

We will start right in by learning what the standards say. On the tests you will need to know how to write well to respond to the MCAS writing prompt. Here are the standards that the state has set for you. It's what they think you should be able to do.

#### Fourth Grade Composition Standards

Composition Standard # 19: Students will write compositions with a clear focus, logically related ideas to develop it, and adequate detail.
Composition Standard # 20 Students will select and use appropriate genres, modes of reasoning, and speaking styles when writing for different audiences and rhetorical purposes.
Composition Standard # 21 Students will demonstrate improvement in organization, content, paragraph development, level of detail, style, tone, and word choice (diction) in their compositions after revising them.
Composition Standard # 22 Students will use knowledge of standard English conventions to edit their writing.

On the next few pages you will see how other students have responded to the writing prompt section of the tests. Do you think you can write that well? Of course you can. It just takes practice and you'll get plenty of that in this course.

This course is built around a theme. You will be studying constellations in the sky and the stories that people have made up to go along with the sky pictures. People in cultures all over the world have created myths and stories to go along with the animals, people and other pictures they thought were spelled out by the stars. You'll have a chance to see some star maps to show you what we mean.

You will choose a constellation/ myth pair on which you will base a final multimedia project. You'll be visiting the Library Media Center and the

Internet for ideas and information. Your teacher will explain what you'll need to do to create this project. Along the way, you'll learn how to be a better reader and writer.

### MCAS Rubrics for Evaluating Written Work

A rubric is a guide. It provides a chart or visual guide that helps teachers judge how well you perform on the written parts of the test. We've included the rubrics in this book so you can see how your work is scored.

About the tests: six million student responses are scored by Massachusetts teachers who have been trained to correct your written work on the tests. Open response items are evaluated by professional scorers. MCAS scoring guides indicate the knowledge and skills you must demonstrate to earn points.

Students' writing prompt long compositions are evaluated by looking at:

- topic development, based on a 1-6 point scale
- standard English conventions (grammar, mechanics) using a 1-4 point scale

Students responded to the following writing prompt:

Some days are more fun than others. Describe a day that was great for you and tell WHY it was great. Include details so the reader can enjoy the day as much as you did.

You'll see compositions that other students wrote to tell about their great day. You may be asked to write a composition about a day that was great for you too. See if you can write a composition that's as good as the first one in the group.

To help you along the road to better writing, we have a self-evaluation checklist on the next two pages. You can use it to judge your own writing, just like the scorers of the MCAS tests.

## A writing rubric (checklist) for students:

When writing a composition or practicing an MCAS writing prompt exercise, does your writing match the scoring rubrics used by the test scorers and your teacher?

Scenario: you just wrote a composition for your teacher. How well did you do? Fill in the checklist below. The next time you have a writing assignment come back to this page and fill in the checklist again.

Place a checkmark where you think you did well.

Organization and Content Checklist:	How's My Style:
<input type="checkbox"/> I used important details.	<input type="checkbox"/> I used many different and descriptive words.
<input type="checkbox"/> When I added details, I didn't wander from the main idea. I remembered my Topic Sentence and the subject of the Writing Prompt and stayed on course.	<input type="checkbox"/> I used words that helped people see my meaning. They could use all of their senses to feel and even hear my meaning.
<input type="checkbox"/> I organized my ideas in a logical way.	<input type="checkbox"/> I used different kinds of sentences and didn't start each one with the same word.
<input type="checkbox"/> My composition answered the question in the prompt.	<input type="checkbox"/> I made every effort to make my writing legible. My spelling and grammar were the very best.

My writing is good but I could improve. Maybe I need to add more details or more information.

Organization and Content	How's My Style?
<input type="checkbox"/> I tried to explain my main idea, the one in my Topic Sentence, but I could have added more information or supporting detail.	<input type="checkbox"/> My choice of words was good. My vocabulary choices served a purpose. I didn't use too many extra or unnecessary words.
<input type="checkbox"/> Once in a while my thoughts wandered away from the subject or I didn't totally answer the question in the Writing Prompt.	<input type="checkbox"/> My sentences were pretty good, but they are mostly the same kind of sentence. The sentences could be shorter and more to the point.

<input type="checkbox"/> My story was a little bit disorganized.	<input type="checkbox"/> I could have been a little neater and I know I wasn't watching my spelling and grammar too carefully.
<input type="checkbox"/> My ideas needed to be connected. I don't think every idea I had fit with the topic.	<input type="checkbox"/> The reader can usually see my point.

My writing isn't very clear. My ideas don't really support my topic sentence and some of my information isn't accurate. I don't pay attention to my spelling.

