

2024 MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guide

Grade 10 English Language Arts

Question 9: Essay

Reporting Categories: Language and Writing

Standard: [L.PK-12.1](#) - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Standard: [L.PK-12.2](#) - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Standard: [L.PK-12.3](#) - Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Standard: [W.PK-12.2](#) - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Standard: [W.PK-12.4](#) - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Item Description: Write an essay explaining how a central idea is developed in two excerpts on similar topics; use details from both excerpts for support.

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Essay Prompt

For this question, you will write an essay based on the passage(s). Your writing should:

- Present and develop a central idea/thesis.
- Provide evidence and/or details from the passage(s).
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Based on *Becoming Maria* and *The Yellow House*, write an essay that explains how the authors' experiences lead to important realizations in their lives. Be sure to use details from **both** excerpts to develop your essay.

Continue to the following page to see the scoring guides for this question. Sample student responses begin on page 3. The annotations that appear above each sample response describe elements of the response that contributed to its score for Idea Development and Standard English Conventions.

Scoring Guide for Idea Development

Select a score point in the table below to view the sample student response.

Score*	Description
5A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea/thesis is insightful and fully developed Skillful selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Skillful and/or subtle organization Rich expression of ideas Full awareness of the task and mode
5B	
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea/thesis is clear and well-developed Effective selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Effective organization Clear expression of ideas Full awareness of the task and mode
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea/thesis is general and moderately developed Appropriate selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Moderate organization Adequate expression of ideas Sufficient awareness of the task and mode
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea/thesis may be present and is somewhat developed Limited selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Limited organization Basic expression of ideas Partial awareness of the task and mode
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea/thesis is not developed Insufficient evidence and/or details Minimal organization Poor expression of ideas Minimal awareness of the task and mode
0	The response shows evidence the student has read the text, but does not address the question or incorrectly responds to the question.

Scoring Guide for Standard English Conventions

Select a score point in the table below to view the sample student response.

Score*	Description
3A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent control of a variety of sentence structures relative to length of essay Consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay
3B	
3C	
3D	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly consistent control of sentence structures relative to length of essay Mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little control and/or no variety in sentence structure and/or Little control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or insufficient length
0	Sentences are formed incorrectly with no control of grammar, usage, and mechanics and/or insufficient length.

*In both Scoring Guides, letters are used to distinguish between sample student responses that earned the same score (e.g., 5A and 5B).

Idea Development—Score Point 5A

This fully developed and insightful essay begins with a brief introduction explaining how the authors of both *Becoming Maria* and *The Yellow House* “have an experience that positively changes their lives.” Skillfully organized details and explanations richly express how the authors’ experiences lead to important realizations that expand their outlooks on the world. In the first body paragraph, the essay explains how watching the movie *West Side Story* leads author Sonia Manzano to an emotional, transformative experience, in which she questions “how long she has been ignorant of life’s beauty” and comes to the realization that “there are endless possibilities, hope for the future, and opportunity for her to do great things.” The rich expression of ideas insightfully conveys the significant change Manzano undergoes, “broadening her perspective on what is truly possible.” In the second body paragraph, the essay explains how in *The Yellow House* the author’s understanding of the world changes when she obtains a pair of glasses. Details from the excerpt are skillfully selected to convey how the author struggled with impaired vision, impacting her behavior at school and with her family. When the author’s mother finally notices that she has difficulty seeing, it “was a turning point for the author, as Broom would get the help she needed.” The essay further describes how the author is “astonished” by her sudden ability to see the world clearly, providing her with a new perspective on life. Overall, the essay is fully developed and demonstrates full awareness of the writing task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3A

Grammar, usage, and mechanics are consistently controlled across a variety of complex sentence structures: “Similar to Manzano, the author of *The Yellow House*, Broom, lives through a life-changing experience that shapes her current perspective on the world.” The essay is relatively free of errors, and its length and complexity provide the opportunity to demonstrate control of standard English conventions.

