

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 1

DIRECTIONS

This session contains one reading selection with seven multiple-choice questions and one open-response question. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

Many teens have discovered the fun and benefits of yoga. Read this excerpt from the book Yoga for Teens, and answer the questions that follow.

YOGA AND YOU

from *Yoga for Teens* by Thia Luby

If you want people to admire your inner strength and beauty and enjoy being with you—

If you'd like to be stronger, more flexible, toned, and healthy—

If you'd like to feel more peaceful and happier—

Give yoga a try.

- 1 Yoga is a discipline and a science—but also a fun way to exercise your body and your mind. Some yoga poses are held statue-like, while others are very active and involve jumping movements. Doing statue-like poses will build concentration skills, physical strength, and flexibility that will help you in school or at work. The more active poses will build strong muscles for endurance and better performance in sports and other activities. When you learn how to breathe deeper and slower by practicing yoga breathing exercises, you'll feel calm and relaxed. Breathing exercises will also help you sleep better and wake up in a better mood, ready to face another day with good energy and a smile.
- 2 You can practice yoga poses by yourself, with a friend, or with a group of friends. You can practice any time of the day or evening,

outdoors on the grass, or in a spacious room indoors, and you never need anything but your own body. You will be amazed at how strong you can become by practicing yoga often, and your friends will be impressed by what you can teach them.

- 3 It's important to start with the Basic Poses to begin building the strength, flexibility, and endurance that more advanced yoga requires. After you become stronger, you can begin to learn the more difficult poses. . . .

What You Need to Know About Yoga

- 4 Many forms of yoga and yogic meditation are described in the ancient writings of India, where yoga was developed over 5,000 years ago, but in this book we will focus mainly on the form known as *hatha yoga*. This type of yoga is a complete system of poses, movements, breathing, relaxation, and concentration that promotes total health and well-being—mental, physical, and spiritual. People who do hatha yoga regularly can quickly increase their physical strength, flexibility, and coordination; clear energy blocks; and develop greater mental clarity, focus, and concentration—qualities essential for success in all areas of life.

- 5 Yoga poses tone the internal organs of the body while toning muscles, keeping the muscular structure strong, and improving circulation. When you hold a pose, the circulation of blood bathes a particular area of the body to rejuvenate¹ glands and cells, and to calm nerves.



- 6 Yoga practice focuses strongly on the brain and the spinal cord, the two principal centers of the body's nervous system. While some yoga poses are designed for energizing the body, others are aimed specifically at calming and focusing the mind. Keeping the nerves calm and healthy is very important to maintaining a healthy mind and body. A nervous state or negative emotions like anger can have harmful physical or mental effects if these emotions and mental states occur often or last a long time. The deep breathing methods and calming poses learned in yoga ease nervous tension and help to keep your brain and nervous system working well. At the same time they help you calm your emotions and redirect energy into constructive channels.
- 7 Yogic breathing exercises produce life energy, or *prana*, which circulates through hundreds of energy channels (called *nadis*) throughout the body and clears blocked energy. The creators of yoga discovered seven energy centers, called *chakras*, running along

the spine. Chakras absorb prana and send it along the energy channels to the blood, nervous system, and glands.

- 8 Each of the seven chakras affects specific glands, areas, and functions of the body. Each chakra activates a particular kind of energy that impacts our emotional, mental, and spiritual selves. If a particular part of your body feels "tight," uneasy, achy, or painful, a yoga pose can be selected to move more blood and energy into that area. With yoga poses, chakras are stimulated and energy blocks are released so that the physical stress or emotional upset can heal. Practicing yoga poses keeps the energy channels clear and the chakras open, resulting in a healthy, balanced state. . . .
- 9 A person who practices yoga faithfully will eventually lose self-consciousness about his or her body and can begin to "let go of ego." According to yoga philosophy, at this point the body is considered a fit vehicle for the soul. Although the form of yoga you will learn in this book does not involve spiritual meditations, practicing yoga poses that are calming to your body and spirit will allow you to experience a calm, peaceful, meditative state. As you continue to practice yoga, a quiet mind will emerge spontaneously and naturally. As you learn to focus your mind while holding a yoga pose, you will also improve your concentration and learning skills, and find it easier to maintain a positive mental attitude.
- 10 Yoga offers a different approach to strengthening and moving the body than sports and other types of physical activity. It gives you a chance to listen to your own body's needs by tuning in and learning which parts need direct attention for healing or strengthening. Instead of exerting energy to the point where your body feels exhausted, in

¹ *rejuvenate* — restore to a healthy condition

doing yoga you will feel increased energy as you focus inward on proper alignment² of the body while holding a pose.

- 11 Many yoga poses were inspired by animals and insects. Observing them to learn their secrets of staying strong and healthy, the creators of yoga developed a series of poses that focus on the special qualities and abilities of different animals and insects—their strength, agility, poise, or determination. Being aware of these life forms and their qualities helps you use your powers of visualization to strengthen your practice of yoga. Some of the classical poses in this book have been renamed to make them easier to visualize. . . .

- 12 When you practice yoga, you will notice that you become much more aware of your body. You will feel more alive and energized, and aware of how all the parts of your body are made to work together, in harmony. You will stand taller and be more poised, presenting a positive self-image to the world.

