

PRACTICE TEST

English Language Arts

Grade 10

Student Name

School Name

District Name



Grade 10 English Language Arts

PRACTICE TEST

Sample Explanatory Essay Question and Scoring Notes

Directions

The sample explanatory essay question does not have student work samples or annotations as it was not administered to grade 10 students. The essay is an example of what an explanatory essay might look like on a grade 10 next-generation test.

In this packet, you will find the following:

- passage set
- sample explanatory essay question
- sample scoring notes

Read the articles about how practicing mindfulness in schools has helped students and teachers. Then answer the questions that follow.

This article explores the potentially positive mental and physical effects that mindfulness exercises can have on teachers and students.

When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom

by Lauren Cassani Davis

- 1 A five-minute walk from the rickety, raised track that carries the 5 train through the Bronx, the English teacher Argos Gonzalez balanced a rounded metal bowl on an outstretched palm. His class—a mix of black and Hispanic students in their late teens, most of whom live in one of the poorest districts in New York City—by now were used to the sight of this unusual object: a Tibetan meditation bell.
- 2 “Today we’re going to talk about mindfulness of emotion,” Gonzalez said with a hint of a Venezuelan accent. “You guys remember what mindfulness is?” Met with quiet stares, Gonzalez gestured to one of the posters pasted at the back of the classroom, where the students a few weeks earlier had brainstormed terms describing the meaning of “mindfulness.” There were some tentative mumblings: “being focused,” “being aware of our surroundings.”
- 3 Gonzalez nodded. “Right. But it’s also being aware of our feelings, our emotions, and how they impact us.”
- 4 Arturo A. Schomburg Satellite Academy is what is known in New York City as a transfer school, a small high school designed to re-engage students who have dropped out or fallen behind. This academy occupies two floors of a hulking, grey building that’s also home to two other public schools. For the most part, Gonzalez told me, the kids who come here genuinely want to graduate, but attendance is their biggest barrier to success. . . .
- 5 Still holding the bowl, Gonzalez continued with the day’s lesson. “I’m going to say a couple of words to you. You’re not literally going to feel that emotion, but the word is going to trigger something, it’s going to make you think of something or feel something. Try to explore it.”
- 6 The slightly built, 30-something Gonzalez, who wears a wide smile and a scruffy beard, first learned about mindfulness from his wife, a yoga teacher in schools around the city. His students referred to him by his first name, and Gonzalez addressed them just as informally—greeting them in the morning with a high five and a “Sup,” or “How you doing, bro?” or even “Hey, mamma.” He told me he strives to make school relevant—

explaining what a “motif” is by comparing it to the hook of a rap song, for example—and believes in the value of hands-on teaching, emailing students individually to check in when they don’t show up.

- 7 “First, sit up straight, put your feet flat on the ground. Let your eyes close.” Gonzalez demonstrated as he instructed. Most of the 15 or so students followed suit—though a few scribbled surreptitiously to finish overdue assignments. Gonzalez tapped the bowl and a rich, metallic sound rang out. The class fell quiet as the note reverberated.
- 8 “Take a deep breath into your belly. As you breathe in and breathe out, notice that your breath is going to be stronger in a certain part of your body. Maybe it’s your belly, your chest, or your nose. We’ll begin with trying to count to 10 breaths.”
- 9 There was silence but for the hiss of the 5 train pulling into the station, the clunk of garbage cans, the faint siren of a police car.
- 10 “If you get lost in thought, it’s okay. Just come back and count again. Whether you get up to 10 or not doesn’t really matter. It’s just a way to focus [your] mind.”

- 11 It may not be the typical way to start an English class, but Gonzalez’s students were familiar with these five-minute mindfulness exercises—from counting breaths and focusing on the sensations of breathing, to visualizing thoughts and feelings—that he uses to help train their attention, quiet their thoughts, and regulate their emotions. . . .
- 12 Through a series of online lectures, weekly breakout sessions, monthly meetings, and two week-long summer retreats, Gonzalez worked on his own mindfulness skills, honing his ability to control his attention and regulate his own emotions while receiving specific guidance on how to teach those same skills to the youth populations he’d be working with. Gonzalez also received training about the biology of the nervous system, child development, and the neuroscientific basis for mindfulness’s effects.
- 13 Not all mindfulness programs are in schools like Gonzalez’s, where large numbers of students have been identified as disordered or disruptive, or struggle with mental-health problems and unstable living situations. Middlesex School, a prestigious boarding school in Massachusetts, requires that all incoming freshmen take a mindfulness course. The program, which was founded by an alumnus who used mindfulness to cope with both sports-related performance anxiety and T-Cell lymphoma, has proven popular among students. A vast majority—97 percent—of students surveyed in 2014 said they would recommend the course to others, reporting benefits

ranging from better sleep and diminished stress to increased focus on schoolwork.

