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Practicing for Today's Tests

TIME FOR KIDS

Level 6 Language Arts

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Today's Next Generation Tests

> "To be college and career ready, students must now read across a broad range of high-quality texts from diverse cultures and times in history."
>
> —Delia E. Racines, Ph.D.

Education is currently undergoing a dramatic shift when it comes to the ways we measure and assess for learning. Educational standards across the nation are designed to provide clear and meaningful goals for our students. These standards serve as a frame of reference for educators, parents, and students and are most critical when decisions must be made about curriculum, textbooks, assessments, and other aspects of instructional programs (Conley 2014). Part of the disconnect with standards in the recent past has been the vast differences and lack of consistency in expectations that became a major concern for the quality of education students were receiving across the country (Conley 2014; Wiley and Wright 2004).

Standards in education in the United States are not a new concept. However, the role of educational standards has recently shifted to not only ensure that all students have access to equitable education no matter where they live, but also to ensure a more consistent national expectation for what all students should know to be successful in a rapidly changing economy and society (Kornhaber, Griffith, and Tyler 2014).

Scales, scores, and assessments are absolutely necessary to ascertain the current status of students. This kind of data is vital for teachers to understand what is missing and what the next steps should be. The real question about assessment isn't whether we should assess but rather what kinds of assessments should be used. Along with the current shift to more consistent and rigorous standards, states now measure student progress with assessments that require higher-order thinking skills necessary for preparation for college and/or careers.

So, what is this new yardstick that is being used? How is it better than yardsticks of the past? And how do we best prepare students to be measured with this yardstick in a way that tells the whole story? The next generation tests intend to provide results that are comparable across all states and will use more performance-based tasks as well as technology-enhanced items. This is very different in comparison to the standardized testing that teachers, students, and parents are used to (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices 2010; Rothman 2013).

The following descriptions serve as explanations of how the three most prominent next-generation tests are different from assessments of the past.

Categories of Questions

In order for students today to be better prepared for college and/or careers, they must be able to read widely and deeply across a range of informational and literary texts (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices 2010). In today's standards, there are often three categories of reading standards. On assessments, these categories are represented by three categories of questions. The questions include new terminology that defines specific skills and understandings that all students must demonstrate. **Note:** See *Appendix B* (pages 100–103) for how these categories are represented in each practice exercise in this book.

Overall, today's college and career readiness reading standards depict the picture of what students should be able to exhibit with increasing proficiency and on a regular basis. To be college and career ready, students must now read across a broad range of high-quality texts from diverse cultures and times in history. The reading standards emphasize the skills necessary to critically read and continuously make connections among ideas and texts. Students also learn to distinguish poor reasoning as well as ambiguities in texts. The following explanation of the terms related to each of the three reading categories will better prepare educators and parents for today's tests.

Key Ideas and Details

This category stresses the importance of understanding specific information in various texts. Overall, students must be able to identify specific details and then gain deeper meaning from what is read. Specifically, this category requires students to be able to do the following things.

Students should be able to . . .	To show how they know this, students must . . .
read text closely to really understand what it says.	identify specific details from the text.
make conclusions based on what they identify from a text.	say or write specific details to support their conclusions.
determine the main idea or theme from a text and analyze its development.	identify and summarize key supporting details that support the theme or main idea.
figure out how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.	explain details about how characters and/or the story develop at different times throughout the text from the beginning to the end.

