



# Texas Success Initiative

## Sample Questions

## Reading

The Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Reading test contains questions that measure proficiency in four content areas. The four content areas are as follows:

**Literary Analysis** — Topics covered in this category include:

- Identifying and analyzing ideas in and elements of literary texts

**Main Idea and Supporting Details** — Topics covered in this category include:

- Identifying the main idea of a passage
- Comprehending explicit textual information in a passage

**Inferences in a Text or Texts** — Topics covered in this category include:

- Synthesizing ideas by making a connection or comparison between two passages
- Making an appropriate inference about single passages

**Author’s Use of Language** — Topics covered in this category include:

- Identifying an author’s purpose, tone and organization or rhetorical strategies and use of evidence
- Determining the meaning of words in context

## Reading Sample Questions

### Directions for questions 1–9

Read the passage and then choose the best answer to the question. Answer the question on the basis of what is stated or implied in the passage.

1. When we think of volcanoes, eruptions, lava, and smoke-filled air come to mind—all occurring on land. Most people are surprised to learn about the prevalence of underwater volcanoes on our planet. Because the lava and smoke spilling out of an active, underwater volcano is contained by the ocean, people generally do not take note of these eruptions. However, the largest underwater volcanoes are capable of creating huge tidal waves, threatening coastal communities.

The main idea of the passage is that

- A. traditional volcanoes and underwater volcanoes are similar
  - B. the lava and smoke from an underwater volcano is contained by the sea
  - C. most tidal waves are caused by underwater volcanoes
  - D. underwater volcanoes receive little attention but can be dangerous
2. In 2010, talk show host Oprah Winfrey and novelist Jonathan Franzen kissed and made up after a nine-year feud. In 2001, Franzen was disinvited from appearing on Winfrey’s TV show to pitch his novel *The Corrections* after he made it clear that he was unhappy about the book’s being chosen for the Oprah Book Club. Describing his work as “in the high-art literary tradition,” Franzen said he didn’t want to be associated with the Club, which he accused of occasionally choosing “schmaltzy, one-dimensional” novels. But Winfrey is apparently able to forgive and forget: she chose Franzen’s next novel, *Freedom*, for her book club and said of it, “Now you haven’t heard me say this word often, but this book is a masterpiece.”
- The passage implies that Franzen’s criticism of the Oprah Book Club was motivated primarily by
- A. pride
  - B. anger
  - C. insensitivity
  - D. ignorance

3. The main authors of The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are usually thought of as America’s “Founding Fathers.” Other, less known personages also deserve the title, however, and Noah Webster was one of these. Through his writings, which include the still-influential dictionary that bears his name, Webster sought to legitimize an “American English” that was independent of British spelling and pronunciation. For instance, Webster removed the “u” from “colour,” creating the distinct American version of the word.

What is the main purpose of this passage?

- A. To praise the Founding Fathers
  - B. To present information about an important American
  - C. To define and explain “American English”
  - D. To distinguish American dictionaries from British dictionaries
4. If you are committed to healthy, green living and want to reduce your environmental footprint, you might consider expanding your daily diet to include bugs. Supporters of the edible insect initiative rightfully argue that farming insects has a much lower environmental impact than does raising livestock since bugs are easier to harvest and require a fraction of the water and land space that cattle need. Indeed, the high-protein, low-fat health benefits of bug-eating have long been known. For hundreds of years, crickets, silkworms and even tarantulas have been served roasted, stewed and fried at the dinner tables of many cultures.

Which words best describe the author’s attitude toward the “edible insect initiative”?

- A. awe and amazement
  - B. interest and support
  - C. disgust and distaste
  - D. fear and apprehension
5. Long thought to be a case of mistaken identity, the discovery of the Bornean rainbow toad by European explorers in 1924 was recently verified by scientists. The explorers had made a black-and-white sketch of an unusual toad they had found in the jungles of Southeast Asia, christening it the Bornean rainbow toad. Skeptical but curious, scientists recently went to look for the toad—and ended up finding three specimens.

The passage implies which of the following about the Bornean rainbow toad?

- A. Some people doubted the existence of the toad.
- B. Scientists were confident that they would find the toad.
- C. The surviving toads have been relocated to Europe.
- D. No human being had seen the toad since 1924.