Organization and Content	How's My Style?
<input type="checkbox"/> I need to make my points more clearly. I needed to stay on the subject.	<input type="checkbox"/> My words need to be stronger and more effective.
<input type="checkbox"/> There weren't many details or supporting ideas in my composition.	<input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes repeated the same idea and my writing was choppy. My sentences could have been shorter and to the point.
<input type="checkbox"/> My paragraphs didn't have "flow". My ideas were choppy.	<input type="checkbox"/> My handwriting was sloppy and I didn't check over my spelling.

I know I need to answer the question, stick to the point. I don't add any details and my spelling and grammar are not up to par. I know I can do better.

Organization and Content	How's My Style?
<input type="checkbox"/> I didn't pay attention to the question. My story wandered.	<input type="checkbox"/> People couldn't tell what my ideas were about the subject.
<input type="checkbox"/> I need to get organized. I could have outlined my ideas before I started to write.	<input type="checkbox"/> I started all of my sentences the same way and didn't use descriptive words.
<input type="checkbox"/> I need to add details and more information.	<input type="checkbox"/> I had so many spelling and grammar mistakes that people were distracted and couldn't pay attention to what I was saying.

The first response earned the highest score of six points for topic development.

One Friday morning our family decided to take a vacation because we had school off. We had already packed. Today was a very special day. I was going to learn how to ski! It was going to be a family weekend at Sugarloaf.

The car ride was going to be very enduring. It would take six hours. I tried to keep myself busy. Everyone was very anxious to go skiing, although not everyone was going skiing. Shawn, and Andy my brothers are going to snowboard. Shawn has already gone snowboarding before, but Andy is just learning. While Andy and I were playing checkers I asked my mom if we were there, and she said "Yes"!

When we got there we looked at our lodge. In the lodge there was a fire, some couches, and a rug. It was nice and cozy. When we looked in our lodge room it was more than just one room, it was four rooms! I got my own room. I even got my own queen sized bed! My brothers had to share a room and a queen sized bed! My mom and dad slept in a pullout bed. It was pretty neat because the queen sized bed pulled out of the wall.

Soon it was time to get dressed in our ski clothes. I had trouble getting my boots on, but my dad helped me. They were ski boots. My boots were weird because they didn't even bend! When I tried to walk it felt funny. I walked funny too. I looked very buff. It was going to be hard walking to the ski area.

We finally got there. It only took us fifteen minutes. The hills were enormous. A man named Joe said that he was our teacher for the private lesson.

## Grade 4 English Language Arts - Composition #2

Score: Topic/Idea Development 5 - Standard English Conventions 4

*Last weekend my family and I went to a large campground in New Hampshire. It is called Keyser Pond. This story is about the day we arrived there and what happened that day of the trip. In this story you will learn how exciting this trip really was.*

*I took a long time to pack our clothes, games, bikes, what to do on the ride, and pack water bottles in case we get thirsty on the way up. We had to leave extra food and extra water for my cats so they won't run out when we are gone. Also, I had to clean the litter box for my cats. After that we went to get a part for the truck so we could hook the camper onto the truck. When we came back we hooked the camper to the truck. Then we all hopped into our giant, cozy, red truck and started to drive.*

*My sister, brother, and I packed lots of things to entertain us on the long ride up. The ride was about an hour and a half long. That is why we packed lots to do. All of us packed our game boys and the games to play on them. I brought "Emily's Quest" to read if I don't want to play my game boy anymore. My sister Rosemary brought lots of paper and colored pencils. She always brings paper and colored pencils because she loves to draw. John, my brother brought a book and a game boy to do. The ride seemed like it was only 10 minutes long. After a while we finally got to the large campground.*

*When we got there my parents had to sign in and find our campsite. Then we had to set up.*

## Topic/Idea Development 3 - Standard English Conventions 3

The day that was great for me was my 9<sup>th</sup> birthday. My six best friends were there. It was a sleepover party and we had soda, pretzels, and sandwiches. We jumped on the trampoline and watched funny movies.

The next morning about 7:00 am we snuck outside and jumped on the

trampoline. Later my three cousins came over and we played football and played on the swing set.

Then we opened presents and ate pizza and cake. About 3:00 pm everyone went home except my cousins. We played with my new presents. The party was a blast and I got wonderful presents.