- 14 Education reformers have long maintained that there is a fundamental connection between emotional imbalance and poor life prospects. As Paul Tough argued and popularized in *How Children Succeed*, stress early in life can prompt a cascade of negative effects, psychologically and neurologically—poor self-control and underdeveloped executive function, in particular. The U.S. education system’s focus on cognitive intelligence—IQ scores and academic skills like arithmetic—undermines the development of equally vital forms of non-cognitive intelligence. This type of intelligence entails dimensions of the mind that are difficult to quantify: It is the foundation of good character, resilience, and long-term life fulfillment. It is this part of the mind that mindfulness seeks to address. . . .

- 15 Beyond the issue of scientific evidence, bringing mindfulness into classrooms raises other questions: How does it fit into the traditional teaching model? Could any teacher teach mindfulness, or does it require a significant personal investment? Is opening teachers up to dealing with their students’ emotional and psychological needs, in addition to their academic ones, encouraging a blur between teacher and therapist?
- 16 Gonzalez doesn’t think so. “My intention as a mindfulness instructor is to give students some very simple and basic tools so they can learn to self regulate. That’s the beginning and end of it.” When a student is dealing with emotional trauma, Gonzalez said he’s been taught to keep his advice general—to remind the student that everyone suffers and feels pain, but that life is a gift to be treasured.
- 17 The clinical social worker at Gonzalez’s school—a large man with a warm baritone voice—thinks mindfulness supports the school’s overall SEL¹ mission. “At times all the roles blur—teachers, therapists, social workers. Especially in a school like this. If you don’t address the noise in a kid’s head that they bring in from the outside, I don’t care how good a teacher you are, you’re not going to have much success.”
- 18 He was convinced that Gonzalez is on the right track; and that all teachers should get something akin to mindfulness training, given that they must deal with undiagnosed mental conditions on a regular basis. While they are not therapists, they “can at least ease some of the stress in the moment. Long enough to have somebody intervene.”

¹SEL—social-emotional learning

- 19 Greenberg's² view about the teacher-as-therapist issue is also clear: "Teachers teach many things that are therapeutic. They are managing children's behavior all day long, but that doesn't make them therapists, that makes them good teachers. Some of the same ideas we teach in therapy are also applicable to all people."
- 20 Beyond helping his students, Gonzalez also thinks mindfulness helps him to cope with the strains of teaching. He believes he now draws clearer lines in his relationships with students—giving them the skills to help themselves, rather than feeling that he needs to be the one to heal them—and copes more healthily with the trauma the job exposes him to. . . .

²Greenberg's—Penn State University psychologist Mark Greenburg

"When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom" by Lauren Cassani Davis, from *The Atlantic* Magazine. Copyright © 2015 by The Atlantic Media Co., as first published in *The Atlantic* Magazine. Reprinted by permission of Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

This article discusses how some schools are seeing benefits to eliminating detention. These schools are trying a new approach by sending students to rooms where they can reflect on and redirect their negative behaviors.

Instead of Detention, These Students Get Meditation

by Deborah Bloom

- 1 Into a room of pillows and lavender, an elementary school student walks, enraged.
- 2 He's just been made fun of by another student, an altercation that turned to pushing and name-calling. But rather than detention or the principal's office, his teacher sent him here, to Robert W. Coleman Elementary School's meditation room.
- 3 "I did some deep breathing, had a little snack, and I got myself together," the boy recalled. "Then I apologized to my class."
- 4 He's one of many children who simmer down in what this West Baltimore elementary calls its "Mindful Moment Room," a warm, brightly lit space strewn with purple floor pillows, yoga mats and the scents of essential oils.
- 5 Kids here stretch, do yoga and practice deep breathing. More important, staff say, they build an ability to be mindful and calm. And in the face of so much adversity, some of these children are coming out ahead.
- 6 "When I get mad at something or somebody, I just take some deep breaths, keep doing my work and tune everyone out," said Dacari Crawford, 9. "It gives you good confidence when you need to do something important."

