

WY-TOPP ELA EXEMPLARS

Grade 5



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2.0 Overview

The WY-TOPP ELA assessment includes a writing component in grades 5, 7, and 9. Each writing task contains one or more passages related to a prompt. Students read the passages and write a response to the prompt, using evidence from the texts to support their ideas. Students do not answer comprehension questions about the passages before responding.

This document provides examples of Grade 5 student responses to a WY-TOPP ELA writing task and illustrates how responses are scored using the WY-TOPP writing rubric.

3.0 Passages & Prompt

3.1 Passage 1

from Shi's Special Seed

by Christie Chu

1 “Shi, stop singing to the flowers! You have a visitor,” Mui-Mui called. Shi’s little sister loved to tease him about his garden.

2 Shi broke off mid-song and whispered an apology to the flowers. Mud squelched between his toes as he hurried toward the house. Sweet-smelling blossoms and green leaves swayed as he passed. Shi’s mother stepped out into the garden, followed by a finely dressed stranger. Shi bowed politely.

3 “Greetings, Shi,” said the man. “The emperor has heard of your gardening skills. He has sent seeds to one hundred of the best gardeners in China, including some others from your village. Here is yours. Tend it and bring it to the palace in one year. Then the emperor will choose one of you to be the caretaker of his imperial gardens.” He dropped a small black seed into Shi’s palm. “Care for it well.” He bowed and left.

4 “What an honor,” Shi’s mother said, her eyes wide.

5 Shi planted the special seed in his best pot. He placed it in his garden next to his pink peonies, where it would get lots of sun.

6 “Hello, little one,” he murmured. “Ours is not a fine house like the palace, but I hope you like it here.”

7 After a month, no green sprout had pushed through the soil.

8 “Little one, what’s wrong? Do you miss your home?” The pot of dirt did not answer. Shi sang as he watered it, taking care not to pour too much water.

9 Months later, Mui-Mui stared into the pot. “That seed is defective,” she said.

10 Shi took the pot from her. “Don’t worry, little one. You take your time,” Shi said to it. “Mui-Mui is anxious to meet you, just like I am.” He moved the pot to the cool shade and began to sing. Mui-Mui rolled her eyes and stomped away.

11 But the seed did not grow. Shi transferred the seed to a different pot. He tried composts and fertilizers.

12 After more months of waiting, Shi’s stomach started to hurt. Then his head began to pound. He ate little. He couldn’t sleep and often got up in the night to check on the seed. Every day, he dragged himself outside to water his plants, but he was too tired to sing. His healthy garden began to wilt.

13 One day, Mui-Mui took the water pail from Shi’s hands when they began to shake. “I will water the seed while you rest,” she said.

14 Shi grabbed the pail back. “It is *my* responsibility.”

15 “Shi, take one of your own plants to the emperor. He won’t know it didn’t come from that seed,” Mui-Mui said.

16 “No. Even if he did not know, I would.”

17 “This is a ridiculous contest! You are making yourself sick worrying about that seed. You don’t even sing anymore.” Mui-Mui returned to the house, where their mother stood in the doorway, watching Shi with a furrowed brow.

18 The thought of disappointing the emperor made Shi feel queasy, but he felt worse about seeing his mother and sister distressed.

19 Shi took a deep breath. “It’s OK if you are not ready to grow yet, little one,” Shi said to the seed, still hidden in the dirt. Then he walked through the rest of the garden, apologizing to his plants. “I am sorry I haven’t sung to you lately,” Shi said to his favorite peonies. “I have missed you.” He began to sing softly.

20 Shi woke the next morning without a stomachache. He ate all the congee his mother gave him. When he handed her back the empty bowl, she smiled and her eyes shone with tears. He kissed her on the cheek and went to greet his garden with a song.

21 Still, the special seed did not grow. Mui-Mui tried one more time to convince Shi to bring one of his plants to the emperor instead.

22 “No, Mui-Mui,” he said. “This is the seed he asked me to care for. It is the one I’ll bring back to him. I won’t win, but at least I’ll see the beautiful imperial gardens while I’m there.”

23 Shi walked all day to get to the palace. Along the way, he saw other gardeners from his village carrying full, healthy plants.

