details from the article to support the answer. The second response describes a characteristic of invasive species but does not explain why it should cause people concern.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Little or No Comprehension - Student Responses

Using what you read in "Alien Invasion," explain why people should be concerned about invasive species.

Because it is important so they don't become extinct.

Using what you read in "Alien Invasion," explain why people should be concerned about invasive species.

because some species that come into the united state doesn't really do what you exactly want them to do.

Scorer Comments:

The first response is incorrect; it suggests people should be concerned about invasive species becoming extinct. The second response provides an unsupported personal opinion.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	MC	8	Medium

14. What is the central purpose of "Home on the Range"?

- A. To inform people about two opposing views
- B. To convince people to take a particular point of view
- C. To describe recent scientific discoveries
- D. To challenge a common belief

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A*	Choice B	Choice C	Choice D	Omitted
National	56%	21%	18%	4%	1%
Delaware	60%	22%	14%	3%	2%

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	ECR	8	Medium

Question 15 refers to Alien Invasion and Home on the Range

15. Describe a similarity and a difference between the way the two articles approach the subject of invasive species. Support your answer with references to both of the articles.

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category						
Public Schools	Unsatisfactory	Partial	Essential	Extensive	Omitted	Off task
National	16%	33%	22%	21%	7%	1%
Delaware	12%	30%	18%	29%	12%	#

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Extensive - Student Responses

Describe a similarity and a difference between the way the two articles approach the subject of invasive species. Support your answer with references to both of the articles.

The similarity is that they are both talking about animals and problems with them. The difference is that one is talking about saving animals the other is talking about getting rid of them.

Describe a similarity and a difference between the way the two articles approach the subject of invasive species. Support your answer with references to both of the articles.

One similarity is that they both quote scientists. In the first article, it quotes Lisa Gould, Todie A. Ellis, and an Australian official. In the second article, it quotes Donald Grayson. One difference that they have is in the first article, it has one point of view. No one is arguing, everyone is on the same side. In the second article, they have two different sides and opinions. One side thinks it is a good idea to have African animals imported to the Great Plains and one side thinks it is a horrible idea.

Scorer Comments:

Both responses describe a similarity and a difference between the two articles and provide relevant information from both articles to support each part of the answer. The first response compares the positions of both articles. The second response emphasizes the structure of each of the articles.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Essential - Student Responses

Describe a similarity and a difference between the way the two articles approach the subject of invasive species. Support your answer with references to both of the articles.

The two articles both talk about species going somewhere new. The lions are to be brought to North America to reserve this species from going extinct. The cane toads were brought from Hawaii to eat the beetles for harming the sugarcane crops.

Describe a similarity and a difference between the way the two articles approach the subject of invasive species. Support your answer with references to both of the articles.

The article "Alien Invasion" is about animals that could be dangerous to humans and other animals. But in the section "Home on the Barge" the animals aren't dangerous or doing harm. The animals are the ones who need help, they need somewhere to live where they will be safe and not become extinct.

Scorer Comments:

The first response describes a similarity between the two articles and uses information from both as support, but does not describe a difference between them. The second response describes a difference in the way the two articles approach the subject of invasive species and gives details from the articles; it does not describe a similarity.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Partial - Student Responses

Describe a similarity and a difference between the way the two articles approach the subject of invasive species. Support your answer with references to both of the articles.

Both articles are talking about animals. One article wants the animals the other wants to get rid of some animals.

Describe a similarity and a difference between the way the two articles approach the subject of invasive species. Support your answer with references to both of the articles.

One similarity that the articles have is they both are informing the public about what could happen. A difference between the 2 articles is one article is talking about Africa and the other is talking about Australia. It says in the passage.

Scorer Comments:

Both responses provide relevant information from the article, but the information used to describe a similarity or a difference between the two articles is very limited. The first response describes the similarity in the topic ("talking about animals") but does not provide details about invasive species. The second response describes a similarity and a difference, but the support for the description is minimal.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Unsatisfactory - Student Responses

Describe a similarity and a difference between the way the two articles approach the subject of invasive species. Support your answer with references to both of the articles.

I think that both sides of the
argument are correct and they
both have a strong point.

Describe a similarity and a difference between the way the two articles approach the subject of invasive species. Support your answer with references to both of the articles.

that elephant have trunks and
the alien don't. And that they
also eat different food.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides a personal opinion but does not support it with references to the articles. The second response gives irrelevant information.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	MC	8	Easy

16. In "Alien Invasion," on page 4, an Australian official says, "We cannot **tolerate** a situation" where cane toads are traveling across the Australian continent. This means that the official thinks that Australians cannot

- A. find a solution to the problem posed by cane toads
- B. understand why cane toads are such a problem
- C. allow the cane toads to continue causing a problem
- D. permit the cane toad problem to become well known

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C*	Choice D	Omitted
National	19%	6%	71%	4%	#
Delaware	19%	3%	73%	4%	2%

