The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

English Language Arts Item and Scoring Sampler

2018–2019 Grade 6



**PSSA ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GRADE 6**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEST DIRECTIONS FOR READING PASSAGES AND QUESTIONS**

**Directions:**

On the following pages are the Reading passages and questions .

**Directions for Multiple-Choice Questions:**

Some questions will ask you to select an answer from among four choices. For the multiple-choice questions:

* First, read the passage carefully.
* Read each question and choose the best answer.
* Only one of the answers provided is correct.
* You may look back at the passage to help you answer the question.
* Record your choice in the answer booklet.

**Directions for Evidence-Based Selected-Response Questions:**

Some questions will have two parts and will ask you to select one or more answers in each part.

For the evidence-based selected-response questions:

* Read Part One of the question and choose the best answer.
* You may look back at the passage to help you answer Part One of the question.
* Record your answer to Part One in the answer booklet.
* Only one of the answers provided in Part One is correct.
* Then, read Part Two of the question and choose the evidence to support your answer in Part One. If Part Two tells you to select two answers, be sure to select two answers.
* You may look back at the passage to help you answer Part Two of the question.
* Record your answer or answers to Part Two in the answer booklet.

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**Directions for Text-Dependent Analysis (TDA) Prompts:**

The English Language Arts TDA prompt will ask you to analyze the passage and use evidence from the passage to write an essay.

For the TDA Essay:

* Be sure to read the passage and the TDA prompt carefully.
* Review the Writer’s Checklist to help you plan and organize your response.
* You may look back at the passage to help you write your essay.
* Write your essay in the appropriate space in the answer booklet. If you use
scratch paper to write a rough-draft essay, be sure to transfer your final essay to the answer booklet.
* Be sure to check that your essay contains evidence from the passage to support your response.
* Be sure to check your essay for errors in capitalization, spelling, sentence formation, punctuation, and word choice.

**PASSAGE 1**

**PSSA ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GRADE 6**

Read the following passage about redwood trees and the scientists who study them. Then answer questions 1–9.

**Skywalking for Science: Aloft in Redwood Space**

by Jeanne Miller

When Dr. Stephen Sillett climbed his first giant redwood tree, back in 1987, he didn’t know that a new world awaited him up there. At that time the tops of the ancient trees in old-growth redwood forests were unexplored. Scientists assumed they were biological deserts, containing only tree branches. But when Sillett reached the crowof the 300-foot tree, he found a forest above a forest. At its top was a sunny glade alive with mosses, lichens, and even small trees. Growing from a rotting stump in the middle of the crown were huckleberry bushes, laden with berries. It was a thriving ecosystem in the air.

Sillett started climbing trees when he was a student at Reed College, in Portland, Oregon, in the 1980s. Those experiences led him to become a botanist, a scientist who studies plants. Today he teaches botany and forestry at Humboldt State University in northern California and spends much of his time at the top of tall trees. Coast redwood trees (*Sequoia sempervirens*) are his specialty.

**An Aerial World**

The coast redwood is one of three surviving species of redwoods (the others are the giant sequoia in the Sierra Nevada in California and the dawn redwoods in China). It grows only in a narrow band along the Pacific coast between central California and southern Oregon, a 450-mile belt where rain and fog provide enough moisture to sustain the giants. They are the tallest trees on Earth and have been around for 10 million years. Some coast redwoods living today may be as old as 2,000 years. The oldest and largest ones survive in old-growth forests, most of which are protected in parks or reserves. These are the trees that Sillett and his colleagues study.

Redwoods are remarkable for their ability to stay alive, whatever happens. If some accident exposes the living tissue under the bark, a sprout grows from the wound. Thus, if a limb breaks off, another limb arises in its place. If the top of the trunk dies and falls off, another trunk shoots up from that spot. And if that trunk breaks off, another trunk will grow. The crown of an old redwood often has many trunks, each with its own set of branches.

