

Critical Skills Assignment Answer Key

Critical Reading and Narrative Writing (A)

Starter feedback for correct and incorrect answers is in **blue**. Use or adapt the feedback in this answer key as you grade each student assignment. Many answers will vary. The model answers demonstrate what a complete student response should include, but they do not represent the only correct response to most questions.

Read the story. Then answer the questions.

Mysterious Myrtle

(1) Myrtle’s behavior is mysterious, Mike thought. He stood by the corral fence observing his prize Angus cow. As he watched, she bellowed at him again. Her voice seemed to come from the bottom of her two-toed hooves. Even her chocolate-brown eyes looked strange. They were wide and rolling as if she’d seen a coyote.

(2) Mike loved detective shows, and from all the clues he was detecting now Myrtle was fretting. Just look at the way she followed him with her long-lashed eyes. And why did she keep trotting to and from the gate? All that was unusual—especially that she was disregarding her heaping feed trough. At 1,200 pounds she seldom ignored her evening rations.

(3) Could she be thirsty? Sometimes the breeze didn’t blow, and the windmill didn’t pump water fast enough. But when Mike checked, the blades whirled like a buzz saw shredding the wind. The pump rod clattered as it plunged up and down and water gushed from the horizontal pipe into the overflowing stock tank.

(4) Maybe Myrtle was sick. One time she’d had a stomachache. Her belly had swollen and her glistening black sides heaved as she panted in pain. That could explain her lack of appetite now. But her belly looked fine and she was breathing normally. No need for a shot like last winter when she’d had a lung infection and wheezed like a locomotive. She was better in no time once the veterinarian gave her the injection. Now she seemed perfectly healthy.

(5) Could she be lonesome? She always looked depressed when Mike left for school, her big head hanging over the corral gate as he climbed the steps of the bus. But she revived and came trotting when he hurried out to do his after-school chores.

(6) As silly as it seemed, Mike liked telling Myrtle about his day. He’d sit on a hay bale, pouring out his problems as she chewed her cud, seeming to think over what he said.

(7) It wasn’t the season for her to be planning another surprise either. Late last fall, she wasn’t with the rest of the herd or in her stall and she never came for corn that night. But the next morning she arrived bright and early with the prettiest licorice-black baby following close behind her. Mike named Myrtle’s calf Mischief, because he was always up to something.

(8) Was Myrtle thinking about Mischief now? “Wait a minute!” Mike said aloud. Where was Mischief? He wasn’t trailing her as usual. Was Myrtle alerting Mike that Mischief was missing?

(9) “Dad!” Mike hollered, bolting to the house. Soon they were bouncing down one hill and bumping up another in the pickup with Myrtle leading the way. She trotted along, her tail

flipping high and her ears straining forward. Finally, she stopped by the fence in the far corner of the pasture. Rain water had cut a fresh, deep gash into the earth just beyond it. Mike heard a commotion as he leaped from the truck. He ran toward the excitement. Myrtle stared down into the sinkhole and there, staring up, was Mischief, his mouth wide and his bawling almost as loud as his mama's had been earlier.

(10) That evening, Mike smiled as he gave Myrtle a pat and scratched Mischief behind the ears. He gave Myrtle a handful of sweet hay to munch. She deserved it for being such a good mama. If it wasn't for her, they'd have never found Mischief and Detective Mike wouldn't have had a chance to solve the farm's first mystery.

Choose answers to multiple choice questions. Type responses to questions that ask you to write a response. Be sure to save your work.

1. Reread Paragraphs 1 to 3.

(a) From the information in the paragraphs, which choice best describes the setting of the story?

- A. A small town on the rolling plains of the west
- B. A large city zoo of with many animals near the ocean
- C. A wild rural area where the weather is changeable
- D. A lonely mountainous area with isolated houses

Teacher feedback: The correct answer is C.

(b) Which sentence **best** supports the answer in Part (a)?

- A. They were wide and rolling as if she'd seen a coyote.
- B. He stood by the corral fence observing his prize Angus cow.
- C. Sometimes the breeze didn't blow, and the windmill didn't pump water fast enough.
- D. The pump rod clattered as it plunged up and down and water gushed from the horizontal pipe into the overflowing stock tank.