24 When Shi stood among the one hundred best gardeners in China holding nothing but a pot of dirt, he couldn't enjoy the imperial gardens' beauty. The emperor inspected all the large green plants the other gardeners held. Finally, he approached Shi, who was the only one with an empty pot. Shi bowed, then stared at his feet, dirty from the long walk.

25 "I am sorry, Emperor," Shi said. His cheeks burned with shame. "I was not able to grow the seed you gave me."

26 The emperor laughed. "I know you weren't," he said. "All of the seeds were boiled. None of them could have grown. You are the only one who brought me back the seed I sent you."

27 Shi's head snapped up in surprise.

28 "I already know you are the best gardeners in China," the emperor said to them all. "My advisors told me of your beautiful gardens. However, I need to trust the people who live and work at the palace. That's why I had this contest." The emperor held up Shi's empty pot. "Shi was honest about his seed. I can trust him to take good care of my beloved gardens."

3.2 Passage 2

The Wheat on the Chessboard

by Liz Huyck

1 Long ago in India, there was a wise mathematician called Sessa. He invented a new game to amuse his friend, the king. He called it "chess." The king loved chess and told Sessa to name anything he liked as his reward. Anything! The king enjoyed boasting of his limitless wealth. But instead of gold, jewels, or elephants, after much thought Sessa told the king that he wished only some grains of wheat.

2 "What?!?" exclaimed the king, greatly astonished.

3 "I am a simple man," replied Sessa, "and my wants are few. But since you enjoy my chessboard so much, give me a single grain of wheat on the first square, two grains on the second square, four for the third, and so on. For each square double the last, as each day of play doubles our delight. That will mean more to me than all the riches in the world."

4 "Very well!" said the king, a little irritated, thinking that Sessa was mocking him. "If wheat is all he wants," he told his treasurer, "give it to him!"

5 The first day, the treasurer presented Sessa with a single grain of wheat, to the huge amusement of the court.

6 The second day, he got two, on a little cushion. The great lords roared with laughter. But Sessa kept his thoughts to himself.

7 On the ninth day, Sessa received 256 grains, enough to make a small handful. But the very next day, he had two handfuls. It took Sessa 16 days to get enough wheat to fill a large bag. But only one more day to get two bags. The day after, he had four bags.

8 The courtiers stopped laughing and started whispering.

9 By the end of the month, wagons filled with grain were rumbling toward Sessa's house, and the treasurer began to look worried. Quaking in his boots, he went to see the king.

10 "Highness!" he trembled. "Please look over my calculations, but I don't think they are in error. By his simple doubling, Sessa has now collected nearly all our stores of wheat! What shall we do? If we continue at this rate the treasury will soon be empty, and I doubt there is enough wheat in the *entire world* to pay him!"

11 "Impossible!" said the king. But he checked and double-checked the sums, and there was no doubt. In horror, he saw that by square 64, he would owe Sessa a total of 18,446,744,073,709,551,616 grains of wheat!

12 He could not even imagine so many grains—they would make a pile of wheat larger than the tallest mountain. That much wheat could not be gathered in all of India for the next 2,000 years!

13 There was nothing for the king to do but call Sessa, and take back his boasts of *limitless* wealth.

14 "Sire!" Sessa replied. "Say no more. I am happy with what I have already—I forgive you the second half of the chessboard."

15 With that, the king and Sessa remained the best of friends and enjoyed many games of chess together. And the clever Sessa got the real reward he had wanted all along—a wiser and more mathematical king.

3.3 Prompt

You have now read two folktales: “Shi’s Special Seed” and “The Wheat on the Chessboard.” In both passages, the main character receives a reward.

Write an essay in which you explain how each character earns and then reacts to his reward and what this shows about what is most important to him. Use details from **both** passages to support your essay.