## Topic/Idea Development 2 - Standard English Conventions 2

### *A Day That Was Great For Me!*

*The day that was great for me is when I went to Maryan's house. I think it's fun at her house because when we go over she plans a lot of fun things when we sleep over.*

*Sometimes she plans to have a square dancing contest. What she plans to have in the square dancing contest is lots of balloons and sometimes confetti. And we get to dress up like, the girls wears a dress and the boys wear a suit and we also get to hear lot of music too. That was my great day.*

## Topic/Idea Development 1 - Standard English Conventions 2

The greatest day was my seventh birthday. That day I got my ears pierced. We when't out for brakefast. I had a big party, with family and friend's. we when't to the museum. I had lot's presents given to me to, so for these reason's we all had fun at my seventh birthday.

MCAS Sample Student Work

MCAS Student Work: Grade 4 English Language Arts

Open Response Question 10: Lobster Boat

The author uses many descriptive words to make this story seem real. Give two examples EACH from the story of the author's descriptive words for something SEEN, something HEARD, and something TOUCHED

Score	Description
4	Response demonstrates a thorough comprehension of the author's use of sensory language by providing fully developed supporting examples from the selection.
3	Response demonstrates a general comprehension of the author's use of sensory language by providing appropriate supporting examples from the selection.
2	Response demonstrates a partial comprehension of the author's use of sensory language by providing limited or weak supporting examples from the selection.
1	Response demonstrates minimal comprehension of the author's use of sensory language by providing vague or minimal supporting examples from the selection
0	Response is incorrect or irrelevant.
Blank	No response.

Question #10 - Open Response Score Point 4 (best)

**The ocen glistens in the sunlight. Tomy sees buoys painted yellow on top and red on the bottom.**

**The scree! scree! Of the seagulls.**

**The wirr of the winch.**

**The slippery traps. A seagulls wing flaps against Tommy's shoulder.**

Question #10 - Open Response Score Point 3

Russ looks at the different colored buoys. Russ squints across the bright blue ocean. Tommy hears clicking from the lobsters claws. The seagulls go "scree, scree." Tommy reaches in for another lobster. Russ puts a notch in a female lobsters tail.

Question #10 - Open Response Score Point 2

Touch = 1. The trap is covered with furry sea growth and is slippery in his hand. 2. Tommy opens the back door of the trap and carefully grabs the lobster from behind.

Heard = 1. Scree! Scree! More sea gulls follow the Nellie Jean with noisy chatter. Scree! Scree! Sea gulls come so close that Tommy feels a wing flap against his shoulder.

Seen = 1. Look at this female," says Tommy. "Loaded with eggs.

Question #10 - Open Response Score Point 1

*Tommy heard a noisy it was the seagulls.*

*They find two traps that are damaged and replace them with new ones. Reddish - black lobster claws reach out.*

On the writing prompt assignment you are being asked to express an opinion or write an essay or letter on an issue from your own experience. On the open response, you are responding to a reading assignment, someone else's work.

We hope you learn to write a better composition.

Remember the Hans Christian Anderson Story "The Emperor's New Clothes?"

Long ago, there lived an Emperor who really loved new clothes. He had clothes for the morning and clothes for the afternoon. And he had extra special clothes for the evening. In fact, he had so many clothes that he sometimes didn't know what to wear. One day, two wicked men came to the palace to see the Emperor.

"We are weavers," they said. "But we are no ordinary weavers. We can make a special, magic cloth. If a foolish person looks at our cloth, he can't see it at all." The Emperor was impressed. This certainly *was* something new.

"I would like you to make me a suit of magic cloth," he said eagerly. The weavers smiled at each other. "We shall need a very great deal they said. "You shall have all the thread you require," replied the Emperor. The wicked weavers took all the gold thread and hid it in their bags. Then they sat down and busily pretended to make the magic cloth. One night, the Emperor wondered how the weavers were getting on. "Prime Minister, find out if my magic cloth is ready," he ordered. Clickety clack, clickety clack, the weavers were hard at work.

"Oh dear," thought the Prime Minister. "I can't see a

thing, but I know that I am not stupid." So he hurried off to tell the Emperor that he had never seen such beautiful cloth. When the Prime Minister had gone, the weavers just laughed and laughed. Then they went to the Emperor.

"It is time to sew the cloth into a suit," they announced. "We need more gold thread." When they got the thread, they hid it as before. The weavers pretended to cut and sew for a whole week. At last they asked the Emperor to try on his new suit. When he had taken off his clothes, the weavers fussed around the Emperor. "What a perfect fit!" they both cried. The Emperor looked in the mirror. He couldn't see any new suit at all, but he didn't want to seem foolish.

"It is a beautiful suit," he said. "Magnificent!"

The two weavers held their breath until they were sure the Emperor had gone. Then they laughed and laughed and laughed. How could people be so silly?