Teacher feedback: The correct answer is C.

Score: (2 points – both (a) and (b) must be correct to earn 2 points, if (a) is correct and (b) is incorrect award 1 point, if (a) is incorrect, award 0 points)

2. Reread Paragraph 3:

Could she be thirsty? Sometimes the breeze didn't blow, and the windmill didn't pump water fast enough. But when Mike checked, the blades whirled like a buzz saw shredding the wind. The pump rod clattered as it plunged up and down and water gushed from the horizontal pipe into the overflowing stock tank.

(a) Which statements can be inferred from Paragraph 3?

Choose **all** answers that are correct.

- A. There is enough water for Myrtle to drink.
- B. Myrtle is acting strangely because she is thirsty.
- C. The windmill is pumping a lot of water.

- D. Mike knows how to check on Myrtle's needs.

Teacher feedback: The correct answers are A and C.

(b) Which phrase from the paragraph **best** supports the answers in Part (a)?

- A. Sometimes the breeze didn't blow...
- B. ...water gushed...into the overflowing stock tank.
- C. The pump rod clattered as it plunged up and down...
- D. ...the blades whirled like a buzz saw shredding the wind.

Teacher feedback: The correct answer is B.

Score: (2 points – both (a) and (b) must be correct to earn 2 points, if (a) is correct and (b) is incorrect award 1 point, if (a) is incorrect, award 0 points)

3. Which statement **best** tells the meaning of this sentence from Paragraph 3?

But when Mike checked, the blades whirled like a buzz saw shredding the wind.

- A. The windmill blades were able to chop up the wind.
- B. The windmill blades worked like a buzz saw.
- C. The windmill blades were spinning quickly.
- D. The windmill blades were not working properly.

Teacher feedback: The correct answer is C.

Score: (1 point)

4. Mike is worried about Myrtle. What does this tell the reader about Mike's character?

Describe at least two character traits and give an example from the story to support each trait.

Model Answer

When Mike worries about Myrtle it shows that he is observant and he notices changes in his surroundings. He checks for signs that might show differences in her food and water intake and with her health and well-being.

The fact that he is worried about Myrtle also shows Mike cares about her. He likes that she seems to watch his comings and goings; for example, she looks sad as he leaves for school and chews her cud when he tells her about his day.

The fact that Mike continues worrying also shows that he is not willing to give up without some answers. He is determined to keep asking questions until he solves Myrtle's problem.

Award points for specific answers as shown below (for a total of 0–4 points).

Points	Concept Addressed	Feedback for Student Answers
2	The answer gives at least two descriptions of what Mike's worrying about Myrtle tells the reader about Mike's character. (1 point for each)	Your answer should describe what Mike's worrying about Myrtle tells the reader about Mike's character.
2	The answer uses an example from the story to explain each character description. (1 point for each)	Your answer should include examples from the story to explain what Mike's worrying about Myrtle tells the reader about Mike's character.

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer describes what Mike's worrying about Myrtle tells the reader about Mike's character. Your answer includes examples from the story to support your response.

5. Reread Paragraph 6:

As silly as it seemed, Mike liked telling Myrtle about his day. He'd sit on a hay bale, pouring out his problems as she chewed her cud, seeming to think over what he said.

(a) Which phrase **best** describes the meaning of the underlined words in Paragraph 6?

- A. saying it carefully
- B. crying it out
- C. talking it over
- D. clearing the way

Teacher feedback: The correct answer is C.

(b) Which phrase or sentence from the text **best** supports the answer in Part (a)?

- A. Mike liked telling...
- B. But she revived and came trotting...
- C. Could she be lonesome?
- D. She always looked depressed...

Teacher feedback: The correct answer is A.

Score: (2 points – both (a) and (b) must be correct to earn 2 points, if (a) is correct and (b) is incorrect award 1 point, if (a) is incorrect, award 0 points)

6. How does Myrtle show she is a good mother?

Use an example from the story to support your response.