Certain experiences can have significant impacts later in life. In the short story excerpts, *Becoming Maria* and, *The Yellow House*, the authors' experiences lead to important realizations in their lives. The author of *Becoming Maria*, finds realization after watching the film, *West Side Story*, and the author of *The Yellow House* finds realization after getting glasses. Both authors have an experience that positively changes their lives, and those experiences are worth exploring.

Manzano, the author of *Becoming Maria*, obtains a new outlook on life and the endless possibilities of the future. When Miss Pellman decides to take Manzano, Norma and Teresa to see *West Side Story*, she does not express any particular excitement upon the idea of going to watch a movie. However, after they find their seats at the movie theater, Manzano expresses great intrigue by exclaiming, "I see the schoolyards, the fences, the buildings, and candy stores I've seen in all my neighborhoods--but here they look different. Sharp, clear, bright, and beautiful. What is this that I am watching?" (Manzano 10). The author's dialogue expresses how new of a experience watching a movie might be. As the movie starts, Manzano immediately expresses passion and interest in the film and she explains, "My eyes open wider so I can see everything better. My ears pick up all the musical sounds flowing and crashing into each other in the air, and I wonder, how long have I been sleeping?... This movie makes things possible. Music and words and songs and images that are possible... I don't care that strangers see me cry. These tears are important and I will not hold anything back at all" (12-19). Here, Manzano clearly expresses the significance of the movie to her life. The film has clearly changed her perspective on life, broadening her perspective on what is truly possible. She cries tears of importance, and questions how long she has been ignorant of life's beauty. In the end of the excerpt, as Manzano looks at her poster in deep thought, she thinks to herself and questions: "If people can make that movie, what can I do?" (28). This line directly shows the realization Manzano made that day. She realized that there are endless possibilities, hope for the future, and opportunity for her to do great things. Watching that film was definitely a eye-opening experience for her, making way for new-found motivation to carry her to success.

Similar to Manzano, the author of *The Yellow House*, Broom, lives through a life-changing experience that shapes her current perspective on the world. Before anything else, Broom explains, "My growing-up world contains five points on a map, like five fingers on a spread hand. This world of mine... is a blur. I can see, but only up close... I hide my eyes' weakness from my mother for a long time. It is not hard, she is busy making her new world. My poor sight and the hiding of it shapes my behavior and thus my personality" (Broom 1). From this quote, it is evident that the author has bad eyes and needs glasses in order to see clearly. Hiding her condition from her mother, her world is restricted without glasses. When Broom finally turned ten, her "mother [discovered] that [she could not] see beyond a hand in front of [her] eyes" (12). This event was a turning point for the author, as Broom would get the help she needed to see clearly like everyone else. She expresses her difficulties with eye trouble, and Broom explains, "The children sitting all around me are annoying blurs, the chalkboard black waters with scratches of white... If the teacher asks a question based on something she's written on the board, I'll say something smart-alecky to hide the fact I have no idea what she's written on the board" (12-13). The author's eye trouble clearly affects her daily life and education as well. This builds up the significance of obtaining glasses, which would change Broom's whole life around. When Broom finally receives glasses, she is astonished by all of things in the world she could not see before. Broom finally explains, "only when [the glasses] are on my face can I know what kind of day I have awakened to" (21). Getting glasses definitely broadened Broom's perspective on the world and how seeing the world clearly can change one's life.

Both authors experience significant events that change their lives for the better. Manzano is able to realize that there are endless possibilities in life, and gets inspiration from the film *West Side Story*, and she has infinite opportunities to do whatever she wants to do in life. For Broom, after getting glasses, she is able to grasp a new perspective on life, viewing the world clearly now. In modern day society, it is important to note that certain experiences can shape a person and what they become in the future. For both authors, their experiences allowed to share a new outlook on life, influencing their lives for the better.