4.0 Reading ECR Informative and Opinion/Argumentative Writing Rubric (Grades 3-10)

4.1 Reading Comprehension and Written Expression

	4	3	2	1	0
Reading Comprehension and Written Expression	The student response to the prompt is characterized by all or most of these criteria: • shows full comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially in the passage by providing an accurate explanation (G3) or analysis (G4–10) • responds to the prompt and provides effective and complete development of the claim or topic that is consistently appropriate to task, purpose, and audience • uses clear reasoning supported by appropriate text-based evidence in development of the claim or topic • uses appropriate organization, with clear and coherent writing • establishes and maintains an effective style	The student response to the prompt is characterized by all or most of these criteria: • shows comprehension of ideas stated explicitly or inferentially in the passage by providing a mostly accurate explanation (G3) or analysis (G4–10) • responds to the prompt and provides mostly complete development of the claim or topic that is mostly appropriate to task, purpose, and audience • uses mostly clear reasoning supported by appropriate text-based evidence in development of the claim or topic • uses good organization, with mostly clear and coherent writing • establishes and maintains a style that is mostly effective	The student response to the prompt is characterized by all or most of these criteria: • shows basic comprehension of ideas stated explicitly or inferentially in the passage by providing a generally accurate explanation (G3) or analysis (G4–10) • responds to the prompt and provides some development of the claim or topic that is somewhat appropriate to task, purpose, and audience • uses some reasoning and text-based evidence in the development of the claim or topic • is somewhat organized, with somewhat coherent writing • has a style that is somewhat effective	The student response to the prompt is characterized by all or most of these criteria: • shows limited comprehension of ideas stated explicitly or inferentially by providing a minimally accurate explanation (G3) or analysis (G4–10) • responds to the prompt and provides minimal development of the claim or topic that is limited in its appropriateness to task, purpose, and audience • uses limited reasoning and text-based evidence • uses limited organization and coherence • has a style that is minimally effective	The student response to the prompt is characterized by all or most of these criteria: • shows no comprehension of ideas and provides an inaccurate explanation (G3) or analysis (G4–10) or no explanation or analysis • is undeveloped or inappropriate to task, purpose, and audience • uses little to no text-based evidence • lacks organization and coherence • has an inappropriate style

A response is considered unable to be scored if it cannot be assigned a score based on the rubric criteria, including but not limited to those responses that are blank, illegible, indecipherable, off topic, written in a language other than English, insufficient, or state a refusal to respond.

4.2 Knowledge of Language and Conventions

	3	2	1	0
Knowledge of Language and Conventions	The student response to the prompt shows full command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be minor errors in spelling, mechanics, grammar, and usage, but the meaning is easily comprehended.	The student response to the prompt shows some command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be errors in spelling, mechanics, grammar, and usage that occasionally impede understanding, but the meaning can usually be comprehended.	The student response to the prompt shows limited command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be errors in spelling, mechanics, grammar, and usage that frequently impede comprehension.	The student response to the prompt does not show command of the conventions of standard English at the appropriate level of complexity. There may be many errors in spelling, mechanics, grammar, and usage that impede comprehension.

A response is considered unable to be scored if it cannot be assigned a score based on the rubric criteria, including but not limited to those responses that are blank, illegible, indecipherable, off topic, written in a language other than English, insufficient, or state a refusal to respond.

5.0 Student 1 – Score Point 4/3

5.1 Student 1 – Response

In both folktales, the main characters get rewards. But the rewards are not the most important part. Both stories show that a reward can tell us what a character values. The way each character earns the reward matters more than the prize itself. Shi and Sessa both face choices that show who they really are. Shi chooses honesty. Sessa uses knowledge to teach an important lesson.

In the first passage, Shi earns his reward by being honest and responsible. Gardening is important to him. He sings to the flowers, and the emperor hears about his skill. The emperor gives him a seed to care for, but it never grows. Shi keeps trying. He waters it carefully. He tries other pots, composts, and fertilizers. This shows that he takes the task seriously. He does not just want to win. Even when his sister tells him to bring one of his own plants, Shi refuses. He says, "No, Mui-Mui," he said. "This is the seed he asked me to care for. It is the one I'll bring back to him." Shi knows he might lose, but he still tells the truth. At the palace, he stands with only a pot of dirt. The other gardeners have healthy plants. Then the emperor says the seeds were boiled. Shi learns that his honesty helped him earn the reward. The emperor says, "Shi was honest about his seed. I can trust him to take good care of my beloved gardens." This shows that doing the right thing is more important than winning. The emperor's choice proves that Shi values trust and responsibility more than looking successful.