Stressed and struggling

- 7 Almost a quarter of Baltimore residents are living below the poverty line, according to US census data. And at Coleman . . . more than 80% of students qualify for free or reduced lunches.
- 8 "Some of our children are homeless. Some of them come to school from situations where they don't have lights at home, or food. They see crime occur in their neighborhoods," Principal Carlillian Thompson said. "So we're trying really hard here to make this a place where children feel safe and where their needs are met." . . .

'An oasis of calm'

- 9 Students who are disruptive in class are sent to the Mindful Moment Room by their teachers. There, foundation¹ staff members encourage them to talk about what led to their dismissal from class, and then they sit down for some breathing exercises. They're instructed to close their eyes and inhale and exhale deeply.
- 10 A fifth-grade boy has just been sent in for being rowdy during his math lesson. Foundation staff member Michelle Lee instructs him to shut his eyes and take several slow, deep breaths. "Do you feel calmer?" Lee asks after a few minutes. "Yes," the boy responds, nodding.
- 11 He then goes back to class. The next day, he returns for more breathing exercises.
- 12 "We have a few frequent fliers here," Lee said.

Fewer referrals, zero suspensions

- 13 Although a meditation room is no miracle cure for students' strife, those at the school say it's done wonders for their learning environment and productivity.
- 14 "When the kids come down here, they're all rowdy and goofing around," said Dacari, a third-grader who has been using the Mindful Moment Room since it was established in the school three years ago. "When they leave the room, they're peaceful and quiet and ready to do their work."
- 15 Before the Mindful Moment Room, students who got into trouble were sent to detention or to the principal's office. But since making the meditation room available, Thompson said, she rarely sees children for disciplinary issues anymore.
- 16 "It's made a huge impact," she says.
- 17 And for what it's worth, Thompson says she's had zero suspensions since the room's creation. The year before that, there were four suspensions.

Mindfulness, far and wide

- 18 The school's emphasis on mindfulness goes beyond a meditation room.
- 19 All children at Coleman start and end their school day with a 15-minute guided meditation over the intercom. They also have the chance to practice yoga during and after school.

¹foundation—the Holistic Life Foundation, where the Mindful Moment Room originated

- 20 Taking notice of Coleman’s success, Patterson High School in East Baltimore created its own Mindful Moment Room, where students do yoga or simply decompress after a school day.
- 21 Gonzalez² says he and the other co-founders want to take their program far and wide. They plan to open Mindful Moment Rooms in other schools in the coming years. And they’d like to eventually take their program nationwide.

Can it really help?

- 22 Researchers have documented the beneficial effects of meditation on the brain of adults, says Tamar Mendelson, an associate professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who specializes in mental health.
- 23 A study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* in 2014 suggests that mindfulness meditation can help ease psychological stressors such as anxiety, depression and pain.
- 24 The research on children, however, is still in the early stages, Mendelson said.
- 25 “We aren’t in a place yet where we can say that we know this works,” she said.
- 26 However, from her time working with the foundation and studying the Mindful Moment Rooms in Baltimore, she says, she’s seen the impact of meditation on children firsthand.
- 27 “These kids who are dealing with high-stress situations a lot of the time are coming into school on high alert. Their body’s alarm system is switched way on, so they may be primed for fight or flight and not able to sit calmly and pay attention,” Mendelson explained.
- 28 But giving these kids the chance to breathe deeply, to focus their attention on themselves rather than what’s going on externally, can be an effective way to combat the stress, improve attention and usher in calm, she adds. “When we sit with pain or discomfort rather than act on it, we learn that feelings and sensations come and go. We don’t necessarily need to act on them all. We have a chance to pause and make a thoughtful choice about how to respond.”

²Gonzalez—Andres Gonzalez, the co-founder of the Holistic Life Foundation

“Instead of Detention, These Students Get Meditation” by Deborah Bloom, from the CNN Web site (November 8, 2016). Copyright © 2016 by Turner Broadcast Systems. Reprinted by permission of PARS International Corp.