Model Answer

Myrtle shows she is a good mother when she puts her calf's needs before her own. She ignores the food in her trough, which shows she is more worried about getting help for her calf than she is about eating.

Myrtle also shows she is a good mother because she doesn't give up trying to get help. She keeps bawling and pacing until Mike gets his dad's help. Then Myrtle led them to the sinkhole where her calf is trapped.

Award points for specific answers as shown below (for a total of 0–2 points).

Points	Concept Addressed	Feedback for Student Answers
1	The answer describes how Myrtle is a good mother.	Your answer should describe how Myrtle is a good mother.
1	The answer uses an example from the story to describe how Myrtle is a good mother.	Your answer should include an example from the story to describe how Myrtle is a good mother.

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer describes how Myrtle is a good mother and includes an example from the story to support your answer.

7. What is the theme of “Mysterious Myrtle”?

Support your answer with an example from the story.

Model Answer

The theme of the story is that it is important to be persistent when trying to solve a problem.

In the story, both Mike and Myrtle are persistent.

Mike is persistent in trying to figure out what is bothering Myrtle. He asks questions and eliminates possibilities until he figures out that Mischief is missing.

Myrtle is persistent because she keeps running around in a strange way, ignores her food, and bawls until she gets Mike's attention so he could get help for her calf.

Award points for specific answers as shown below (for a total of 0–2 points).

Points	Concept Addressed	Feedback for Student Answers
1	The answer describes the theme of “Mysterious Myrtle.”	Your answer should describe the theme of “Mysterious Myrtle.”
1	The answer uses an example from the story to describe the theme of “Mysterious Myrtle.”	Your answer should include an example from the story to describe the theme of “Mysterious Myrtle.”

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer describes the theme of “Mysterious Myrtle” and includes an example from the story to support your answer.

8. Which statement is the **best** summary of the story?

- A.** A cow behaves strangely until a boy figures out she is trying to get help for her calf.
- B.** A boy makes friends with a depressed cow and likes to tell her all his troubles.
- C.** A cow is sick and a boy calls the veterinarian to help her.
- D.** A boy can’t figure out why a cow is acting so strangely.

Teacher feedback: The correct answer is A.

Score: (1 point)

Read the story. Then answer the questions.

Thud Bump

(1) Mom appeared in the living room doorway with a basket of laundry on her hip. “Shall we order in from Bliss tonight? I can pick it up after I put in this laundry.”

(2) “Sure,” I replied locating the Thai restaurant’s take-out menu. After I ordered, I plopped down with the TV remote again, though nothing interested me. If only I had the gaming system already but Mom believed I’d appreciate it more if I purchased it with my own money. I was fine with that and didn’t mind saving what I got for doing Mrs. O’Leary’s chores, but that didn’t help me now.

(3) I heard the front door close and glanced out the bay window. The sun had set behind San Francisco’s hills and lights were winking on in the final warm glow. A speeding cab whooshed by and I saw my mom hurrying down the hill toward Bliss. My stomach grumbled at the thought of mango and sticky rice from my favorite restaurant.

(4) I turned back to the TV and a black-and-white movie about a frightened woman who hears a strange noise under her floor. After I watched for a while, goose bumps rose on my forearms, and I punched the remote to OFF before going into the kitchen to set the table. A distant siren screamed, but I heard something else, too—a low thumping far away, like someone continuously knocking on a door downstairs. Thud bump...thud bump. Wait! I knew that sound! It was the same noise the woman on TV had heard!

(5) Startled, I sprinted to the living room and leaped onto the couch, tucking my feet beneath me. Maybe the sound was someone outside bouncing a basketball off our building.

(6) I grabbed two sofa pillows and clamped them to my ears; I was alone with only a miserable couch for protection! I wondered if I should call the police but what would I tell them that wouldn’t make them think I was crazy or a pest?

(7) The sound could be the kid in the house next door. He’d recently received a drum set and he loved that bass pedal. But that was more of a bang boom than a thud bump.

(8) I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. Okay, be reasonable. It was coming from downstairs, so maybe Mrs. O’Leary was trying to get my attention. Mrs. O. wasn’t big on technology and didn’t like using a telephone. Her preferred method of contact was to bang on the ceiling with her broom to get our attention. Well, she definitely had mine. I’d have to check on her.