By now everyone in the land had heard about the wonderful magic cloth and the Emperor's new suit. They were all sure that they would be able to see it. Soon a royal proclamation was sent out. The Emperor was to lead a grand procession, and he would be wearing his new clothes! When the great day arrived, the Emperor sent for the weavers to help him to get dressed. "Your Highness looks perfect!" they cried when they had finished. But the Emperor still couldn't see the clothes at all. "I can't be more foolish than the Prime Minister," he thought, "and he could see the cloth." So he paid the weavers handsomely.

The trumpets blew and the great procession started. People had come from far and near to get a good view of the Emperor in his new clothes. But how surprised they were

when they saw him! At last one of the crowd said timidly,

"The Emperor's new clothes are beautiful!" Then everyone started talking at once. "So fashionable!" "Very smart!" "Divine!" they said, each of them anxious not to seem more foolish than the rest.

But one small boy laughed out loud and shouted, "Look! The emperor has no clothes on!"

At once the people around him began to laugh as well. "Oh no!" gasped the Emperor, turning very red. "I have been the most foolish person of all!" As for the weavers, they were nowhere to be seen!

When you write compositions and long responses to questions, never leave a noun naked. Try to dress up your work with adjectives. Name some things in this story that you could see or hear. What are these marks? “”

## Your Final Project

### Standards Sixteen and Seventeen

For the fourth grade MCAS test in English/Language Arts, we will be working with a project and a theme through which we can learn the standards. It is not too soon to learn the content of the standards so you'll know what is expected of you on the test. You will march right through the language, literature and composition standards using myth as your theme. You'll learn about science and social studies, too.

For many reasons, legend, myth and fantasy have become fascinating for young people. The success of the "Harry Potter" series is evidence of this fascination. We'll use myth as an avenue through which we can teach literature standards.

We are starting at standards sixteen and seventeen for a reason. We want to prepare you for your final project, and we need to jump ahead to the last two standards so you can be planning the project through the rest of the course.

Literature standard sixteen says: you will compare and contrast similar myths and narratives from different cultures and geographic regions.

Literature standard seventeen says: you will interpret the meaning of literary works, nonfiction, films, and media by using different critical lenses and analytic techniques.

Through myth and meaning you will demonstrate all you've learned in this course with a written or multimedia presentation. You'll work to prepare your own unique creation based on constellations and myth. You'll read a wide variety of written materials. You'll find new information in the library and on the Internet to help you.

The standard also talks about nonfiction (factual) works, film, and media (many choices, radio, TV). The standard requires you to be able to understand what you read using different "critical lenses" and "analytic techniques". We provide references to Internet sources that will help you become good searchers for information. Not all web sites are the same. In this course you will learn to tell the difference between good sites and bad sites.

Ask your school Library Media Specialist to help you find books to prepare a final project on your constellation and matching myth. The public library can help too. Media means many things, art, film, music etc.

- You can prepare a computerized presentation on a myth of your choice. The final product can be a Powerpoint presentation, Hyperstudio slide show or a simple word processing document with clip art. With help you can make a class web page. Your teacher might have you work with other students.

- A mural of the night sky with the constellations and your report on the star picture myths posted below could be another project.
- Individual projects can be simple. A drawing of the constellation and a retelling of the myth may be enough. Your teacher will guide you.
- You might write a play with the creatures and people of the constellations as characters.
- Use your imagination. You may want to make a final mural for display in the hallway of your school building.

Your project provides practice in writing and creating. Another component of the assignment will be a requirement that you come up in front of the class to share what you've learned about your constellation and its associated myth.

These are the first three "language standards".

Language standard one; you will use agreed-upon rules for informal and formal discussions in small and large groups.

Language standard two; you will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others, and contribute your own information or ideas in group discussions and interviews in order to acquire new knowledge.

Language standard three; you will make oral presentations that demonstrate appropriate consideration of audience, purpose, and the information to be conveyed.

Bring this book with you the next time you go to the library so you can look up your constellation in the catalog and on the Internet. Here's a website for you to try:

<http://www.dibonsmith.com/stars.htm> - with permission from author Richard Dibon-Smith. Always give credit to the author of a book or Internet site you use in your research.

This is a great website with outlines of the myths and constellations. The author of this site has a book available with all the pictures and stories.

Here are some constellations with myths you can read about.