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Idea Development—Score Point 5B

This essay is fully developed, explaining how the authors' experiences lead to important realizations that fundamentally impact their lives. The introduction of the essay is insightful and engaging, noting that "vivid" childhood experiences cause both authors to arrive at "a realization that alters the course of their lives." The two body paragraphs contain skillfully organized details and explanations that richly express the authors' transformations. The essay explains in the first body paragraph how, in *Becoming Maria*, Sonia Manzano has a cathartic experience while attending the film *West Side Story* with her teacher, causing her to undergo a metamorphosis and recognize the potential her life holds: "The author uses a metaphor comparing herself to a caterpillar metamorphosing into a butterfly in order to demonstrate that the film significantly changed her." In the second body paragraph, the essay explains how the author of *The Yellow House* was limited by her poor vision but can "see the beauties of everyday life" once she receives glasses and is suddenly "able to delight in simple activities such as reading the words off of objects." The conclusion skillfully expands upon how the authors' experiences led them, both literally and metaphorically, to see the world in new ways. The essay demonstrates a rich expression of ideas and full awareness of task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3B

Consistent control is evident across a variety of complex sentence structures, and grammar and usage also demonstrate consistent control: "Even though she is five, her vision prohibits her from discerning definite shapes." Punctuation and spelling are generally correct, including some more advanced vocabulary ("catharsis," "Unbeknownst," "rudimentary"). Overall, the essay's length and complexity provide opportunity to demonstrate control of standard English conventions.

The human life contains an array of vivid experiences. These experiences can be fundamental to a person's character and their future. A single event can disrupt the course of an entire life. Sonia Manzano is an actress who is most famous for playing the character Maria on *Sesame Street*. In her memoir *Becoming Maria*, Manzano details the experience of seeing the film *West Side Story* for the first time, which contributed to her career and likely her character name on *Sesame Street*. Whilst Manzano's experience led to her career, Sarah M. Broom's memoir *The Yellow House* details her world before and after receiving glasses. Broom documents how receiving glasses opened up her world. Each memoir highlights the most memorable experiences of their own lives; these memorable experiences lead to each author arriving at a realization that alters the course of their lives.

Sonia Manzano is invited by her teacher to attend the film *West Side Story* with her and two other classmates. Manzano accepts the invitation and attends the film with her teacher. As the film starts, the young girl notes that "the schoolyards, the fences, the buildings, and candy stores I've seen in all my neighborhoods ... they look different. Sharp, clear, bright, and beautiful" (Manzano 10). Manzano describes the imagery of the film, and how the young version of herself wonders at the cinematography. *West Side Story* takes place in New York City, where Manzano lives, and as a result, she is able to compare the glamour of the film to the reality of what she personally has seen. Therefore, she believes film makes everything more magical, which can serve as a reason she later becomes an actress. By the end of the film, Manzano is overcome by emotion. "Shedding my old, sleepy cocoon so the real me can rise makes me giggle, and then laugh, but too soon the new me, the one who feels the air around is being born too fast, begins to cry--no, not cry, but sob, gasp, and gush" (Manzano 14). The young Manzano realizes that she has never experienced such emotional release before. In fact, the film is able to invoke catharsis in Manzano. The author uses a metaphor comparing herself to a caterpillar metamorphosing into a butterfly in order to demonstrate that the film significantly changed her. Before watching the film, her only motivation for going is that she wanted to do something fun with her Saturday. However, the film inspired her, and upon returning home, Manzano comes to her realization: "If people can make that movie, what can I do?" (Manzano 28). Unbeknownst to Manzano at the time, her future entailed her appearing on the screen.