6. Television has been the primary source of information and entertainment for most Americans over the last 50 years. However, with Internet use on the rise year after year, some may wonder if surfing the net will soon surpass watching television as Americans’ primary leisure activity. Indeed, some recent surveys show that time spent on the Internet is now greater than time spent in front of the television. However, this statistic may not tell the whole story, as 59% of Americans say they multitask, using the Internet and watching TV simultaneously.

The main idea of the passage is that television

- A. is only one of many information sources
  - B. may have become less popular than the Internet
  - C. is watched by more people now than ever before
  - D. focuses more on entertainment than on news
7. Plywood, while not the most pleasing wood to look at, has become an incredibly important building material in house construction. It is flexible, inexpensive, and strong. Its strength is due to layers of thin wood glued on top of each other with the grain of each layer making a right angle with the grain of the layer below it. This way of layering the sheets of wood makes plywood difficult to break.

According to the passage, the arrangement of the layers of thin wood explains plywood’s

- A. strength
  - B. cost
  - C. attractiveness
  - D. flexibility
8. The 1922 German Expressionist film *Nosferatu*, directed by F. W. Murnau, is considered one of the most influential films in cinematic history—while also being a classic vampire movie. The film is closely based on Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel, *Dracula*; however, the villain in the film is called “Count Orlok” rather than “Count Dracula.” The reason is that the small studio that produced the film, Prana Film, was unable to secure the rights to Stoker’s novel. In fact, shortly after finishing *Nosferatu*, its one and only film, Prana went bankrupt in order to dodge copyright lawsuits from Stoker’s widow.

Why does the author say that the vampire in *Nosferatu* is named “Count Orlok” and not “Count Dracula”?

- A. To show that the makers of *Nosferatu* made minor changes to Stoker’s novel
- B. To suggest that the characters in *Nosferatu* were based on real people instead of literary characters
- C. To criticize *Nosferatu* for its differences from its source
- D. To praise the makers of *Nosferatu* for their imagination in recreating Stoker’s novel

9. Guillermo Gonzalez Camarena became a successful inventor at an early age. By the age of seven, he had constructed a variety of electronically-propelled toys to play with; he later designed and built his own amateur radio and a functioning telescope. In 1940, when he was only 23, Camarena obtained the world's first patent for color television. Camarena's early color television transmission system was the first one to be approved by the U.S. Federal Communications Commission. Other color-television technologies came after Camarena's patented invention, but his system is still used by a number of scientists today.

In sentence 2, the word "functioning" most nearly means

- A. performing
- B. running
- C. working
- D. moving

### Directions for questions 10–11

Read the 2 passages below and then choose the best answer to each question. Answer the questions on the basis of what is stated or implied in the passages.

#### Passage 1

I recently met a fifth-grade teacher who had asked her students what they did after school. Most said they stayed inside and watched TV or spent time on the computer. Some went to a recreation center for an afterschool program—where they played computer games. A handful of students played outside, but most of those were doing organized sports. It turned out that fewer than 10% of the children were enjoying unstructured time outside rather than concentrating on electronic devices. This is a tragedy! Now more than ever, kids need opportunities to learn and develop through outdoor activities—and not just on organized teams. Parents, limit computer use and encourage your kids to get outside and play every day!

#### Passage 2

There is almost no reliable data about the level of technological literacy among children in the United States. Our students perform relatively poorly on international tests in science and math, however, and many other Western countries teach more about technology than we do. It seems that American students are not as technologically literate as their international counterparts. This could put them at a disadvantage when it comes to their careers, because technology is everywhere, from medical facilities to farms. Obviously, it is imperative that teachers and parents make

the use of technology, including computers, a more central part of children's lives.

10. The author of Passage 2 probably would respond to the last sentence of Passage 1 ("Parents . . . every day!") by
- A. asserting that parents should help children find a balance of indoor and outdoor activities
  - B. claiming that young children often know more about computers than their parents do
  - C. pointing out that many children would rather use technology than play outside
  - D. arguing that children should be spending more time using computers
11. The author of Passage 1 would most likely criticize the author of Passage 2 for
- A. overemphasizing the strength of the data about students' technological literacy
  - B. overlooking the drawbacks of increasing the time children spend using technology
  - C. dismissing as unimportant the development that occurs during outdoor activities
  - D. exaggerating the proportion of careers that require knowledge of science and math

### Directions for questions 12–15

Read the passage below and then choose the best answer to each question. Answer the questions on the basis of what is stated or implied in the passage.

