

MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guides

Grade 10 English Language Arts Practice Test

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 that compares and contrasts the attitudes of a character in an excerpt with those of a speaker in a poem.

[View item in MCAS Digital Item Library](#)

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 *The Namesake* and “Names,” write an essay that compares and contrasts Gogol’s and the speaker’s attitudes toward their names. Be sure to use details from **both** the excerpt and the poem 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 5B	- 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
4	- 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	- 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	- 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	- 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 3B 3C 3D	- 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
2	- 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	- 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 four-paragraph essay is fully developed and insightful. The introduction explains Gogol's and the speaker's attitudes toward their names: "For both of them, they feel that their names are disconnected from their identities, and more specifically their heritages." Organization is skillful, as the essay explores the cultural and personal significance of names in the two body paragraphs, connecting carefully selected details with textual analysis to illustrate the similarities and differences between the two characters. The essay explains that Gogol "feels no connection to the author that was his namesake" and his name is no more than "what people call him, not a descriptor of himself." Similarly, the essay notes that the speaker "does not even really feel as if she is that person." Though the motives of the two characters are similar, the essay describes how they seek resolution in different ways. Gogol takes legal action to adopt a Bengali name and identity; in contrast, Teresa subtly accepts the importance of her birth name and sees that reclaiming it is an acceptance of the identity that was always there: "Changing her name was not a solution to her problem, but the cause of it, and she wants to go back to being the name her parents gave her, the one that is true to her Vietnamese roots." Such skillful explanation of evidence supports a rich expression of ideas throughout the essay, and it demonstrates full awareness of the task and mode of writing.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3A

The essay demonstrates consistent control of a variety of sentence forms: "For Teresa, it is the opposite. She likes the name her parents chose for her, her Vietnamese name, and she only feels disconnected from it because she has not used it in a long time." Grammar, usage, and mechanics are controlled throughout. The level of control in sentence formation and standard English conventions supports fluency of ideas and rich expression.

A name is a central part of everyone's identity. It is something that uniquely belongs to a person, something others refer to them as, a way to describe themselves. However, Gogol Gargul from *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri and Teresa Mei Chuc from her poem "Names" both have unhappy attitudes towards their names. For both of them, they feel that their names are disconnected from their identities, and more specifically their heritages. Gogol thinks that changing his name will solve this problem. However, Teresa thinks that changing her name in the first place is what caused the problem.

A name is something that is supposed to represent one's identity, but both Gogol and Teresa feel that their names do not serve that purpose. Gogol dislikes that his parents gave him a Russian name and that his namesake is a person whom he does not relate to. Gogol says, "it's not even a Bengali name" and talked about "Gogol's lifelong unhappiness, his mental instability" (Lahiri 7-8). Gogol is proud of his Bengali heritage, but his name is Russian, and he feels no connection to the author that was his namesake. He struggles to connect his name to his identity when there is nothing personal about his name. For him, his name is just what people call him, not a descriptor of himself. Similarly, Teresa dislikes the fact that she had to change her name when she entered the US to an anglicized version. She says, "[w]ho is Tue My Chuc? / I don't really know. I was never really her" (Chuc 17-18). Since Chuc no longer goes by her birth name, she does not even really feel as if she is that person. Her true name is not connected to her identity, and she regrets this, because she likes that name. However, she does not feel connected to her current name either. She says, "[s]ometimes I just don't feel like a Teresa anymore" (Chuc 26-27). Neither of her names really connects to her identity, so her name is not serving the purpose that a name should. Though the two names are disconnected from her identity for different reasons, the result is the same: Teresa does not go by a name that she has a personal connection to. For both Gogol and Teresa, their name is something that they wish did a better job of representing who they are.

Though Gogol and Teresa have a similar problem, it has a different root cause for each of them and they each propose a different solution. For Gogol, that is his name simply because that is what his parents chose to name him, and the solution for him is to change his name and to pick a new name, one that he likes and one that has Bengali influence. Gogol "read that tens of thousands of Americans had their names changed each year. All it took was a legal petition, the article had said. And suddenly he envisioned 'Gogol' added to the list of names, 'Nikhil' printed in tiny letters upside down" (Lahiri 1). There are two main things that Gogol dislikes about his name: it's Russian, rather than Bengali, roots and the fact that it does not feel like him. Changing his name to Nikhil would solve both of those problems, because Nikhil is a Bengali name and he likes it. For Gogol, the name his parents gave him is one that he does not feel connected to, so changing his name to one he chose himself would allow his name to truly represent his identity. For Teresa, it is the opposite. She likes the name her parents chose for her, her Vietnamese name, and she only feels disconnected from it because she has not used it in a long time. She dislikes the anglicized version that it was changed to when she moved to the US. Chuc writes, "I want to go way back. Reclaim that name once given and lost so quickly in its attempt to become someone that would fit in" (15-17). Changing her name was not a solution to her problem, but the cause of it, and she wants to go back to being the name her parents gave her, the one that is true to her Vietnamese roots. She does not feel like a Teresa because it is not connected to her identity, but she does not feel like a Tue because she has not been Tue in so long. She believes that reclaiming her original name will allow her name to represent her identity. Though Gogol and Teresa have the same problem, they attempt to solve the problem in different ways.