Similarly, glasses help Sarah M. Broom see the world of color around her. Broom describes how her poor vision limits her view of the world. "This world of mine, it must be said outright, is a blur. I can see, but only up close" (Broom 2). Broom's poor eye-sight stops her from enjoying her own life. Even though she is five, her vision prohibits her from discerning definite shapes. Her brothers bully her because she can not see them when the brothers are attempting to prank her. Later, Broom's mother realizes that Broom is almost blind, and takes her daughter to the eye glasses store. Upon trying on the glasses, Broom remarks "[t]rees have leaves" (Broom 15). The fact that there are leaves on trees is an obvious, rudimentary fact. However, Broom is only able to see these leaves with her glasses on. Her three-word observation signifies how extreme her impairment is. She soon realizes how important the glasses are to her life. "On the way home, ... I read aloud every single word we pass, from billboards along the interstate and from storefront signs" (Broom 17). Broom is amazed by her new ability to read. Before she recieved her glasses, Broom is only able to see objects right in front of her. However, Broom is now able to delight in simple activities such as reading the words off of objects that are off in the distance. "Only when they are on my face can I know what kind of day I have awakened to" (Broom 21). With her new pair of glasses, Broom is able to see the beauties of everyday life, and is able to distinguish clearly between days.

Manzano and Broom both see a whole new world because of their experiences, both metaphorically whilst Broom is also only able to literally see because of her experiences. Manzano's visit to the movie theater to see *West Side Story* inspired her to later become an actress, whilst Broom's visit to the optometician unlocked a world of possibilities for Broom herself. Although the lives of most are not as drastically changed by an experience as those of Broom and Manzano, every person has experiences that shape their character, personality, and tenets. By experiencing new things, a person's character can become more developed, and by a sudden twist of fate, perhaps an event similar to those which occurred to Broom and Manzano may cause a significant alteration to the course of that person's life.

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Idea Development—Score Point 4

This essay is well developed and explains how the authors' experiences lead to important realizations in their lives. The central idea is clear, outlined in an effective introduction that states how the authors' youthful experiences allow them to develop a greater appreciation of the worlds they inhabit. In the first body paragraph, the essay discusses *Becoming Maria* and explains how Sonia Manzano seeing *West Side Story* with her teacher as a young girl led to a personal "metamorphosis," broadening her sense of what is possible in her life: "The idea of that movie being possible makes Sonia question what she can do." In the second body paragraph, the essay explains that the author of *The Yellow House* gets glasses to correct her poor vision, which gives her a new appreciation of her surroundings, "noting every little detail she could observe." Throughout the essay, details are effectively selected and paraphrased or woven into the explanation, contributing to a clear expression of ideas. The essay demonstrates effective organization and full awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3C

The essay's length and complexity provide opportunity to demonstrate control of standard English conventions. The response is relatively free of errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage and employs a variety of sentence structures, including effective incorporation of details from the text: "Her mother finally figured out she had a vision problem and took her to the eye doctor, where she remembers the 'cold fluorescent bulbs' (14)."

Youth brings opportunity for strong influence on a developing mind. In the passages *Becoming Maria* by Sonia Manzano and *The Yellow House* by Sarah M. Broom, both authors tell of their experiences as children and how it shaped their behaviors and personalities. In *Becoming Maria*, a young Sonia sees a movie for the first time that opens her eyes to her true personality, and gives her the motivation to explore her interests and abilities. *The Yellow House* tells the story of the limited perspective of a young Sarah M. Broom, both due to her child mind and terrible eyesight, and how the development of both of these things shows her the beauty of the world around her.

Becoming Maria is the story of Sonia Manzano, the author, as a young girl seeing the 1961 film *West Side Story*. Between moving around and home life, young Sonia's life was a haze until her teacher offers to take her and some of her classmates to see the movie. When she watches the film, she gains a new perspective on the things she sees everyday, and the cinematography opens her eyes to possibility. She has a full-blown metamorphosis in the middle of the theater and cannot contain herself emotionally, becoming a new person in the mix. The idea of that movie being possible makes Sonia question what she can do.