Name: _____ Date: _____

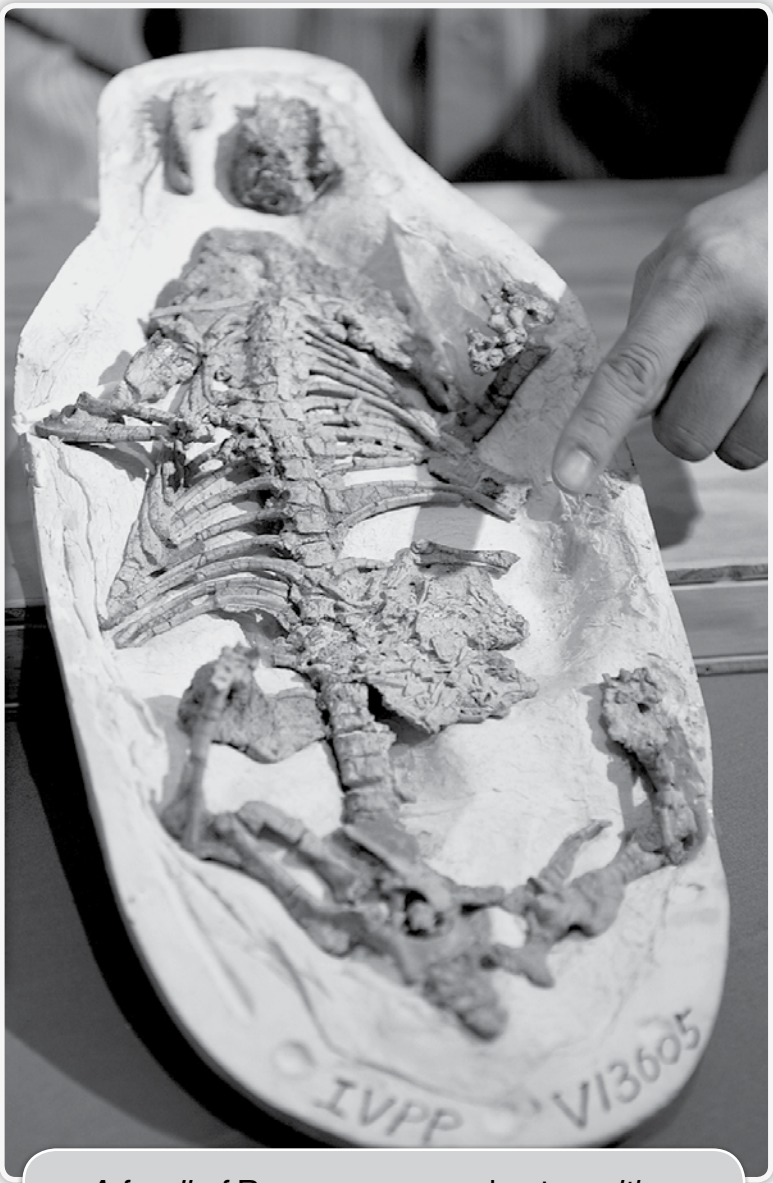
Dinos for Dinner

Directions: Read this text and respond to the questions on pages 30–32.

1 Even when dinosaurs ruled the earth, they sometimes ended up as a meal. Not just for other dinosaurs but also for mammals. Chinese and American paleontologists made this discovery. Paleontologists are scientists who study fossils. They were studying a fossil of a 130 million-year-old mammal called *Repenomamus robustus (R. robustus*). The scientists found the fossilized remains of its last meal—a baby dinosaur. The mammal had eaten a *psittacosaur*, a two-legged plant-eating dinosaur with a beaklike snout.

2 Farmers in China dug up this fossil in 2000. It was brought to researchers in Beijing, China. Then it was taken to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. There researchers noticed a set of bones under its rib cage, where the mammal's stomach had likely been. The bones were the limbs, fingers, and teeth of a six-inch (15-cm) long *psittacosaur*.

3 Some of the eaten dinosaur's bones were joined. This suggests that it was swallowed in large, unchewed chunks. The rare fossil is the first sign that early mammals may have fed on young dinosaurs. "This discovery is the chance of a lifetime," Jin Meng says. He is a paleontologist at the American Museum of Natural History.