This complex structure, trunk upon trunk, limb upon limb, creates pockets where dry redwood needles collect. Fungi grow on the dead needles and decompose them into soil. Into this soil drop airborne seeds and spores. Plants sprout, mature, reproduce, and die, enriching the soil and making it ever deeper. In the nestled in nooks and crannies and on flat limbs, Sillett
and his tree-climbing team have discovered rhododendrons in bloom as well as miniature trees of many species: hemlocks, Douglas firs, and tan oaks among them. They’ve even found an eight-foot

uppermost layer in a forest **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GRADE 6**

Sitka spruce rooted on a limb of a redwood. Dense aerial gardens of ferns host a variety of animal life, including slugs, snails, and salamanders. These fern mats store moisture that supports much of the canopy life.

**Mapping Redwoods**

Sillett and his colleagues want to understand how these trees operate and what their limits are. They’ve installed sensors in several trees to collect data on light, temperature, humidity, wind, and sap flow. In addition, he and his students measure the diameter and position of all the woody parts of the redwoods. Sillett uses these numbers to construct 3-D diagrams of each tree. He hopes to be able to explain someday how and why the trees are different from one another.

The researchers want to know how water moves through their trunks and branches. It takes water a few weeks to get from the redwood’s roots to its top, traveling up through microscopic channels in the trunk. Water molecules have a tendency to cling to one another, so as a water molecule rises it pulls the next molecule with it. When water evaporates from the leaves at the top of the tree, more water rises to replace it. But it’s a fight against gravity, and scientists think there’s a limit to how high the water can be pulled. And that puts a limit on how high a tree can get. Coast redwoods have an advantage over many trees in that they are bathed in fog on summer mornings. Scientists working with Sillett have discovered that 25 percent to 50 percent of a coast redwood’s water comes from summer fog, much of it taken up by the canopy soil.

**Taming the Tallest Trees**

The very tallest redwoods all grow in a few state parks and a national park along the northernmost coast of California. There are four trees over 370 feet in height and Sillett has climbed them all. Laser range finders, devices that use laser beams to measure distance to an object, can determine the height of a tree within a few feet. However, the only really accurate measurement comes with climbing to the top and dropping a measuring tape to the ground. The tallest tree in
the world was discovered in 2006 in Redwood National Park in Humboldt County, California. Sillett measured it at 379.1 feet high. That’s the height of a 37-story building.

Canopy researchers face many difficulties, and getting to the top of a tree is just one of
them. Hiking through an old-growth redwood forest is the first challenge. These are temperate rainforests, which, like their tropical cousins, have abundant rainfall. The forest floor is thick with lush undergrowth. Fallen redwood trunks, some as much as twelve feet in diameter, often lie in the way. It can take hours of bushwhacking to go just a mile.

Sillett has made an art of climbing the ancient redwoods, but he can’t completely eliminate the danger. It requires extreme discipline and focus to stay safe that high off the ground. A moment of inattention can result in a fatal fall. Redwoods drop dead branches without notice.

Just as important to Sillett and his team as their own safety is the safety of the fragile ecosystems in the canopy and of the tree itself. Sillett calls this area “redwood space.” The climbers hang in harnesses from ropes when they’re in the trees to avoid putting their full weight on the branches they’re exploring. These rope systems allow them to move all around the crown, even to the tips of the farthest branches. Traveling over these webs of ropes is known as “skywalking.”

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**The Future of Old-Growth Redwoods**

It’s not easy to kill a mature redwood. The trees are immune to most diseases. Sometimes a series of fires will hollow out a cavern in a redwood trunk, but the tree keeps growing. Early settlers used to house their poultry in fire caverns at the base of the trees. (These cavities are still known as “goose pens.”)

Builders value redwood lumber because the heartwood—the cinnamon-colored wood at the center of the log—is resistant to rot and insects. And that’s a big reason why only 4 percent of the country’s old-growth redwood forests remain today. Commercial logging of redwoods came in with the California Gold Rush in the 1850s. Redwood trees built old San Francisco. And they built it again after the 1906 earthquake.

In the early 1900s some Americans who were concerned about the disappearing stands of ancient redwood founded the Save the Redwoods League. We have the League to thank for establishing the publicly owned preserves within the northern California state parks that exist today. But logging of old-growth redwoods continues on privately owned land.