A name is something that is given to a child by their parents at birth, but it is something that can be changed when the child gets older. It is different for each person. Gogol and Teresa both felt that their names were not something they connected to on a personal level, but Gogol disliked the name his parents gave him and wished he could change it, while Teresa had changed her name and wished she could go back to the one her parents gave her. A name is something that is personal to each individual, and people find names that represent them in different ways, whether it be from their parents or decided by themselves, but everyone deserves to have a name that they connect to.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 5B

This fully developed essay opens with an introduction that outlines the characters' attitudes toward their names, claiming that Gogol and the speaker in the poem both want to change their names, but Gogol "is inclined to change his name due to issues with confidence, while the speaker is inclined to change her name for herself, not for others." Organization is effective, though somewhat formulaic, and the essay provides a coherent analysis of the characters' different attitudes through effective use of evidence from both the excerpt and the poem. The essay explains that Gogol is concerned with how his name will determine how he is viewed by others: Gogol "did not envision his future successful self with his birth-given name" and after changing his name to Nikhil, he "was able to change his confidence and finally feel free." In contrast, the essay describes the speaker in "Names" as being "in a constant identity crisis due to the constant changes of names depending on what stage of life she goes through." It further explains that the speaker "describes wishing to be a resonating string because she wants to feel connected to something and also have something connect to her. The arrow's release straight for the heart represents the speaker finally feeling something true and close to her." Skillfully selected evidence and details from the excerpt and poem support a high level of expression, and the essay demonstrates full awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3B

Sentences are varied in form, and consistent control of standard English conventions is evident. For example, "While they both feel distant from their birth-given identities, their reasons differ." Despite minor errors in usage ("unsatisfaction"), the essay demonstrates consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to its overall length and complexity.

Throughout the two passages, both Gogol and the speaker have very differing perspectives on their names and how others perceive them. While both speakers dislike their names, they are for differing reasons. Gogol is inclined to change his name due to issues with confidence, while the speaker is inclined to change her name for herself, not for others.

Gogol's dissatisfaction regarding his name is due to his own personal battle with self confidence. As his father asks who is not taking Gogol seriously due to his name, "the only person who didn't take Gogol seriously, the only person who tormented him...the only person who constantly questioned it and wished it were otherwise, was Gogol." Gogol has convinced himself that no person of true maturity and value should have a name such as his. "It was only thing [to be typed on Ivy League applications]... but engraved, four years from now, on a bachelor of arts degree? Written at the top of a resume?" Gogol did not envision his future successful self with his birth-given name, so he wished desperately to change it. When the judge asks him to provide reasoning for his intense dislike against his name, he is unprepared. Gogol does not have much to defend except for stating "I hate the name Gogol, I've always hated it." Gogol is aware that he does not have much reasoning for disliking the name yet he cannot convince himself otherwise. The total entirety of Gogol's desire to change his name is for his own personal issues with how he believes others perceive him and how he perceives himself. After accomplishing changing his name, Gogol feels free. "He wonders if this is how it feels... for a prisoner to walk free. 'I'm Nikhil,'" By changing his name, Gogol was able to change his confidence and finally feel free. Gogol's reasonings for a name change differ from the speaker in "Names" because the speaker was more so unconnected with her name than hating it.

The speaker in "Names" shows dislike for her name because of the amount of times she has to change it when beginning a new life. For her, her name acts as a large inconvenience in her life. "I am tired of having five different names; Having to change them when I enter A new country or take on a new life." The speaker resents her name because she is never able to form a connection with any of them. Throughout the speaker's life she has had to gain five different titles. "Reclaim that name once given and lost so quickly in its attempt to become someone that would fit in." The speaker is stating that everytime she gains a new name, she loses it, never being able to become accustomed with her identity. For the speaker, she is in a constant identity crisis due to the constant changes of names depending on what stage of life she goes through. She states "Sometimes I just don't feel like a Terease anymore... Anyways, I'd like to be a string... resonating. Pulled back tensely like a bow then reverberate in the arrow's release straight for the heart." The speaker describes wishing to be a resonating string because she wants to feel connected to something and also have something connect to her. The arrow's release straight for the heart represents the speaker finally feeling something true and close to her.