*The narrator of this passage from a short story describes the cabin where her father worked.*

I wasn't sure what this work involved, but it must have been exciting because the Lab itself was exciting. Anywhere we didn't go often was exciting.

We would get there in a heavy wooden rowboat, built in the five-house village half a mile away—our mother would row, she was quite good at it—or by following a twisty, winding footpath, over fallen trees and stumps and around boulders and across wet patches where a few slippery planks were laid across the sphagnum moss, breathing in the mildew smell of damp wood and slowly decaying leaves. It was too far for us to walk, our legs were too short, so mostly we went in the rowboat.

The Lab was made of logs; it seemed enormous, though in the two photographs of it that survive it looks like a shack. It did however have a screened porch, with log railings. Inside it there were things we weren't allowed to touch—bottles containing a dangerous liquid in which white grubs floated, their six tiny front legs clasped together like praying fingers, and corks that smelled like poison and were poison, and trays with dried insects pinned to them with long, thin pins,

each with a tiny, alluring black knob for a head. All of this was so forbidden it made us dizzy.

At the Lab we could hide in the ice house, a dim and mysterious place that was always bigger on the inside than it was on the outside, and where there was a hush, and a lot of sawdust to keep the blocks of ice cool. Sometimes there would be a tin of evaporated milk with holes punched in the top and wax paper stuck over them; sometimes there would be a carefully hoarded stub of butter or an end of bacon; sometimes there would be a fish or two, pickerel or lake trout, already filleted, laid out on a chipped enamel pie plate.

What did we do in there? There was nothing to actually do. We'd pretend we had vanished—that nobody knew where we were. This in itself was strangely energizing. Then we'd come out, away from the silence, back into the pine-needle scent and the sound of waves pocking against the shore, and our mother's voice calling us, because it was time to get back into the rowboat and row home.\*

12. In line 1, “this work” clearly refers to
- A. writing
  - B. food science
  - C. photography
  - D. insect research
13. Details in the passage suggest that the narrator is
- A. an adult remembering a recent incident
  - B. an elderly person remembering middle age
  - C. an adult recalling a location from childhood
  - D. a child describing a frightening place
14. The descriptions of the Lab and of the ice house are similar in that both descriptions
- A. emphasize cheerful and light-filled surroundings
  - B. contain images of hiding and concealment
  - C. highlight the narrator's misconception of size
  - D. contrast with descriptions of the narrator's home
15. When the narrator repeatedly uses the pronouns “we” and “us,” she is most likely speaking of herself and
- A. a sibling
  - B. her mother
  - C. her father
  - D. the reader

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\* Margaret Atwood, excerpt from “The Boys at the Lab” from *Moral Disorder: Stories*. Copyright © 2006 by O. W. Toad, Ltd. Used by permission of Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc. Any third party use of this material, outside of this publication, is prohibited. Interested parties must apply directly to Random House, Inc. for permission.

## Reading

Question Number	Correct Answer	Rationale
1	D	<p>Choice (D) is correct. The main idea of the passage is that underwater volcanoes receive little attention but can be dangerous. The author explains that while “people generally do not take note” of underwater eruptions because “the lava and smoke . . . is contained by the ocean,” such eruptions are dangerous because they are “capable of creating huge tidal waves, threatening coastal communities.” Choice (A) is incorrect because the passage highlights differences, not similarities, between traditional and underwater volcanoes. Choice (B) is incorrect because although the passage notes that the lava and smoke from underwater volcanoes is contained by the sea, that fact is not the main idea; it supports the larger point about what people notice. Choice (C) is incorrect because the passage does not indicate that <i>most</i> tidal waves are caused by underwater eruptions.</p>