The Yellow House is another anecdote from the author about her life from a young age. Sarah M. Broom had such terrible eyesight she could only see her hand in front of her, and saw her five year old world as "five points on a map, like five fingers on a spread hand."(1). Hiding her disability from her mother and teachers, she lived with her limited perspective until the age of ten. Her mother finally figured out she had a vision problem and took her to the eye doctor, where she remembers the "cold fluorescent bulbs"(14). Leaving the eye doctor, Sarah could see the world around her for the first time and truly appreciate it, noting every little detail she could observe.

In the passages *Becoming Maria* by Sonia Manzano and *The Yellow House* by Sarah M. Broom, the authors share anecdotes about core memories they have that shaped them. *Becoming Maria* has young Sonia see opportunity in the accomplishments of the film *West Side Story*, having her ponder her own capabilities. *The Yellow House* tells about the young author's discovery of the world around her and how the beauty of it changed her perspective. Both of these are stories about the authors' own experiences that lead to important realizations in their lives, leading them to become who they are today.

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Idea Development—Score Point 3

The central idea of this essay restates the prompt and is moderately developed. Appropriate details are selected from both excerpts to support an explanation of how the authors' experiences in both *Becoming Maria* and *The Yellow House* lead to important realizations. The essay starts by explaining how the intense emotion Sonia Manzano feels while watching *West Side Story* transforms her pessimistic outlook on life, providing her with hope and optimism for her future. The details provided to support this explanation are appropriate: "'I'm alive and awake now and I think again, *If people can make that movie, what can I do?*'" In the second body paragraph, the essay focuses on *The Yellow House*, explaining how Sarah's experience of getting glasses broadens her perspective and allows her to see for the first time how amazing the world is. While the introduction and conclusion are brief, the overall organization of the response is moderate. The essay demonstrates sufficient awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3D

The length and complexity of the essay are sufficient to demonstrate consistent control of standard English conventions. Overall, sentences are correct and clear in meaning. Grammar, usage, and mechanics are consistently controlled and relatively free of errors: "In conclusion, both characters have experiences that make them realize they have had a limited view on the world (both literally and figuratively)."

In both excerpts *Becoming Maria* and *The Yellow House*, both of the main characters have experiences that lead to important realizations in their lives.

In *Becoming Maria*, the main character Sonia has one main experience that completely changes her outlook on life. She goes to a play, and she experiences something she's never felt before. She has always been stuck in her neighborhood, not really thinking anything of it. She thought it was boring and didn't like it. She had a bland outlook on life. But when she went to the play, she saw bright colors and she felt the music inside of her, which changed her. She felt something that she had never felt before which was a mix of hope and amazement. "I sit up taller, because if I don't accommodate this emotion it will spill out and explode, maybe even hurting those around me" (Manzano, paragraph 12). She has such intense emotion from the play she realizes life is more than she thought it was and she has hope for herself and what she can do with her life. "I'm alive and awake now and I think again, *If people can make that movie, what can I do?*" (Manzano, paragraph 28).

In *The Yellow House*, the main character Sarah (also the author) has one experience that makes her truly understand what her limitations actually are. She has always acted up in school but for a different reason than one would expect. She does it to hide the fact that she can't see because she is embarrassed by it. She always has a comeback to the teacher if she asks her what is on the board because she wants to avoid the question because she can't actually see what is on the board. The teacher takes notice of this plus Sarah squinting and talks to her mom about it. Her mom takes her to get her eyes checked and once she puts on her glasses, she realizes how limited her world actually was. "On the way home, riding in the back seat of our yellow Aries I read aloud every single word we pass, from billboards along the interstate and from storefront signs... I can see detailed versions of everyone I thought I already knew... Only when they are on my face can I know what kind of day I have awakened to" (Broom, paragraphs 17,18, and 21). She now understands how amazing the world actually is, now that she can see it.

In conclusion, both characters have experiences that make them realize they have had a limited view on the world (both literally and figuratively).