(9) I leaped up and hurried to the front door but my sneakers were not beside the mat where I usually left them. So, I edged in my stocking feet down the musty stairs to Mrs. O’Leary’s door. But she didn’t hear me knocking with her music, opera, cranked up. Still I could hear the thud bump which was louder now. I knocked again until the music stopped. Then a somewhat breathless voice called, “Who is it?”

(10) “Jeremy.”

(11) I heard a scuffle before the deadbolt slid and the door creaked open only as wide as the security chain allowed. She squinted out at me, her face reddened and sweaty, and her hair on end like she'd been sleeping. She recognized me and her wrinkles lifted into a smile; she removed the chain lock, swinging the door wide.

(12) I stepped inside to the smell of old newspapers and vanilla. She leaned heavily on her cane, her shoulders as rounded as the loaves of the bread she sometimes baked for us. But behind her was a big surprise — a shiny new treadmill in the middle of her living room.

(13) “Did you need something?” I asked, my eyes riveted to the state-of-the-art equipment.

(14) “No, why?”

(15) I dragged my eyes back to her face. “I heard the broom.”

(16) She cocked her head then grinned and tottered over to pat one of the treadmill's arms. “That was no broom. It's my baby here.”

(17) “When did you get that?”

(18) “They delivered it last night,” she said, beaming. “My doctor said I needed more exercise. What do you think?”

(19) “That should do it.”

(20) She glanced down at my feet. “Where are your shoes?”

(21) Her question brought me back to earth. “I can't find them. But never mind that. I keep hearing this bumping sound, but now I see it must be your treadmill.”

(22) “Not likely. This thing purrs like a kitten.” With that she hung her cane on one handle, flipped a switch to start the belt, and began pacing. A hum and the slow smacking of her thick-soled shoes filled her apartment. “See?”

(23) I did. But when I listened more closely, there was that thud bump playing accompaniment in the background. “I do, but I still hear the noise.”

(24) She flipped the switch again and climbed off the treadmill. Then she stood with her head tilted to one side, listening.

(25) “There! Hear it?”

(26) “I do, but it's not coming from in here. It's farther away, toward the back of the building. Should we investigate?”

(27) I should have guessed she'd want to help since next to opera, and now, apparently, walking, crime dramas were another of Mrs. O's favorite entertainments. I waited for her to get her keys and lock up before we started down the hall, stopping every few seconds to listen. The sound got louder as we neared the laundry room.

(28) Thud bump, thud bump; each repetition reeled us to the laundry room like fish on a line. Finally, I flung the door open, nearly choking on the smell of heated rubber and flowery fabric softener that gusted out. THUD BUMP, THUD BUMP; suddenly the noise stopped, and a loud BEEP, BEEP came from the dryer on the end. I walked over to open the door revealing my lost sneakers, clean and dry.

(29) “Mystery solved!” Mrs. O. exclaimed.

Choose answers to multiple choice questions. Type responses to questions that ask you to write a response. Be sure to save your work.

9. Where does “Thud Bump” take place? How do you know? Why is the setting important?

Support your answer with details from the story.

Model Answer

The story takes place in an apartment in San Francisco.

Even though it does not say the story takes place in an apartment building, it can be inferred since Mrs. O’Leary lives below Jeremy and his mother and can hit the ceiling with a broom to get their attention. Also, Jeremy goes downstairs to check on Mrs. O’Leary.

It’s important that it takes place in an apartment building because Jeremy can hear sounds from other people’s homes, which would be harder in a place where houses are spread out. The story needs to take place where people would share laundry facilities as residents of an apartment building might and where the sound of shoes thumping in a dryer might be a distant sound they could hear.

Award points for specific answers as shown below (for a total of 0–4 points).