In "The Wheat on the Chessboard," Sessa earns his reward by being clever. He has already helped the king by inventing chess. But he chooses a reward that teaches the king a lesson. He does not simply ask to become rich. Instead, he asks for wheat that doubles on each square of the chessboard. He says, "Give me a single grain of wheat on the first square, two grains on the second, four for the third, and on." His plan teaches the king about math. At first, the court laughs. Soon, the amount of wheat becomes huge. Wagons of grain go to Sessa's house. The treasurer worries that the treasury will be empty. The king realizes he would owe more wheat than could be gathered in all of India for 2,000 years. When the king realizes he cannot pay, Sessa is not angry. He says, "Say no more. I am happy with what I have already I forgive you the second half of the chessboard." This shows that Sessa cares more about teaching the king than getting a reward. His reaction also shows kindness. He forgives the king and stays his friend.

Both characters show what matters most through their actions. Shi values honesty and responsibility. Sessa values wisdom and learning. Shi earns a reward because he tells the truth. Sessa gets a wiser king because he teaches a lesson. Both stories show that good character can be more important than wealth or prizes. Shi's empty pot and Sessa's growing chessboard problem are very different. But both prove that the characters care about doing what is right.

5.2 Student 1 – Annotation

Reading Comprehension Written Expression

Score Point 4

The response shows full comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially in the passage by providing an accurate analysis (*Shi chooses honesty. Sessa uses knowledge to teach an important lesson*). The writing provides effective and complete development of the topic (*He waters it carefully. He tries other pots, composts, and fertilizers. This shows that he takes the task seriously. He does not just want to win. Even when his sister tells him to bring one of his own plants, Shi refuses.... The emperor's choice proves that Shi values trust and responsibility more than looking successful*). The response uses clear reasoning supported by appropriate text-based evidence (*But he chooses a reward that teaches the king a lesson. He does not simply ask to become rich. Instead, he asks for wheat that doubles on each square of the chessboard. He says, "Give me a single grain of wheat on the first square, two grains on the second, four for the third, and on."* His plan teaches the king about math. At first, the court laughs. Soon, the amount of wheat becomes huge). The writing is consistently appropriate to task, purpose, and audience (*...cares more about teaching the king than getting a reward. His reaction also shows kindness. He forgives the king...*). It uses appropriate organization, with clear and coherent writing. The response establishes and maintains an effective style (*Both stories show that good character can be more important than wealth or prizes....But both prove that the characters care about doing what is right*).

Conventions

Score Point 3

The response shows full command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. Sentences are controlled. Minor errors in mechanics (*...emperor says, "Shi was..."*), grammar, and usage do not affect meaning and comprehension.

6.0 Student 2 – Score Point 1/1

6.1 Student 2 – Response

Shi and Sessa both got rewards. Shi got a reward because he liked gardens and sang to flowers. His pink peonies and talked to the seed. Then the Emperor gave him the garden job. Shi was surprised. I think he wanted to see the imperial gardens more than anything. The empty pot showed he was a good gardener.

Sessa got wheat. At first it was only a grain and then wagons filled with grain went to his house. The King was mad because there was not enough wheat. Sessa reacted by keeping all the wheat and showing he was rich. This shows the reward most important to him.

Both characters earned rewards because they worked hard. Shi watered plants and Sessa made chess. They both got what they wanted. Shi liked flowers and Sessa liked having alot of wheat. they was happy with there rewards and thats why the storys ended good.

6.2 Student 2 – Annotation

Reading Comprehension Written Expression

Score Point 1

The response shows limited comprehension of ideas stated explicitly or inferentially by providing a minimally accurate analysis (*Shi got a reward because he liked gardens and sang to flowers.... Sessa got wheat*). The response provides minimal development of the topic that is limited in its appropriateness to task, purpose, and audience (*His pink peonies and talked to the seed. Then the Emperor gave him the garden job. Shi was surprised*). The writing uses limited reasoning and text-based evidence (*The King was mad because there was not enough wheat. Sessa reacted by keeping all the wheat and showing he was rich*). The response uses limited organization and coherence. The writing has a style that is minimally effective (*they was happy with there rewards and thats why the storys ended good*).

Conventions

Score Point 1

The response shows limited command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There are be errors in spelling (...storys...), mechanics, grammar (*they was, they...there, that's*), and usage that frequently impede comprehension.