Both Gogal and the speaker do not have close connections to their names. While they both feel distant from their birth-given identities, their reasons differ. Gogal is insecure about his name because of his own issues within. He believes that he must change his name in order to make something of himself. The speaker feels confident with who she is but does not feel any connection to her inner self. Due to her many name changes, she is unable to truly figure out who she is and wants to be.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 4

This essay is well developed and presents a clear explanation of the similarities and differences between Gogol and the speaker's attitudes toward their names. The introduction states that the characters "have conflicted feelings about their names and wish to change them"; subsequent paragraphs develop this point. The first body paragraph merely summarizes the characters' decisions to change their names. The second body paragraph states that the characters differ in "their view of their original names after changing them." The final body paragraph goes on to identify an underlying connection between the two characters, however, explaining that "In both instances, Gogol and the speaker's final name choices are the most closely-related to their cultures." Details from the excerpt and poem are carefully selected and effectively organized, supporting a clear expression of each character's attitude regarding the importance of names. The essay demonstrates full awareness of the writing task.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3C

The essay shows consistent control of standard English conventions, including a variety of sentence forms: "The primary difference between Gogol and the speaker's attitudes towards their names is their view of their original names after changing them. Although Gogol is still called by his original name by people he knows even after officially changing it, he still sticks with his original plan and keeps his altered name." Grammar, usage, and mechanics are consistently controlled throughout the essay.

In the passages *The Namesake* and *Names*, the authors express how their characters feel about their names. Throughout their life, the two characters Gogol and the speaker, both have conflicted feelings about their names and wish to change them. The pair are similar in both of them originally believing a different name would suit them better, but different in how they desire to change their names in the end, which is also the name most closely related to their cultures.

In the passages, Gogol and the speaker both originally desired a new name rather than the one appointed to them at birth. In *The Namesake*, Gogol was embarrassed about his name, and felt "Nikhil" would be a more appropriate name when addressed on official achievements as an adult (Paragraph 2). In *Names*, the speaker's original name was "Tue My Chuc," but once she moves to the U.S. she changed it to "Teresa My Chuc," likely to better fit into societal norms of "American" names. In both cases, the main characters had a similar attitude about their names, as they both believed changing them would better suit their lives.

The primary difference between Gogol and the speaker's attitudes towards their names is their view of their original names after changing them. Although Gogol is still called by his original name by people he knows even after officially changing it, he still sticks with his original plan and keeps his altered name. However, the speaker in *Names* decides that she wishes to revert back to her very first name and, "Reclaim that name once given and lost so quickly in its attempt to become someone that would fit in" (Line 16). At the end of the passages, the main characters' attitudes towards their original names differ in the fact that Gogol seems moderately content with his name change, despite still being addressed by his original name. However, the speaker in the second passage has decided to accept her original name and love it for what it is. While Gogol is accepting of his new name "Nikhil," the speaker wishes to change her name back to "Tue My Chuc."

Another similarity between the characters is that by the end of each passage, they both chose to have names that they believed were the most true to their culture. In the first passage, Gogol explains to his parents that his original name is "...not even a Bengali name" (Paragraph 7). To add on to that, in paragraph 12 Gogol goes on to say that his parents should prefer him to have the name "Nikhil," a Bengali name. This relates to the speaker's decision as well, as she decides to return her name to its original Vietnamese form. She even remarks that her first name is her "truest," being the name connected closest to her Vietnamese roots. In both instances, Gogol and the speaker's final name choices are the most closely-related to their cultures.

In both texts, the characters Gogol and the speaker have various similarities and differences in how they feel about their names. In these passages, both Gogol and the speaker are not happy with their original names at first, but Gogol keeps his new name while the speaker wishes to revert back to her first name, and in both cases that is the name most connected to their cultures.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 3

This moderately developed essay begins with a general statement about how the characters' attitudes toward their names are "similar yet different." Organization is formulaic as these points are developed in separate body paragraphs. The essay notes that "Gogol and the speaker both never really felt connected to their name[s]" but also explains that "Gogol is happy about changing his name and leaving the original behind, while the speaker wants her original name back." Each of these ideas is moderately developed through appropriately selected quotations and paraphrased details from both the excerpt and the poem. Overall, the essay shows sufficient awareness of the task and mode of writing.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3D

Though the essay lacks complexity, its length is sufficient to demonstrate consistent control of standard English conventions. Sentences are correct and clear in meaning, though sometimes slightly awkward: "Different from Gogol, the speaker wants her original name as she realizes that it isn't so bad. She doesn't want her new name, and can learn to love her original name of Tue." Grammar, usage, and mechanics are consistently controlled, and slight errors, such as "a man who lived a lifelong of unhappiness," do not interfere with communication.

In the excerpt "The Namesake" and the poem "Names," Gogol and the speaker have similar yet different attitudes towards their names.