Sillett wants to see a better process for selecting which redwoods should be logged in existing forests. He has found that a redwood’s yearly rate of growth keeps increasing until it’s 1,500 years old. The older the wood, the better the wood, with more decay-resistant heartwood.

The Save the Redwoods League has launched a new initiative to explore how redwoods might react to climate change. Sillett is one of the scientists leading this effort. One thing that we already know is that redwood forests are champions at capturing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it. That’s an important component of slowing climate change. Sillett recommends planting more redwoods in areas where they might thrive, such as the Oregon coast, and letting them become the old forests of the future.

Redwoods were here long before humans and they should be here long after we’re gone. We have to make sure we don’t get in the way of that.

**How to Climb a Giant**

Most canopy researchers have adopted the tree-climbing techniques Sillett uses:

* Using a powerful hunting bow, he shoots a soft-tipped arrow toward a sturdy limb. Sometimes the first sturdy limb is 200 feet up.
* The arrow drags a fishing line with it over the limb.
* He ties a cord to the fishing line and then a climbing rope to the cord.
* As he reels in the fishing line, the rope is hauled up into the tree and over the limb. Now

two ends of the rope dangle from the limb. He secures one end to a small tree.

* He puts on a helmet and a harness and clips mechanical ascenders to the other end of the rope; these devices slide freely in one direction but grip the rope when pulled in the

opposite direction.

* He attaches his harness to one of the ascenders and with the other he pulls himself up

the rope, one arm-length at a time, to the limb.

* From that limb he tosses a weighted rope over a higher branch and climbs to that

branch, then repeats this until he’s where he wants to be in the crown.

* There he uses shorter lengths of rope to anchor himself to other parts of the crown so

that he can move around freely.

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**Multiple-Choice Questions**

**1.** Read the sentence from the passage.
“When Dr. Stephen Sillett climbed his first giant redwood tree, back in 1987, he didn’t know that

a new world awaited him up there.”
Which evidence from the passage **best** supports this central idea?

1. “At its top was a sunny glade alive with mosses, lichens, and even small trees.”
2. “Growing from a rotting stump in the middle of the crown were huckleberry bushes . . .”
3. “The crown of an old redwood often has many trunks . . .”
4. “Water molecules have a tendency to cling to one another, so as a water molecule rises it pulls the next molecule with it.”

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**2.** Read the third paragraph of the passage.

“Sillett started climbing trees when he was a student at Reed College, in Portland, Oregon, in the 1980s. Those experiences led him to become a botanist, a scientist who studies plants. Today he teaches botany and forestry at Humboldt State University in northern California and spends much of his time at the top of tall trees. Coast redwood trees (*Sequoia sempervirens*) are his specialty.”

How does the paragraph **most** contribute to the development of ideas in the passage?

1. by describing the places Sillett visits to study redwood trees
2. by emphasizing Sillett’s research findings on redwood trees
3. by explaining how Sillett became involved with redwood trees
4. by focusing on Sillett’s techniques for climbing redwood trees

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**3.** Read the sentence from the passage.
“Coast redwoods have an advantage over many trees in that they are bathed in fog on summer

mornings.”
What does the figurative language in the sentence suggest?

1. The fog cleans the redwood trees.
2. The fog makes it cooler for researchers to climb the redwood trees.
3. The fog makes it difficult to clearly see the redwood trees.
4. The fog spreads over the redwood trees.

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**4.** Read the sentence from the passage.
“One thing that we already know is that redwood forests are champions at capturing carbon

dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it.”
How does the author use the word “champions” in the sentence?

1. to reveal that more research is needed on redwood trees
2. to indicate a way that redwood trees help the environment
3. to suggest that redwood trees compete against other plants
4. to emphasize one area in which people can protect redwood trees

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**5.** How does the information in the text box titled “How to Climb a Giant” **most** contribute to the development of ideas in the passage?

1. It supports the idea that redwood trees can live a long time.
2. It suggests that much equipment is needed to climb redwood trees.
3. It supports the idea that climbing redwood trees requires complete attention.
4. It suggests that different animals can live within redwood trees.

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**6.** Which evidence from the passage **best** supports the author’s claim that redwood trees have a “complex structure”?

