



GRADE

**10**

# MCAS Finish Line

*English Language Arts*

**Sample  
Lesson**

Continental Press

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Poetry has been called the purest form of writing, “the distilled expression of an author’s heart and soul.” It is also quite possibly the oldest genre of literature. The best poems are models of precise use of words and economy of thought. Yet they are also full of imagery and figurative language that lets readers perceive the world around them and the inner world of the heart in new and unique ways. And poetry too is the most playful of literary genres, using rhyme, rhythm, sound, puns, hidden meanings, and even placement on a page to shape the reader’s thoughts and feelings.

A poem might fall in the genre of **narrative poetry**, which tells a story, or **lyric poetry**, which mainly expresses the author’s feelings but which may in fact tell a more subtle story, like the poems by Emily Dickinson quoted in Lesson 9. A poem may be a **ballad**, like “Farewell to Tarwathie” in Lesson 8, a **sonnet**, with a formal 14-line structure, such as the ones by Emma Lazarus in Lesson 7 and William Shakespeare in Lesson 9, or a **free-verse poem**, such as the one by Edgar Lee Masters in Lesson 8.

On a reading test, you may be asked to identify or analyze any of these elements or forms of poetry. You may be asked questions about:

- **meaning**—to explain an idea, figure of speech, or important image in a poem
- **form**—to identify or analyze the way a poem is structured
- **sound**—to describe or analyze the use of rhyme, rhythm, or such playful uses of sounds as:

**onomatopoeia**—words that sound like what they mean, such as *clang* or *neigh*

**alliteration**—repeating the same or very similar initial consonant sounds in a line of poetry, as in the line “Cake, cookies, and candles at the close of day”

**assonance**—repeating the same vowel sounds in a line or short passage of verse, as in the line “Hear the merry wedding bells”; or in place of rhyme

# Guided Practice

Read a poem and answer the questions that follow.

## Bison Crossing Near Mt. Rushmore

by May Swenson

*May Swenson was born in Logan, Utah in 1912 and died in Bethany Beach, Delaware, in 1989.*

There is our herd of cars stopped,  
staring respectfully at the line of bison crossing.

One big-fronted bull nudges his cow into a run.  
She and her calf are first to cross.

5 In swift dignity the dark-coated caravan sweeps through  
the gap our cars leave in the two-way stall  
on the road to the Presidents.

The polygamous bulls guarding their families from the rear,  
the honey-brown calves trotting head-to-hip  
10 by their mothers—who are lean and muscled as bulls,  
with chin tassels and curved horns—  
all leap the road like a river, and run.

The strong and somber remnant of western freedom  
disappears into the rough grass of the draw,  
15 around the point of the mountain.

The bison, orderly, disciplined by the prophet-faced,  
heavy-headed fathers, threading the pass  
of our awestruck stationwagons, Airstreams and trailers,  
if in dread of us give no sign,  
20 go where their leaders twine them, over the prairie.

And we keep to our line,  
staring, stirring, revving idling motors, moving  
each behind the other, herdlike, where the highway leads.



Which of the following uses of sound is found in line 12?

- A assonance
- B alliteration
- C onomatopoeia
- D internal rhyme

A simile in this line lets you visualize how the bison leap the highway as if they were leaping over a river. But the question is asking about the *sound* of the line. Speak it aloud and you'll hear the effect of its strong rhythm and the repetition of the initial consonant sound *r*. This is an example of alliteration: choice B.

Which of the following **best** explains why the bison are described in line 16 as *prophet-faced*?

- A their apparent fearlessness
- B their orderly discipline
- C their chin tassels
- D their horns

*Prophet-faced* is another way of stating the simile *faces like prophets*'. Prophets, in the Bible or in Greek mythology, carry the image of stern-faced, bearded elders bearing a message from God (or the gods). This is the image Swenson wants to create in her readers' minds in line 16. The correct answer is choice C.

The poet compares the movements of the bison across the plain with

- A a length of string.
- B an army.
- C water.
- D cars.

How does Swenson want us to see the herd of bison in motion? Line 17 describes them as threading the pass (between the cars, as between mountains), and line 20 has them going "where their leaders twine them." Individually they are rough and shaggy, but the metaphor of their motion as a herd shows that choice A is correct.



What is the **main** purpose of the last three lines of the poem?

- A to add humor to the poem
- B to add the imagery of sound
- C to show the speaker's impatience
- D to summarize the poem's meaning

Throughout the poem, the speaker is representing the awe of the people in their cars at the sight of the bison crossing the highway. In these last three lines, the speaker suggests the reason for her awe: The bison are freer than the people, who are bound to follow the highway. These lines do add a touch of humor and of sound imagery, but choice D is the correct answer.