2	A	Choice (A) is correct. The author of the passage states that Franzen refers to his own work as belonging to a “high-art literary tradition” and to Oprah’s book club choices as being “schmaltzy,” or overly sentimental, and “one-dimensional.” These details suggest that Franzen felt that his own book is of higher quality than other books chosen for the book club. In other words, Franzen’s criticism of the Oprah Book Club was motivated by his pride, or his sense of self-importance. Choices (B) and (C) are incorrect because there is no indication in the passage that Franzen felt any anger or was trying to be insensitive. Choice (D) is incorrect because there is no indication that Franzen’s comments about Oprah’s choices were ignorant or uninformed.
3	B	Choice (B) is correct. The author discusses Noah Webster and the idea that he deserves the title of Founding Father. The author clearly considers Webster important, citing his “still-influential dictionary” and his attempt to “legitimize an ‘American English.’” Choice (A) is incorrect because although the author mentions that the Founding Fathers authored certain documents, he or she offers no specific praise of the Founding Fathers. Choices (C) and (D) are incorrect; although the author mentions Webster’s attempt “to legitimize an ‘American English’” and to create an American English dictionary, neither of these points is the main focus of the passage.
4	B	Choice (B) is correct. The author of the passage is interested in and supportive of the edible insect initiative. He or she addresses the reader directly, urging, “you might consider expanding your daily diet to include bugs.” The author also shows support for the edible insect movement by stating that advocates of the movement “rightfully” argue that “farming insects has a much lower environmental impact than does raising livestock.” Choice (A) is incorrect because although the author expresses support for the edible insect initiative, he or she does not speak with awe and amazement, or great wonder. Choices (C) and (D) are incorrect because the author is positive about the movement, showing interest and support rather than fear or disgust.
5	A	Choice (A) is correct. The author suggests that some people doubted the existence of the Bornean rainbow toad: they “thought [it] to be a case of mistaken identity” and were “skeptical.” In other words, some people thought the “European explorers” were documenting another, already known kind of toad, and had not discovered a new toad. This is supported by the fact that the discovery was not “verified” for many years. Choices (B), (C), and (D) are incorrect: the author suggests that scientists did <i>not</i> expect to find the Bornean rainbow toad, there is no indication that the recently-found toads were taken to Europe, and it is unlikely that <i>no</i> human being—including non-scientists—had seen any specimen of the toad since 1924.
6	B	Choice (B) is correct. The main idea of the passage is that television may have become less popular than the Internet. The author points out that “Internet use” is “on the rise,” and that some people wonder if using the Internet will soon become “Americans’ primary leisure activity.” The author points out that surfing the net <i>might</i> already be more popular than watching television, as “recent surveys show that time spent on the Internet is now greater than time spent in front of the television”—though some people use the Internet and watch TV at the same time. Choices (A), (C), and (D) are incorrect: it might be true that television is just one of many information sources, but the author does not address this, and he or she also does not indicate that television is watched by more people now than ever before, or that television programs tend to focus more on entertainment than on news.
7	A	Choice (A) is correct. The passage indicates that the arrangement of the layers of thin wood—“with the grain of each layer making a right angle with the grain of the layer below it”—is what “makes plywood difficult to break.” In other words, the arrangement of the layers explains plywood’s strength. Choices (B), (C), and (D) are incorrect: the author describes plywood as “inexpensive,” “not the most pleasing wood to look at,” and “flexible,” but he or she does not connect any of these facts to the layering of sheets of wood.