In the excerpt "The Namesake" and the poem "Names," Gogol and the speaker both never really felt connected to their name. In the excerpt, the Gogol says, "I hate the name Gogol... I've always hated it," (Lahiri 22). Throughout the story, Gogol shares his dislike towards his name and here, he finally expresses his hate for it. Gogol explains earlier that he was named after a man who lived a lifelong of unhappiness, and that he feels that this name does not represent his identity whatsoever. Earlier in the poem, the speaker also feels a disconnect towards her name. In the poem, the speaker writes, "Who is Tue My Chuc? I don't really know. I was never really her..." (Chuc 15). In this quote, the speaker shares her uncertainty towards her name. She reveals that she was never really her original name since she has changed it so many times, causing her to feel disconnected to it.

In the excerpt "The Namesake" and the poem "Names," Gogol and the speaker also have very different views about their names. Gogol is happy about changing his name and leaving the original behind, while the speaker wants her original name back. In the excerpt, the author writes, "I'm Nikhil," he wants to tell the people who are walking their dogs, pushing children in their strollers, throwing bread to the ducks," (Lahiri 24). In this quote, it is made clear that Gogol is glad to leave his original name behind as he wants everyone to know his new one. In contrast, the speaker wants her true name back. In the poem, she writes, "Sometimes I just don't feel like a Teresa anymore; Tue (pronounced Twe) isn't so embarrassing. A fruit learns to love its juice," (Chuc 25). Different from Gogol, the speaker wants her original name as she realizes that it isn't so bad. She doesn't want her new name, and can learn to love her original name of Tue.

In the excerpt "The Namesake" and the poem "Names," Gogol and the speaker have similar yet different attitudes towards their names. They both feel a disconnect toward their names. But, Gogol is proud to leave his original name behind while the speaker wants hers back.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 2

This brief essay presents a central idea in the introductory paragraph; however, a lack of development leads to a limited expression of the similarities and differences between the characters. The essay notes that Gogol “feels conscious about [the] heritage of his name” and that Teresa prefers one name “for the sake of simplicity,” though the significance of her choice is not further developed. Organization is limited as basic details are clustered in brief paragraphs that do not sustain fluent transitions of ideas. The essay demonstrates only partial awareness of the writing task.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 2

Despite containing relatively few spelling or grammatical errors, the length and complexity of the essay is such that it can only demonstrate mostly consistent control of standard English conventions. Though meaning is generally clear, there is some awkwardness in phrasing: “These justifications for Gogol changing his name confirms that he does hate his own name and why he hates his own name. . . .” and “As displayed by Gogol, he dislikes his name for the following reasons.”

In both peices of literature there is discontent with the official names given to the characters. Despite that, Gogol or Nikhil from *The Namesake* feels conscious about heritage of his name, while Teresa Mei Chuc desires the name Tue for the sake of simplicity.

As displayed by Gogol, he dislikes his name for the following reasons. His name is a pet name, associated with a person that experienced "lifelong unhappines [and] mental instability"(Lahiri par. 8), and is not a name of the main character's heritage. These justifications for Gogol changing his name confirms that he does hate his own name and why he hates his own name, though entirely seperate from the reasons of Mei Chuc.

Mei Chuc also dislikes her given U.S. name, Teresa. Despite that, the fact is supported by a different reason than Gogol. Teresa dislikes her name because she feels that "all these names...make [Teresa] dizzy" (Mei Chuc line 26). Teresa doesn't feel embarassed as Gogol does made evident by the line "a fruit learns to love its juice" (Mei Chuc line 28).

Overall, the main narrative of both pieces of literature describe a person discontent with their name. Despite that, the narrative stems from different reasons. Gogol dislikes the heritage behind his name while Teresa simply desires one definitive and indentifying name.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 1

This response presents a central idea that is not developed. It states that the characters have “similarities and differences” but provides only vague support: “they both feel like their names should be what they make it not what others say it should be.” Poor expression of ideas is seen in minimal development of evidence from the excerpt and poem. The response shows little awareness of the writing task.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 1

The response is brief and basic. Although errors are minor and ideas are understood, the length and complexity of the response does not provide an opportunity to demonstrate more than minimal control of standard English conventions.

In *The Namesake* and “Names”, both Gogol and speaker have similarities and differences. Gogol has a hate for his true name while the speaker wants to go back to her real name, Gogol feels like he can't escape his name while the speaker feels like she can't truly find hers anymore

Both want to be who they want to be, they both feel like their names should be what they make it not what others say it should be

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 0

This response's commentary on a character (Gogol) does show that the student has read at least one of the texts, but it does not address the question.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 0

The response consists of a run-on sentence that includes serious errors in usage and mechanics. Overall, the response is too minimal to demonstrate any control of standard English conventions.

Gogol is not a scared to speak or to say what hes feeling hes open and loves the thinks his parents give him he apresiates everything

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)