Points	Concept Addressed	Feedback for Student Answers
1	The answer describes where “Thud Bump” takes place.	Your answer should describe where “Thud Bump” takes place.
1	The answer explains how the reader knows where the story takes place.	Your answer should explain how you know where the story takes place.
1	The answer explains why the setting is important.	Your answer should explain why the setting is important.
1	The answer uses details from the story to describe where “Thud Bump” takes place and to explain why the setting is important.	Your answer should include details from the story to describe where “Thud Bump” takes place and to explain why the setting is important.

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer describes where “Thud Bump” takes place and explains why the setting is important. Your answer uses details from the story to support your answer.

10. Reread Paragraph 7:

The sound could be the kid in the house next door. He’d recently received a drum set and he loved that bass pedal. But that was more of a bang boom than a thud bump.

(a) Which statement best tells the meaning of the underlined phrase in the sentence from Paragraph 7?

- A. Jeremy was hearing a bigger sound than he usually heard.
- B. Jeremy does not like the sound of his neighbor's bass drum.
- C. The sound Jeremy heard was different from a bass drum.
- D. The sound Jeremy heard was louder than a set of drums.

Teacher feedback: The correct answer is C.

(b) Consider the author's purpose in including the example sentence in Part (a). Which phrases or sentences serve the same purpose?

Choose all answers that are correct.

- A. "It's farther away, toward the back of the building."
- B. A distant siren screamed but I heard something else, too...
- C. ...like someone continuously knocking on a door.
- D. "This thing purrs like a kitten."

Teacher feedback: The correct answers are A and C.

Score: (2 points – both (a) and (b) must be correct to earn 2 points, if (a) is correct and (b) is incorrect award 1 point, if (a) is incorrect, award 0 points)

11. Reread Paragraphs 12 to 16 from the passage.

Why is Mrs. O'Leary's treadmill surprising to Jeremy?

Support your answer with details from the story.

Model Answer

Jeremy is surprised that Mrs. O'Leary has a treadmill because he didn't expect to see it in her living room. For one thing she is elderly and he doesn't expect to see an elderly person using a treadmill, especially a state-of-the-art fancy one. He is also surprised because he knows she doesn't like to use a phone and bangs on the ceiling to call him. He doesn't think a person who does not like to use technology would want to use a treadmill either.

Award points for specific answers as shown below (for a total of 0–2 points).

Points	Concept Addressed	Feedback for Student Answers
1	The answer explains why Mrs. O’Leary’s treadmill is surprising to Jeremy.	Your answer should explain why Mrs. O’Leary’s treadmill is surprising to Jeremy.
1	The answer uses details from the story to explain why Mrs. O’Leary’s treadmill is surprising to Jeremy.	Your answer should include details from the story to explain why Mrs. O’Leary’s treadmill is surprising to Jeremy.

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer explains why Mrs. O’Leary’s treadmill is surprising to Jeremy and uses details from the story to support your answer.

12. How are the points of view from which “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” are told different?

Support your answer with information from the stories.

Model Answer

“Mysterious Myrtle” is told by a narrator who is not a character in the story. The author uses words such as “he” and “she” which means the story is told in third person.

Jeremy tells the story of “Thud Bump.” He is the main character and he uses words such as “I” and “me,” which means the story is told in first person.

Award points for specific answers as shown below (for a total of 0–2 points).

Points	Concept Addressed	Feedback for Student Answers
1	The answer explains how the points of view from which “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” are told are different.	Your answer should explain how the points of view from which “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” are told are different.
1	The answer uses details from both “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” to explain how the points of view from which the stories are told are different.	Your answer should use details from both “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” to explain how the points of view from which the stories are told are different.

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer explains how the points of view from which “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” are told are different and uses details from both stories to support your answer.

13. How are the stories “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” similar and how are they different?

Support your answers with at least one detail to show how they are similar and at least one detail to how they are different.

Model Answer

The plots of the stories are similar because in both main characters follow several clues relating to their home surroundings to solve a problem or answer a question unique to the areas in which they live. The characters notice something that is different about their surroundings and use their powers of observation to discover the source of the difference.

The stories are different in that they happen in different locations. “Thud Bump” takes place in the city and “Mysterious Myrtle” takes place on a farm. Also, a natural event causes the mystery to begin in “Mysterious Myrtle”. Heavy rain causes the sinkhole into which the calf falls. The event that causes the mystery to begin in “Thud Bump” is the mother putting shoes in the dryer. That is not an event created by nature.