1. “At that time the tops of the ancient trees in old-growth redwood forests were unexplored.”
2. “The crown of an old redwood often has many trunks, each with its own set of branches.”
3. “They’ve installed sensors in several trees to collect data on light, temperature, humidity, wind, and sap flow.”
4. “The climbers hang in harnesses from ropes when they’re in the trees to avoid putting their full weight on the branches they’re exploring.”

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**Evidence-Based Selected-Response Questions**

**7.** This question has two parts. Answer Part One and then answer Part Two. **Part One**

Which claim does the author make in the passage?

1. Redwood trees have few living plants within them.
2. Redwood trees are known for their ability to stay alive.
3. Redwood trees mostly grow in foreign countries.
4. Redwood trees require a lot of water to survive.

**Part Two**Which evidence from the passage supports the answer in Part One? Choose **two** answers.

1. “Scientists assumed they were biological deserts, containing only tree branches.”
2. “The oldest and largest ones survive in old-growth forests . . .”
3. “If the top of the trunk dies and falls off, another trunk shoots up . . .”
4. “The trees are immune to most diseases.”

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**8.** This question has two parts. Answer Part One and then answer Part Two. **Part One**

Which word **best** describes Sillett’s approach to studying redwood trees?

A. fearful B. critical C. cautious D. reluctant

**Part Two**Which sentence from the passage **best** supports the answer in Part One? Choose **one** answer.

1. “But when Sillett reached the crown of the 300-foot tree, he found a forest above a forest.”
2. “Sillett uses these numbers to construct 3-D diagrams of each tree.”
3. “Sillett has made an art of climbing the ancient redwoods, but he can’t completely eliminate the danger.”
4. “These rope systems allow them to move all around the crown, even to the tips of the farthest branches.”

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**Multiple-Choice Question**

**9.** How is the author’s purpose to inform conveyed in the passage?

1. Scientific details are shared to explain how redwood trees are being studied.
2. Historical accounts are given about how redwood trees once looked.
3. Professional interviews are shared to describe how redwood trees were once used.
4. Practical tips are given about how people can visit redwood trees.

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**PASSAGE 2**

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Read the following passage based on a Scottish legend. Then answer question 10.

**Clever Maggie of Tollishill**

by Marilyn Helmer

Over three hundred years ago, in Scotland’s married Thomas Hardie. They set up house at Midside, part of Tollishill farm owned by John Maitland, Earl of Lauderdale. Maggie and Thomas were a hardworking pair, and Maggie was as frugal as she was clever.

That year, winter seized the land in the icy grip the likes of which had never been seen before. Storms and blizzards swept across the open fields, destroying crops. It was only with the most careful planning that Maggie managed to keep food on the table and save enough money to pay
the rent at Midsummer. And the next two winters were no better. Indeed, it seemed that the most plentiful crop the land produced was snow. Down it came in great icy flakes, lingering until there was barely enough time to get the seed sown before the growing season started.

One cloudy spring day, Thomas stared out the window at the fields lying black and barren in the melting snow. He turned to Maggie. “No matter what we do, we won’t have enough for the rent this year,” he said. “If we can’t pay, the earl will turn us out for sure.”

Maggie’s chin went up. “We’ll not give up the farm, Thomas. Not after all the work we’ve put into it. I’ll go and talk to the earl.” She glanced at her husband. “I’ll promise him that we’ll pay as soon as we can.”

Thomas shook his head. “You know the man, Maggie. The only thing he cares about is getting his rent on time. He won’t listen to you.”

“I’m going to try anyway,” said Maggie, and in spite of himself, Thomas smiled. When Maggie set her mind to a thing, no one could stop her.

The next day she put on her warmest wool cloak and set off for Thirlestane Castle to see the earl. It was a long, cold journey across the wind-swept moors. When she arrived, a servant led her to the library, where the earl was going over his account books.

“What are you here for?” he asked curtly, for he was not at all pleased at being disturbed.

Maggie spoke up. “I’m Maggie Hardie from Tollishill and I’ve come to ask if you’ll give us a year’s grace with our rent.” She told the earl about the poor crop. “You know yourself, sir, that the snow was still lying on the fields long after the crops should have been growing.”