- 13 Yoga teaches balance of mind, body, and spirit. It is a discipline that promotes self-awareness and a strong sense of self, without overinflating the ego. Yoga is part of a system that, for centuries, has been used to build character and compassion, and is a basis for learning unconditional love of oneself and others. . . .



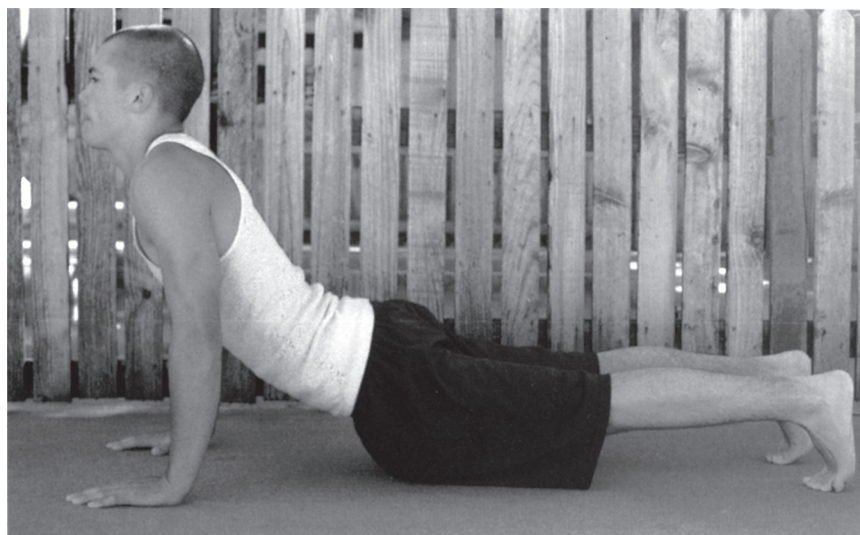
Downward Dog Pose

- Start on your hands and knees. Flex your toes under and exhale as you lift your knees up to straighten your legs, while pressing your heels down toward the floor. Keep your arms straight, press your chest back toward your legs, and lift your seat up higher toward the ceiling. Hold the pose as long as you can, for one minute or more, while breathing deeply.
- To release, come down on your hands and knees slowly, sit on your heels, lower your forehead to the floor, place your arms at your sides, and relax.



Benefits: Stretches the entire back side of the body, while also strengthening the heart and bringing blood to the head to clear the mind.

² *alignment* — position; arrangement



Upward Dog Pose

- Start in a lying down position, facing the floor (lying on your stomach).
- Bring your hands under your shoulders, with palms flat and fingers forward and opened wide.
- Inhale and push down through your hands as you lift your chest high and straighten your arms, while you move your shoulders down away from your ears.
- Flex your toes under and exhale as you lift your legs up from the floor. You will have a big curve in your lower back. Hold the pose as long as you can, for one minute or more, while breathing deeply. Inhale and lift your chest, and exhale and push back through your heels.
- To release, lower your legs to the floor and exhale as you roll your spine down slowly. Take a deep breath and relax.

Benefits: Strengthens the lower back and front legs, and stretches the arms, chest, and front of the spine. This tones the kidneys.

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- 1 According to paragraph 2, how is practicing yoga convenient for people?
- A. It requires almost no equipment or special facilities.
 - B. It can be done while performing other activities.
 - C. It focuses on exercises that are not difficult.
 - D. It requires little training or experience.

- 2 According to paragraph 4, what is a **main** goal of hatha yoga?
- A. to isolate and develop certain muscle groups
 - B. to improve the functioning of body and mind
 - C. to create and promote teamwork among individuals
 - D. to help in developing strength of personality and character

- 3 According to paragraph 5, how does yoga tone the internal organs of the body?
- A. by repositioning the organs
 - B. by directing blood flow to the organs
 - C. by increasing the activity of the organs
 - D. by strengthening muscles near the organs

- 4 According to the excerpt, why is meditation sometimes practiced as part of yoga?
- A. Yoga must be studied.
 - B. Yoga can be a boring routine.
 - C. Yoga requires high intelligence.
 - D. Yoga emphasizes peace of mind.

5 According to paragraph 10, what is the **main** difference between yoga and other forms of exercise?

- A. Yoga demands a high level of focus.
- B. Yoga boosts energy rather than draining it.
- C. Yoga builds strength rather than flexibility.
- D. Yoga emphasizes awareness of other people.

6 What is the **most likely** reason photographs are included in the excerpt?

- A. to show the difficulty of practicing yoga
- B. to show how to do the yoga poses correctly
- C. to show the relaxation achieved by doing yoga
- D. to show how animals can join in a yoga session

7 In the excerpt, why are the words *prana*, *nadis*, and *chakras* printed in italics?

- A. They are the roots of other words.
- B. They are words made up by the author.
- C. They are words with multiple meanings.
- D. They are words specifically related to yoga.

Question 8 is an open-response question.

- **Read the question carefully.**
- **Explain your answer.**
- **Add supporting details.**
- **Double-check your work.**

Write your answer to question 8 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 8** Based on the excerpt, explain how practicing yoga could benefit a middle-school student. Support your answer with important and specific information from the excerpt.