8	A	Choice (A) is correct. The author points out that the film <i>Nosferatu</i> is “closely based on”—but not exactly the same as—“Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel, <i>Dracula</i> .” He or she explains that the vampire in <i>Nosferatu</i> is “called ‘Count Orlok’ rather than ‘Count Dracula’” in order to show that the makers of <i>Nosferatu</i> made minor changes to Stoker’s novel as a result of being “unable to secure the rights” to <i>Dracula</i> . Choices (B), (C), and (D) are incorrect because the author does not indicate that the characters in <i>Nosferatu</i> were based on real people, and he or she neither criticizes <i>Nosferatu</i> for its differences from <i>Dracula</i> nor praises the makers of the film for their imagination in recreating Stoker’s novel.
9	C	Choice (C) is correct. The author speaks of Camarena’s successful inventions. In this context, “functioning” means “working”; the author is indicating that Camarena built a telescope that actually worked. He or she is not indicating that the telescope was performing, running, or moving.
10	D	Rationale: Choice (D) is correct. The author of Passage 2 believes that American students should be more technologically literate and suggests that “the use of technology, including computers,” should be “a more central part of children’s lives.” Therefore, he or she almost certainly would say that instead of limiting computer use, parents should encourage children to spend <i>more</i> time using computers. Choices (A), (B), and (C) are incorrect because the author of Passage 2 does not discuss outdoor activities, adults’ computer knowledge, or children’s recreational preferences.
11	B	Choice (B) is correct. The author of Passage 1 finds it very troubling that so many children spend their time on computers and other electronic devices instead of playing outside. The author of Passage 2, on the other hand, thinks technology should be an even bigger part of children’s lives than it already is. It is likely that the author of Passage 1 would criticize the author of Passage 2 for failing to think about the drawbacks of this increased time spent on technology—such as a decreased amount of time to spend “learn[ing] and develop[ing] through outdoor activities.” Choice (A) is incorrect because the author of Passage 2 states that there is very little “reliable data,” and choice (C) is incorrect because he or she does not discuss and dismiss development during outdoor activities. Choice (D) is incorrect because the author of Passage 1 makes no mention of careers, and there is no indication that the author of Passage 2 is exaggerating when speaking of careers.
12	D	Choice (D) is correct. In the first part of the passage, the narrator refers to “this work,” saying that “it must have been exciting because the Lab itself was exciting.” While she isn’t “sure what this work involved,” she describes the Lab very fully: the mysterious journey to get to it, its exterior, then its contents (“bottles containing a dangerous liquid in which white grubs floated . . . trays with dried insects”) and other aspects of her father’s work. The narrator never directly states what “this work” is, but these and other elements of the passage imply that it involves scientific research with such insects as the grubs. Choices (A), (B), and (C) are incorrect because there is no indication in the passage that the narrator’s father is involved in writing, food science, or photography.
13	C	Choice (C) is correct. The narrator uses the past tense throughout the passage, signaling to the reader that the events described occurred in the past. And the passage contains numerous hints that the narrator is describing her childhood self: “our mother would row” and “our legs were too short,” for example. It is reasonable to assume that the narrator is an adult recalling a location (and events) from childhood. Choices (A) and (B) are incorrect because the incidents described are clearly not recent, nor do the events recalled happen to a middle-aged person. And although the place has elements of scariness about it, the person describing it is clearly not a child; therefore, choice (D) is incorrect.



14	C	<p>Choice (C) is correct. When describing the Lab, the narrator states that “it seemed enormous, though in the two photographs of it that survive it looks like a shack.” When describing the ice house, she states that it “was always bigger on the inside than it was on the outside.” Both these descriptions emphasize misconceptions about the size of a place. The first misconception occurs because of a child’s natural perception that a place is larger than it is in reality, and is corrected by an adult viewing of photographs; the second plays on a child’s mistaken perception of the size of a place based on its exterior. Choices (A) and (D) are incorrect because there are no cheerful and light-filled surroundings in the passage, nor is there a description of the narrator’s home. And although the narrator does speak of hiding and concealing herself in the ice house, she does not speak of doing so in the Lab itself; therefore, choice (B) is incorrect.</p>
15	A	<p>Choice (A) is correct. In lines 3-4, when referring to the journey to the Lab, the narrator states, “our mother would row.” At the end of the passage—after she has described repeated adventures at the Lab while accompanied by at least one other person—she recalls hearing “our mother’s voice calling us, because it was time to get back into the rowboat and row home.” It is clear that the narrator’s companion shared a mother and a home with the narrator—in other words, the other person is the narrator’s sibling. Choices (B) and (D) are incorrect because the narrator’s mother is clearly differentiated from the companion in the passage and the reader does not participate in the events described in the passage. Although the narrator is describing the place where her father worked, there is no indication that her father was the other person accompanying her; indeed, it is unlikely that the narrator’s father’s legs would be “too short” for the walk, and he might not hide with a small child inside an ice house. Therefore, choice (C) is incorrect.</p>