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An amused look crossed the earl’s face. “So it’s a crop of snow you’ve been raising, is it?” he said. His eyes narrowed. “Then I’ll let you pay your rent in snow, Maggie Hardie.”

She stared at him.

“Bring me a snowball in June,” the earl went on, “and I’ll consider your rent paid in full.” He threw back his head and laughed.

Maggie didn’t join in the laughter, but a smile touched her lips nonetheless. “Thank you, sir,” she said. “You shall have your snowball in June.” She walked away quickly, leaving the earl staring after her in astonishment.

Deep into the hills Maggie went, to a far-off glen where she had seen snow piled in drifts long after it had melted elsewhere. She scooped up an armful and wrapped it in her apron. Then she hid the snow in a rocky crevice and covered it with moss and leaves.

When she came back in June, the snow was still there, as firm as the day she’d stored it away. She quickly set off for Thirlestane Castle.

Now, the Earl of Lauderdale may have been a stingy man, but he was an honorable one. When he saw that Maggie had kept her part of the bargain, he upheld his. “A clever lass you are, Maggie Hardie,” he said. “If snow is the land’s favorite crop, then snow is what I’ll take in rent this year.”

You might think the story ends here, but that isn’t so. The weather wasn’t the only thing in turmoil at that time. The future of Scotland itself was in chaos.

Not long after Maggie’s visit, the Earl of Lauderdale joined the Royalist ranks and went off to fight against Oliver Cromwell and his invading forces. Eventually the earl was captured and imprisoned in the infamous Tower of London.

If it was a time of ill fortune for the earl, it was a time of prosperity for his tenants. The weather was as fair then as it had been bitter in the years before. Winters were mild, and spring came early; the flocks increased, and the crops flourished. With the earl in prison, there was no one to collect the rent. He’d never been a popular landlord, and now his tenants took full advantage of his absence. Not a penny did they pay, except Maggie Hardie. Maggie had not forgotten how the earl had kept his promise to her, and each year while he was away, she faithfully put aside the rent money.

When word of the earl’s imprisonment came back to Tollishill, Maggie decided it was her turn to help him. She’d pay him another visit, but she wouldn’t come empty-handed. This time, Maggie was going to bring the earl a very special gift. Her rent money had grown to a tidy sum. Maggie changed it into gold coins, for gold, she knew, spoke louder than copper. Then she mixed a batch of bannock dough and shaped it into a large cake. When the bannock was baked, she carefully scooped out the insides and hid the gold coins within. Who would suspect a simple bannock of hiding gold? Then Maggie dressed in her husband’s clothes and, with the precious bannock in an old leather pack, set off on the longest journey of her life.

Maggie Hardie walked from the Lammermuir Hills to the great city of London, all four hundred miles. Day after day she walked, across mountains, down valleys, along rough country roads. When she reached London, footsore and weary, she followed the banks of the River Thames until it led her to the Tower.

Now, a person couldn’t simply walk into the Tower to visit a prisoner. But clever Maggie was prepared for that. A few gold coins dropped into the hand of a greedy jailer saw her safely past the front door, and a few more unlocked the earl’s cell so that Maggie could slip inside.

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When the Earl of Lauderdale saw Maggie Hardie standing before him, he let out a gasp of surprise. But she put a finger to her lips and listened for the guard’s retreating footsteps.

“I’ve come to pay the rent,” she said in a low voice.

The earl recovered himself. “With another snowball?” he asked.

Maggie smiled and shook her head. “This time I’ve brought you a bannock.” She took it from her pack and held it out to him.

“A bannock to pay the rent?” The earl gave her an incredulous look. “What good is a bannock to me here?” He reached for it. It was dry and stale but surprisingly heavy.

“Break it open, sir,” said Maggie. “I think you’ll find the inside more pleasing than the outside.”

The earl broke the bannock in half, then stared, amazed, as a cascade of gold coins spilled onto the floor.

Just as Maggie had planned, the earl used the gold to buy his freedom. Afterward he fled to France to join the king, who would later return to Scotland to be crowned Charles II.