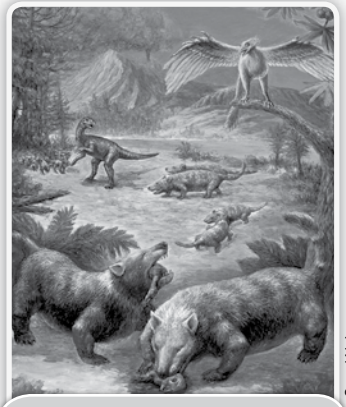
AP Wide World

A fossil of Repenomamus robustus *with a bellyful of its last meal—a baby dinosaur*

Dinos for Dinner *(cont.)*

Mammals Were Bigger, Too

4 Not only were mammals eating dinosaurs, the mammals were also bigger than previously thought. The team of scientists found another fossil in the same place in China in 2005. This animal was a bigger relative of *R. robustus*. It probably weighed about 30 pounds (13.6 kg). It is called *Repenomamus giganticus. R. robustus* was about 15 inches (38 cm) long. *R. giganticus* was twice that size. It is the largest known complete skeleton of a mammal from the Mesozoic era (280 million to 65 million years ago).



Gao Wei

The Mesozoic era was millions of years ago.

5 Together, these two discoveries give scientists a new understanding of ancient mammals. Before these finds, experts thought that Mesozoic mammals were the size of squirrels and hunted mostly at night. These finds offer proof that some mammals were meat eaters who competed with small dinosaurs for food and territory.

6 Of course, 130 million years ago, most dinosaurs were larger, stronger, and moved faster than mammals. Still, these finds raise questions. How did these larger hunting mammals affect dinosaur evolution? The answer will have to wait for more evidence. "That's how it is with the best finds," says paleontologist Anne Weil of Duke University in North Carolina. "They leave you with more questions than answers."

Name: _____ Date: _____

Dinos for Dinner *(cont.)*

Directions: Fill in the bubble of each correct answer choice.

1. What can you infer from the second paragraph? Choose all that apply.

- Ⓐ Farmers thought that the fossil might be important.
- Ⓑ Different scientists worked together to study the fossil.
- Ⓒ The *psittacosaur* dinosaur could not run very fast.
- Ⓓ The mammal was probably killed by a large dinosaur.

2. Which statement from the text suggests that paleontologists were excited about the fossil?

- Ⓐ "Chinese and American paleontologists made this discovery."
- Ⓑ "The scientists found the remains of its last meal—a baby dinosaur."
- Ⓒ "'This discovery is the chance of a lifetime,' Jin Meng says."
- Ⓓ "They leave you with more questions than answers."

3. What does the photograph of the dinosaur bones help the reader to understand?

- Ⓐ Experts thought Mesozoic mammals hunted at night.
- Ⓑ Some mammals competed with small dinosaurs for food.
- Ⓒ Farmers in China found an important fossil.
- Ⓓ The dinosaur bones were found in the mammal's stomach.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Dinos for Dinner *(cont.)*

Directions: Fill in the bubble of each correct answer choice.

4. The article is mainly about how . . .

- Ⓐ a discovery changed scientists' thinking about mammals.
- Ⓑ meat-eating mammals competed with each other for food.
- Ⓒ researchers from different countries work with each other.
- Ⓓ scientists always have more questions than answers.

5. What does the word *ancient* mean as it is used in paragraph 5?

- Ⓐ antique
- Ⓑ tired
- Ⓒ prehistoric
- Ⓓ old-fashioned

6. Which of the sentences from the passage best helps the reader to understand the meaning of *ancient*?

- Ⓔ "These finds offer proof that some mammals were meat eaters who competed with small dinosaurs for food and territory."
- Ⓕ "Before these finds, experts thought that Mesozoic mammals were the size of squirrels and hunted mostly at night."
- Ⓖ "Not only were mammals eating dinosaurs, the mammals were also bigger than previously thought."
- Ⓗ "Of course 130 million years ago, most dinosaurs were larger, stronger, and moved faster than mammals."

Name: _____ Date: _____

Dinos for Dinner *(cont.)*

Directions: Answer the questions.

7. Number these statements in the order in which the events happened.

_____ Paleontologists found bones in the fossil's stomach.

_____ Farmers in China dug up a fossil and sent it to Bejing.

_____ Scientists discovered an animal called *Repenomamus giganticus.*

_____ A mammal ate a baby dinosaur in large chunks.

_____ Scientists realized that mammals were bigger than they thought.

8. Identify the main idea in the text's last paragraph. Use a quotation from the text in your response.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____