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Idea Development—Score Point 2

The central idea of this essay is only somewhat developed. Organization is limited as the essay consists of a brief, simplistic introduction and conclusion and somewhat imbalanced body paragraphs. Expression of ideas is basic and explanation of details from the text is limited. In the first body paragraph, the essay explains that the author of *Becoming Maria* has an important realization while watching the movie *West Side Story*: “She now believes that because people can make something as great as that movie, she can also make something great.” While the essay misidentifies author Sonia Manzano (using the name of her character Maria), this is considered a minor misinterpretation and does not adversely impact the overall score. In the second body paragraph, the essay explains that correcting her impaired vision allows the author of *The Yellow House* to have “a better understanding of the world around her,” but this idea is not further developed. The essay demonstrates partial awareness of the writing task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 2

The essay demonstrates mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to its length and complexity. Errors in punctuation and spelling (“individually,” “veiwng,” “relized”) are present and there is little variety in sentence structure. Overall, however, control of standard English conventions is mostly consistent.

The authors experiences change each of them individually in different ways. In the story 'Becoming Maria', Maria is changed based on something that she went out and saw. In the story 'The Yellow House' the author is changed by being given sight.

In 'Becoming Maria' Maria went out and saw 'Westside Story' with her class. During her veiwng of the story she relized that she was capable of much more than she thought. The show proved to be an eye-opening experience for her. While looking at the poster she got from the preformance she said, "they remind me of all the buildings my family have moved in and out of in the Bronx, Looking for something they will never get." Then at the end of the story she says, "I'm Alive and awake now and I think AGain, If people can make that movie, what can I do?" These two sentances show a shift in tone that Maria makes. She makes this shift because of the experinces that she took in at the show. She now believes that because people can make something as great as that movie, she can also make something great.

In 'The Yellow House' Sarah cannot see anything that is not infront of her face. This is shown at the begenning of the story when she says, "I can see, but only up close." Sarah goes out and gets glasses. After getting her glasses she says, "Only when they are on my face can I know what kind of dat I have awakened to." This shows a shift in Sarah's life where she now has a better understanding of the world around her because of her glasses.

Those are the realizations that were made because during both stories.

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Idea Development—Score Point 1

The central idea of this response is not developed. The response explains how, in *Becoming Maria*, the author's experience of watching the movie *West Side Story* leads to an important realization, but the description of this realization is vague: "The singing and dancing made her soul 'Rise.'" Similarly, the response describes how in *The Yellow House* the author's world view is changed by obtaining glasses, allowing her to read things she had previously been unable to read. However, little detail is provided to support this explanation, and the impact of how this experience changes the author's perspective on her world is left largely implied. The lack of development contributes to a poor expression of ideas. Organization is minimal, and little awareness of the writing task and mode is shown.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 1

This response is brief and shows little complexity. Numerous errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, including multiple errors with spelling ("characters," "afriad," "could't"), capitalization, punctuation, and sentence fragments. The response demonstrates little control of standard English conventions.

In the Passages *Becoming Maria* and *The Yellow house* the Main characters both had life changing realizations. In *becoming maria* it was watching the movie *West Side Story*. The singing and dancing made her soul "Rise". And she took home the poster and cherished it. In *The Yellow House* The main character had very poor vision and was afraid of a lot of things. She also couldn't see the board when the teacher was teaching. So when she was called on she would be smart/wise/sarcastic. But then she got her glasses and her whole life changed so she just began reading everything. And cherishing her glasses.

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Idea Development—Score Point 0

This response shows evidence the student has read the text but does not correctly address the prompt. The brief statement “they both realized the different perspectives on life” is insufficient to answer the question.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 0

The response consists of one brief sentence and contains errors in capitalization and punctuation. There is insufficient length and complexity in this response to demonstrate control of standard English conventions.

In the stories "Becoming maria" and "The yellow house" they both realized the different perspectives on life after they realized the situations.

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