<u>Andromeda</u>	<u>Antlia</u> The Air Pump	<u>Apus</u> Bird of Paradise	<u>Aquarius</u> Water Carrier	<u>Aquila</u> The Eagle
<u>Ara</u> The Altar	<u>Aries</u> The Ram	<u>Auriga</u> The Charioteer	<u>Boötes</u> The Hunter	<u>Caelum</u> The Chisel
<u>Camelopardalis</u> The Giraffe	<u>Cancer</u> The Crab	<u>Canes Venatici</u> Hunting Dogs	<u>Canis Major</u> The Greater Dog	<u>Canis Minor</u> The Lesser Dog

Here's an example of a myth/constellation pair description from this web site:

"In Greek mythology Aquarius was Ganymede, 'cup-bearer to the gods'. Ganymede's story is told in 'Aquila'. His position was essentially to pour wine for all the gods on Olympus, a function far removed from the initial importance of the Water Bearer, as it first rose in Babylonia.

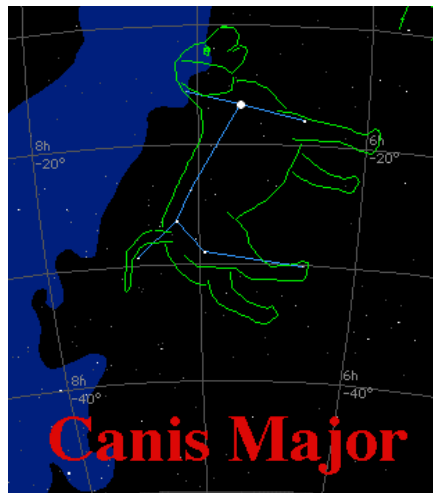
In fact, the constellation seems to have represented water in a number of ancient cultures. In Egypt, for instance, the constellation was thought to cause the Nile to give forth its annual floods. The waters of the Nile, far to the south, would start to rise in June as the rains from the Ethiopian highlands began to run off into the Blue Nile. The night sky, in June, would show Aquarius at its zenith: the bringer of water."

Next is a picture and story combination of a myth/constellation pair.

### Canis Major

One of Orion's two faithful dogs, following him across the sky. Sirius, called Sothis or the Dog Star, was significant in Egyptian mythology, and its rising signaled the start of the Egyptian year in the third millennium B.C. This constellation has been associated with several mythical dogs, including the hound of Actaeon.

Canis Major can be seen South of Orion in the Winter Hexagon, near the horizon. Sirius is the brightest star in the sky.



Picture with permission from NASA which has a wonderful website at:  
<http://www.nasa.gov/>

Books on this subject; ask your librarian about:

- The New Patterns in the Sky : Myths and Legends of the Stars; Julius D. W. Staal
- The Constellations: How They Came To Be, Roy A. Gallant
- Constellations: Glimpses of Infinity in Fact, Myth, and Legend by Larry Sessions.
- A Walk Through the Heavens : A Guide to Stars and Constellations; Milton D. Heifetz, Wil Tirion

- *They Dance in the Sky : Native American Star Myths*; Jean Guard Monroe, et al
- *The Starlore Handbook : An Essential Guide to the Night Sky*; Geoffrey Cornelius
- *The Cambridge Guide to the Constellations*; Michael E. Bakich
- *Star Myths of the Greeks and Romans : A Sourcebook Containing the Constellations of Pseudo-Eratosthenes and the Poetic Astronomy of Hyginus*; Theony Condos (Translator)
- *The Secret Language of the Stars and Planets: a visual key to the heavens / Geoffrey Cornelius and Paul Devereux.*

### Other Internet Sites to Help Guide Your Research

<http://www.astro.wisc.edu/~dolan/constellations/constellations.html> -

The stars and their constellations

<http://www.astro.uiuc.edu/~kaler/sow/sowlist.html> - University of Illinois

<http://www.astronomical.org/portal/modules/wfsection/index.php?category=1> - Peoria Astronomical Society

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/worlds/constellations.html>

#### Deep Photographic Guide

<http://www.allthesky.com/constellations/const.html> - Planetaria

<http://space.jpl.nasa.gov/> - Solar System Simulator - Awesome!

<http://skyandtelescope.com/resources/software/> - Sky and Telescope - free astronomical software

<http://www.stargazing.net/astropc/> - astronomy links

[http://adc.gsfc.nasa.gov/adc/adc\\_amateurs.html](http://adc.gsfc.nasa.gov/adc/adc_amateurs.html) - astronomical data center

Using Christmas lights, fluorescent markers or paint, mark the stars of your constellation on a sheet of cardboard. Use string or chalk to draw the lines to connect the stars to form the constellation figure as you tell the story of the constellation (classical and Native American versions are available through your librarian). Use graph paper and coordinates to make the star patterns of each constellation.