**Write your answer to the following open-response question on a separate sheet of paper. Your answer should be about one-half to one page long.**

Explain and analyze the effectiveness of the author's use of metaphor and personification in describing the cars. Use relevant and specific details from the poem to support your answer.

You may have noticed how the bison remain animals even as the poet uses words that pertain to humans (such as *families*) to describe them. But did you catch the imagery she uses to describe the cars? Here is one way to answer the question:

In the first two lines, Swenson refers to "our herd of cars...staring respectfully at the line of bison crossing." The row of cars on the highway is said to be like the herd of animals crossing it, only the cars are more impressed by the bison than the bison seem to be by them ("if in dread of us give no sign"). So she establishes the metaphor that the cars are a herd, but she also identifies the cars with the people driving them: It's not the people who stare but the cars. It's not "we" who are awestruck by the bison but our "station wagons, Airstreams and trailers." She continues this second metaphor (or is it personification?) to the end of the poem: The bison, "remnant of western freedom," go off "twining" over the prairie, while "we" (the cars and the people driving them) are bound to follow the highway. Both these metaphors are effective in expressing how human beings and their wonderful machines stand in respectful awe of nature.



# Test Yourself

Read another poem and answer the questions that follow.

## My Last Duchess

by Robert Browning

*Robert Browning was born in Camberwell, England, in 1812 and died in Venice, Italy, in 1889.*

Ferrara<sup>1</sup>

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's<sup>2</sup> hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said

“Frà Pandolf” by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,<sup>3</sup>

How such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not

Her husband's presence only, called that spot

15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps

Frà Pandolf chanced to say “Her mantle laps

Over my Lady's wrist too much,” or “Paint

Must never hope to reproduce the faint

Half-flush that dies along her throat”: such stuff

20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

For calling up that spot of joy. She had

A heart — how shall I say? — too soon made glad,

Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

<sup>1</sup>Ferrara: a city in Italy. The setting of the poem is the 16th century.

<sup>2</sup>Frà Pandolf: a fictitious artist, as is Claus of Innsbruck (line 56)

<sup>3</sup>durst: dare



25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favor at her breast,  
The dropping of the daylight in the West,  
The bough of cherries some officious fool  
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule  
She rode with round the terrace — all and each  
30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,  
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, — good! but thanked  
Somehow — I know not how — as if she ranked  
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name  
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
In speech — (which I have not) — to make your will  
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this  
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
Or there exceed the mark" — and if she let  
40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,  
—E'en then would be some stooping, and I choose  
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,  
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet  
The company below, then. I repeat,  
The Count your master's known munificence  
50 Is ample warrant that no just pretence  
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go  
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,  
55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

- 1 To whom is the duke, the speaker in this poem, addressing his monologue?
- A to us, the readers
  - B to a dealer who wants to buy a work of art the duke owns
  - C to a visiting nobleman whom the duke is trying to impress
  - D to a representative of a count whose daughter the duke wishes to marry
- 2 Which of the following does the poet **least** make use of in this poem?
- A rhyme
  - B a narrative
  - C a regular rhythm
  - D figurative language
- 3 Which of these words **best** describe the duke?
- A foolish and shallow
  - B boorish and uncouth
  - C jealous and controlling
  - D manipulative and deceitful
- 4 What is the speaker **mainly** suggesting in lines 13–19?
- A The duchess was embarrassed by her husband’s presence while she was being painted.
  - B The duchess responded inappropriately to Frà Pandolf’s flattery.
  - C Frà Pandolf had to work to get the duchess to smile.
  - D The duchess was not as beautiful as her painting.
- 5 The poet’s **chief** aim in this poem is to
- A reveal the character of the duke.
  - B express melancholy that a beautiful woman died young.
  - C paint a colorful depiction of Italy during the Renaissance.
  - D show his feelings about the titled nobility of his own day.



- 6** How does the poet help the reader understand how the duke's thoughts change when he talks about the duchess from when he talks about the painting?
- A** The point of view changes.
  - B** The rhythm suddenly becomes irregular.
  - C** The speaker frequently interrupts himself.
  - D** The sentences do not conclude at the end of lines.

**Write your answer to open-response question 7 on a separate sheet of paper. Your answer should be about one-half to one page long.**

Some critics think Browning wanted his readers to infer that the duke murdered his last duchess. Explain why you agree or disagree with this assessment. Use relevant and specific details from the poem to support your answer.