Award points for specific answers as shown below (for a total of 0–4 points).

Points	Concept Addressed	Feedback for Student Answers
1	The answer explains how “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” are similar.	<i>Your answer should explain how “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” are similar.</i>
1	The answer uses details from “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” to show how the stories are similar.	<i>Your answer should use details from “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” to show how the stories are similar.</i>
1	The answer explains how “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” are different.	<i>Your answer should explain how “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” are different.</i>
1	The answer uses details from “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” to show how the stories are different.	<i>Your answer should use details from “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” to show how the stories are different.</i>

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer explains how “Mysterious Myrtle” and “Thud Bump” are similar and how they are different, and uses details from the stories to support your answer.

14. A mystery is a story in which a character uses clues to solve a problem or answer a question.

Write a mystery, real or imagined, that is at least three paragraphs long in either first or third person. Choose your words and details carefully so that you can describe the plot, setting, and characters clearly. Use dialogue to show what the characters think and to show how they feel.

- (a)** Write a mystery that is at least three paragraphs long. It should tell about something that really happened or that you imagined happening.
- (b)** Include a main character who uses clues to solve a problem or answer a question.
- (c)** Write the story in either first person or third person point of view. Be consistent.
- (d)** Include a setting and describe the plot and characters clearly.
- (e)** Use dialogue and showing language to tell what the characters are thinking and feeling.
- (f)** Include a satisfying conclusion.
- (g)** Tell the story in the order it happens. Use connecting words between ideas and paragraphs.

Score: Use the rubric to evaluate the student’s writing. Award points for each category as shown below (for a total of 12–20 points). Students who do not respond should be given a 0.

Teacher feedback: Provide feedback about the student’s writing in each category.

Category	Level 3 (5 points)	Level 2 (4 points)	Level 1 (3 points)
Purpose and Content	The writing is a narrative in the form of a mystery. The plot has a problem or question that a character solves using several clues. The mystery unfolds around an event.	The writing is a narrative in the form of a mystery. The plot has a problem or question that a character solves using some clues. The mystery may or may not unfold around an event.	The writing may not be a narrative in the form of a mystery. The plot may not have a problem or question which a character solves using clues. The mystery may not unfold around an event.
Structure and Organization	The writing is at least three paragraphs long. The writing follows the form of a mystery consistently. The writing is consistently from either a first- or third-person point of view. There is a clear and satisfying conclusion.	The writing is at least two paragraphs long. The writing mostly follows the form of a mystery. The writing is mostly from either the first- or third-person point of view, but there are shifts that do not seem intentional. There is a conclusion.	The writing may be fewer than two paragraphs long. The writing may not follow the form of a mystery. The writing may not be from either the first or third person point of view, or it may be difficult to determine a clear point of view. There may be no conclusion.

Category	Level 3 (5 points)	Level 2 (4 points)	Level 1 (3 points)
Language and Word Choice	The writing uses many words and details that describe the plot, setting, and characters clearly. There are many examples of showing language that help readers imagine the characters and scene. The writing uses many lines of dialogue to show what the characters think and feel.	The writing uses some words and details that describe the plot, setting, and characters clearly. There are some examples of showing language that help readers imagine the characters and scene. The writing uses some lines of dialogue to show what the characters think and feel.	The writing uses few if any words and details that describe the plot, setting, and characters clearly. There may not be showing language that helps readers imagine the characters and scene. The writing uses few if any lines of dialogue to show what the characters think and feel.
Grammar, Usage and Mechanics	The writing is in standard English. The writing has no errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics. The writing has no errors in punctuation or spelling.	The writing is mostly in standard English. The writing may contain some errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics. The writing may contain some errors in punctuation or spelling. The errors do not interfere with the reader's understanding.	The writing may not be in standard English. The writing may contain many errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics. The writing may contain many errors in punctuation or spelling. The errors may make it difficult to follow or understand the writing.

Final Assignment Score: (/50)