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 “When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom” and “Instead of Detention,” write an essay that explains the benefits of practicing mindfulness in schools. Be sure to use information from both articles to develop your essay.

Write your answer on the next two pages.

The sample explanatory essay question does not have student work samples or annotations as it was not administered to grade 10 students. The essay is an example of what an explanatory essay might look like on a grade 10 test.

Sample Scoring Notes

(Please note: These sample scoring notes are provided to show examples of explanations and evidence students may use in their essays. The scoring notes are not intended to be restrictive or exhaustive. Students may integrate quotations in their essays or paraphrase them to support main ideas. Other points are acceptable if supported by evidence from the texts.)

An essay that explains the benefits of practicing mindfulness in schools may include, but is not limited to, the following:

Some Possible Examples of Relevant Discussion Points and Supporting Evidence

There are many benefits to practicing mindfulness in schools. / Practicing mindfulness in schools can be beneficial to students, teachers, and the overall learning environment.

Practicing mindfulness in schools could help students learn how to better manage their stress in difficult situations.

- There is research to support this conclusion: "A study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* in 2014 suggests that mindfulness meditation can help ease psychological stressors such as anxiety, depression and pain." ("Instead of Detention, These Students Get Meditation," paragraph 23) / Other references to research mentioned in the article are also acceptable.
- Experts support practicing mindfulness in schools: "But giving these kids the chance to breathe deeply, to focus their attention on themselves rather than what's going on externally, can be an effective way to combat the stress, improve attention and usher in calm, she adds." ("Instead of Detention, These Students Get Meditation," paragraph 28) / Other relevant details related to the impact of mindfulness are also acceptable.

Practicing mindfulness techniques in schools may help students focus on their studies and learn to avoid distractions.

- Some of the positive impacts for students include "'being focused,' 'being aware of our surroundings.'" ("When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom," paragraph 2) / Details from paragraphs 7, 8 or 10 are also relevant to this point.
- There are specific techniques educators use to support students practicing mindfulness: "Kids here stretch, do yoga and practice deep breathing. More important, staff say, they build an ability to be mindful and calm." ("Instead of Detention, These Students Get Meditation," paragraph 5) / Other relevant details about the practice and impact of mindfulness are also acceptable.

Practicing mindfulness in schools can benefit students by helping them understand how to use the strategies effectively not only in their studies but in life.

- Practicing such techniques can help students do better in school but also help build their character: "This type of [non-cognitive] intelligence entails dimensions of the mind that are difficult to quantify: It is the foundation of good character, resilience, and long-term life fulfillment." ("When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom," paragraph 14) / Other references to tapping into a different mindset and the importance of mindfulness beyond school are also acceptable.
- Teachers are equipping students with strategies they can use long-term: "My intention as a mindfulness instructor is to give students some very simple and basic tools so they can learn to self regulate." ("When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom," paragraph 16) / Other references to providing students with strategies for self-regulation are also acceptable.

Mindfulness practices and strategies have been received positively by students who have experienced them.

- Surveys have shown that students have positive feelings about the impact of mindfulness practices: "A vast majority—97 percent—of students surveyed in 2014 said they would recommend the course to others, reporting benefits ranging from better sleep and diminished stress to increased focus on schoolwork." ("When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom," paragraph 13) / Other relevant information citing feedback from students is also acceptable.
- Student anecdotes suggest the positive impacts mindfulness can have: "When I get mad at something or somebody, I just take some deep breaths, keep doing my work and tune everyone out," said Dacari Crawford, 9. "It gives you good confidence when you need to do something important." ("Instead of Detention, These Students Get Meditation," paragraph 6) / Other relevant reflections from students about the impact of mindfulness are also acceptable.

Educators and other school staff have also commented on the positive benefits they observe.

- Students are learning skills that they can use to help themselves long after the school day ends because teachers are "giving them the skills to help themselves." ("When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom," paragraph 20) / Relevant details from/references to paragraphs 18–20 are also acceptable.
- Teachers have seen a difference in how students are managing their stress or behavior: "When they leave the room, they're peaceful and quiet and ready to do their work." ("Instead of Detention, These Students Get Meditation," paragraph 14) / Relevant details from paragraphs 15–17 regarding positive effects as well as student reflections are also acceptable.