When Charles was finally on the throne, the earl himself came back to Scotland. The first thing he did was pay a visit to the Midside farm at Tollishill to thank Maggie for saving his life. “A clever mind and a loyal heart should be rewarded,” he said to her. “For as long as you live, you and your Thomas can stay here rent-free.”

For Maggie herself, the earl had a special gift. He placed a silver belt around her waist. “As befitting a woman who can grow snow in June and turn oats into gold,” he said.

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**Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt**

**10.** Read the statement from the passage.
“When Maggie set her mind to a thing, no one could stop her.”

Write an essay analyzing how the events in the passage prove the statement is true. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

**Writer’s Checklist for the Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt**

PLAN before you write

* Make sure you read the prompt carefully.
* Make sure you have read the entire passage carefully.
* Think about how the prompt relates to the passage.
* Organize your ideas on scratch paper. Use a thought map, outline, or other

graphic organizer to plan your essay.

FOCUS while you write

* Analyze the information from the passage as you write your essay.
* Make sure you use evidence from the passage to support your response.
* Use precise language, a variety of sentence types, and transitions in your essay.
* Organize your paper with an introduction, body, and conclusion.

PROOFREAD after you write

I wrote my final essay in the answer booklet.

I stayed focused on responding to the prompt.

I used evidence from the passage to support my response.

I corrected errors in capitalization, spelling, sentence formation, punctuation, and word choice.

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**10.** Read the statement from the passage.
“When Maggie set her mind to a thing, no one could stop her.”

Write an essay analyzing how the events in the passage prove the statement is true. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEST DIRECTIONS FOR LANGUAGE QUESTIONS**

**Directions:**

On the following pages are the Language questions . .

**Directions for Multiple-Choice Questions:**

Each question will ask you to select an answer from among four choices. For the multiple-choice questions:

* Read each question and choose the best answer.
* Only one of the answers provided is correct.
* Record your choice in the answer booklet.

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**STANDALONE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS**

**11.** Read the paragraph.

(1) Students at Creekview Middle School must have one year of a foreign language class before they go on to attend high school. (2) Many students take more than one year of foreign language because you enjoy the experience of learning a different language.
(3) A student last year said that her favorite part of being in a foreign language class was the end-of-year field trip to the annual Festival of Languages. (4) All students agreed that their trip to the festival was a memorable event.

Which change should be made to the paragraph to correct the inappropriate shift in pronoun person?

1. Change they to you in sentence 1.
2. Change you to they in sentence 2.
3. Change her to your in sentence 3.
4. Change their to our in sentence 4.

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**12.** Read the paragraph.

(1) Big Ben is one of the most famous clock towers in the world, and it is also one of the largest. (2) In fact, it is the third largest clock tower in the world. (3) The name “Big Ben” refers to the bell, which was named after Sir Benjamin Hall, who ordered it. (4) As for the bell itself, it weighs an astonishing thirteen tons.

Which sentence should end with an exclamation point to **most** effectively show excitement?

1. sentence 1
2. sentence 2
3. sentence 3
4. sentence 4

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**13.** Read the paragraph.

(1) The kiwi is a flightless bird that lives in the grasslands of New Zealand. (2) This interesting bird has an excellent sense of smell. (3) Which it uses to find bugs and seeds on the ground. (4) The kiwi is the only bird that has nostrils at the tip of its beak.

Which sentence should be revised to correct the inappropriate sentence fragment?

1. sentence 1
2. sentence 2
3. sentence 3
4. sentence 4

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**14.** Read the paragraph from a story.

(1) Upon entering the butterfly garden, Min and Cameron were amazed. (2) Hundreds of butterflies fluttered through the air above them. (3) Min sat down on a large, knobby tree stump. (4) A pretty butterfly landed on her.

Which revision of sentence 4 **best** uses details to describe the event?

1. A dark butterfly with rare colors set down on Min’s arm after being in the air for quite

some time.

1. An extraordinary butterfly with incredible markings on its wings flew down and found itself on Min’s arm.
2. A large brown butterfly with pale blue spots hovered and then, with a whisper of its wings, perched gently on Min’s arm.
3. A large butterfly with some different patterns on its wings just stayed in the air for a while and then was resting on Min’s arm.

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