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	MC	8	Easy

17. On page 5, when "Home on the Range" talks about **vast** parks in the Great Plains, this refers to parks that

- A. have mostly flat land
- B. have protected sections
- C. are owned by private citizens
- D. are extremely large

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C	Choice D*	Omitted
National	17%	16%	4%	63%	#
Delaware	13%	17%	3%	66%	1%

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Locate/Recall	MC	8	Easy

18. According to "Home on the Range," some scientists think that moving African animals to the Great Plains would help improve the area's

- A. resistance to alien species
- B. economy
- C. biodiversity
- D. research facilities

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Choice A	Choice B	Choice C*	Choice D	Omitted
National	10%	18%	67%	5%	#
Delaware	9%	18%	69%	3%	#

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Integrate/Interpret	SCR	8	Hard

Question 19 refers to Alien Invasion , Home on the Range

19. Explain why "Home on the Range" discusses animals that lived on the Great Plains thousands of years ago.

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category				
Public Schools	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Omitted	Off task
National	72%	25%	2%	1%
Delaware	71%	26%	4%	#

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Acceptable - Student Responses

Explain why "Home on the Range" discusses animals that lived on the Great Plains thousands of years ago.

Home on the Range discusses those animals because they are trying to prove that the African animals would restore the biodiversity of the region like before the ice age when those animals were alive.

Explain why "Home on the Range" discusses animals that lived on the Great Plains thousands of years ago.

They are trying to get you to agree with them, to help get the population back up. They know that thousands of years ago animals alike the ones in Africa lived there,

Scorer Comments:

Both responses explain why the article discusses animals that lived on the Great Plains thousands of years ago. The first response recognizes that the discussion is used to support the idea of relocating African animals to the Great Plains. The second response recognizes that the discussion is used in support of the idea that relocating would help to save endangered species. The responses tend to restate the questions.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Unacceptable - Student Responses

Explain why "Home on the Range" discusses animals that lived on the Great Plains thousands of years ago.

"Home on the range discusses animals that lived in the great plains thousands of years ago because they were making a comparison

Explain why "Home on the Range" discusses animals that lived on the Great Plains thousands of years ago.

This article discusses animals from thousands of years ago to show how different and better it was before humans came along.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides a generalization with no text-based explanation. The second response provides an unsupported personal opinion that is not related to ideas in the article.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Content Area: Informational	Type	Grade	Difficulty
Cognitive Target: Critique/Evaluate	SCR	8	Easy

20. Do you think "Alien Invasion" is an effective title for persuading readers of the article's point of view? Support your opinion with reference to the article.

2009 Percentage of 8 th Grade Students in Each Response Category					
Public Schools	Little/No Comprehension	Partial Comprehension	Full Comprehension	Omitted	Off task
National	16%	19%	65%	#	1%
Delaware	15%	21%	64%	#	#

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Full Comprehension - Student Responses

Do you think "Alien Invasion" is an effective title for persuading readers of the article's point of view? Support your opinion with reference to the article.

Yes, because it says how these animals really are "aliens" to a new area. The article is very convincing because it tells all the damage these invasive species have caused. For example, it tells how the toads keep multiplying and eat everything in sight.

Do you think "Alien Invasion" is an effective title for persuading readers of the article's point of view? Support your opinion with reference to the article.

I don't think that Alien Invasion is a very good title. It makes you think at first that it is like aliens coming from other planets or something. Although they are just talking about toads.

Scorer Comments:

Both responses provide an opinion about the title and use details from the article to demonstrate an understanding of the article's point of view. The first response shows that the title is effective by referring to the damage that invasive species cause. The second response shows that the title is not effective because the article is about toads, not aliens.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Partial Comprehension - Student Responses

Do you think "Alien Invasion" is an effective title for persuading readers of the article's point of view? Support your opinion with reference to the article.

No beacuse it makes
people think its about
aliens from space
invading.

Do you think "Alien Invasion" is an effective title for persuading readers of the article's point of view? Support your opinion with reference to the article.

I think that "Alien Invasion" is a good
title for persuading the readers, because it
is fun and catchy. It makes the reader want
to read the article, and so it allows the
article to try to convince the reader of
the author's point of view.

Scorer Comments:

Both responses provide an opinion about the title but do not support the opinion with reference to the article. The first response says that the title is not effective but does not use details from the article to support the answer. The second response makes general statements about the title but does not refer to information in the article.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.

NAEP 2009 Reading – Grade 8 Released Items

Little or No Comprehension - Student Responses

Do you think "Alien Invasion" is an effective title for persuading readers of the article's point of view? Support your opinion with reference to the article.

It is a very good title
It make a very good
point.

Do you think "Alien Invasion" is an effective title for persuading readers of the article's point of view? Support your opinion with reference to the article.

Yes, I think so because the title
actually explains the story, and it
tells about the whole situation.

Scorer Comments:

The first response provides unsupported personal opinion. The second response could refer to any title.

NOTE: These results are for public and nonpublic school students. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment.