

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.

The Nightly Journey

(1) Dena, Ellie, and Ruth crept down the flat rock steps behind the cabin, each child clutching the pajamas of the female in front of her. This was definitely not their favorite part of vacations in the Ozarks.

(2) They followed their mother’s guiding beam, their old sneakers squeaking as they trekked through dewy grass toward the outdoor bathroom they called the outhouse. If only their grandparents would install a bathroom indoors; it was 1959 for heaven’s sake!

(3) “Oh, girls, look!” their mother exclaimed, halting abruptly. The daughters jostled into her and almost into the object of her interest—an enormous cobweb stretching from the clothesline to the ground. “Isn’t it fascinating?” Mother gushed, playing the flashlight around the web. The fibers glowed silvery in the flashlight beam and quivered when a reckless moth blundered into the web. The careless moth thrashed briefly as the spider darted across the web and when it pounced, the sisters squealed, shuddering.

(4) “It is the way of nature, girls,” Mother said, finally flicking the flashlight away and setting off again with the sisterly ensemble. The band continued through the towering evergreens and hardwoods as a multitude of insect voices filled the night.

(5) The pale outhouse loomed down the path, an ashen ghost against the trees. When they arrived, their mother held up a hand to halt them. “Let me check first, she warned,” and creaked the door open. It mimicked the sound of old bones and the girls held each other but craned their necks as Mother trained the light around inside. “No snakes,” she announced then whipped back around making the girls flinch.

(6) “Sillies!” Mother teased then she grinned before lunging at them, her arms were spread wide and her hands curled into claws. “Hooo! It’s the Ozark swamp monster!” When the girls leaped back squealing, Mom put her hands on her hips. “Oh, for Pete’s sake. There’s nothing to be afraid of!” Then she gestured toward the outhouse, “Okay, who’s first?”

(7) “Go ahead,” Dena said, stepping back and urging her younger sister, Ellie, forward.

(8) “You go,” Ellie said, prodding Ruth.

(9) “Aww!” Ruth protested but she knew it would do no good. As the youngest she always got the first turn of the bad stuff and the last turn of the good. So she took a deep breath and made the big step into the closet-like gloom.

(10) Their mother stood in the doorway playing the flashlight around the interior of the outhouse. Dena and Ellie could see the shifting shadows and the light slivers through the cracks in the wood.

(11) “Oh, there’s another spider,” Mother said, spearing its web in the corner with the light beam. “That’s a wolf spider; see how big it is? As big as...” But she didn’t finish her sentence as Ruth streaked past her and collapsed against her sisters.

(12) Mom chuckled, the light of the flashlight making her eyes and teeth glow eerily; “Okay who is next?”

(13) “Your turn,” Dena said, giving Ellie a push. Ellie baby-stepped forward.

(14) “Ooh, what’s that?” Mom said pretending to search around her feet, just as Ellie reached the door. Mom giggled when Ellie jumped and Dena and Ruth gasped.

(15) “Mom!” Dena scolded, and Ellie steadied herself against the door frame momentarily before straightening and entering the shadowy cubicle.

(16) Dena followed minutes later, stomping boldly past their mother and shooting her a warning glare.

(17) Then it was their mother’s turn. Mother handed Dena the light and slipped into the outhouse. Crickets chirped and some dogs barked not far away.

(18) Dena pointed the flashlight downward, making a light puddle by her feet. Then she pulled her sisters into a huddle and whispered, “Let’s give Mom a taste of her own medicine,” and held a finger to her lips as they cast glances at each other, grinning.

(19) “Are you girls okay?” Mom called.

(20) “We’re fine,” Dena replied, motioning her sisters to be quiet when they threatened to giggle.

(21) Finally, their mother stepped out and Dena waved the light at the perfectly bare ground before her. “What’s THAT?” Dena screeched, while her sisters screamed.

(22) Mother leaped higher than the girls had ever seen and in two steps she was beside them, panting as if it had been two miles. Then she stared back over her shoulder, her eyes as wild as a deer on the run. “What is it?” she wheezed.

(23) “Nothing,” said Dena, her sisters snickering behind her. “False alarm.”

(24) Mother paused, looking them up and down as her breathing slowed. Then she shook her head and gave them a weak smile before letting Dena lead the way back to the cabin.

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

1. Which sentence or phrase from the text **best** explains how the sisters feel about trips to the outhouse?

- A. “Go ahead,” Dena said, stepping back and urging her younger sister, Ellie, forward.
- B. They followed their mother’s guiding beam...
- C. This was definitely not their favorite part of vacations in the Ozarks.
- D. When the girls leaped back squealing, Mom put her hands on her hips

Teacher feedback: (The correct answer is C.)

Score: (1 point)

2. Reread Paragraphs 3 and 4.

Which statements can be inferred about the mother from Paragraphs 3 and 4?

Choose **all** answers that are correct.

- A. She is not afraid of spiders.
- B. She is very interested in nature.
- C. She is afraid of walking in the dark.
- D. She is keeping a secret from her daughters

Teacher feedback: (The correct answers are A and B.)

Score: (1 point)

3. How do the sisters react to their mother’s actions at the beginning of the story? How do their reactions change by the end of the story?

Use examples from the story to support your response.

Model Answer

At the beginning of the story the sisters are afraid when their mother shows them the spider web and again when she teases them after they reach the outhouse.

But by the end of the story, they set their fears aside by taking action and playing a trick on her. Also, before they play the trick, they each have to deal with their fear separately, but once they band together, they gather strength from each other.

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 how the sisters react to their mother's actions at the beginning of the story.	Your answer should describe how the sisters react to their mother's actions at the beginning of the story.
1	The answer describes how the sisters' reactions change by the end of the story.	Your answer should describe how the sisters' reactions change by the end of the story.
2	The answer uses examples from the story to describe how the sisters react to their mother's actions at the beginning of the story and how their reactions change by the end of the story. (1 point for each)	Your answer should include examples from the story to describe how the sisters react to their mother's actions at the beginning of the story and how their reactions change by the end of the story.

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer describes how the sisters react to their mother's actions at the beginning of the story. Your answer also describes how the sisters' reactions change by the end of the story. Your answer includes examples from the story to support your response.

4. Answer the questions about the story.

(a) Which statement **best** tells the theme of the story?

- A. People learn how others feel by experiencing the feeling themselves.
- B. Paying someone back is not a fair way to teach a person a lesson.
- C. You cannot overcome a fear by working together as a team.
- D. It is best to carry a flashlight when going out after dark.

Teacher feedback: (The correct answer is A.)

(b) Which paragraphs from the story support the answer in Part (a)?

Choose all answers that are correct.

- A. 18
- B. 20
- C. 22
- D. 24

Teacher feedback: (The correct answers are C and D.)

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.)

5. Read this sentence from Paragraph 5:

The pale outhouse loomed down the path, an ashen ghost against the trees.

- (a) Which sentence **best** describes the meaning of the underlined words?
- A. The outhouse was painted with a picture of a scary ghost.
- B. The outhouse was painted a color which blended with the dark trees.
- C. The outhouse was shaped like a ghost and was placed in front of the trees.
- D. The outhouse was painted a light color and looked frightening.

Teacher feedback: (The correct answer is D.)

- (b) Which phrase from the text uses the same figurative language technique as the underlined phrase in Part (a)?
- A. ...pointed the flashlight downward...
- B. ...her eyes as wild as a deer on the run.
- C. ...panting as if it had been two miles...
- D. ...making a light puddle by her feet.

Teacher feedback: (The correct answer is D.)

- (c) Which sentence **best** describes the meaning of the answer in Part (b)?
- A. A light made a circle on the ground.
- B. She was breathing hard as if she'd run a long way.
- C. Her eyes were wide with fear.
- D. A light pointed in a downward direction.

Teacher feedback: (The correct answer is A.)

(3 points – (a), (b) and (c) must all be correct to earn 3 points. If (a) is correct, award 1 additional point if (b) is correct and /or 1 additional point if (c) is correct. If (a) is incorrect, award 0 points.)

6. Reread Paragraph 3.

- (a) Which word means nearly the same as the underlined word as it is used in the sentence?

The fibers glowed silvery in the flashlight beam and quivered when a reckless moth blundered into the web.

- A. confused
- B. tired
- C. foolish
- D. mistaken

Teacher feedback: (The correct answer is C.)

- (b) Which phrases from the text support your answer in Part (a)?

Choose **all** answers that are correct.

- A. ...blundered into the web.
- B. The fibers glowed silvery in the flashlight beam...
- C. ...almost into the object of her interest...
- D. The careless moth thrashed briefly...

Teacher feedback: (The correct answers are A and D.)

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.)

7. From what point of view does the narrator tell the story? How does the point of view affect what the reader learns about events and characters?

Use examples from the story to support your response.

Model Answer

The narrator is telling the story from the third-person point of view.

This allows the narrator to describe what is happening from all sides and to see how all characters feel. The narrator goes into great detail about what the setting is like, such as the dark night and the huge cobweb. Then when the family gets to the outhouse, the narrator talks about what it is like for the person inside as well as what it is like for the group waiting to go in. The narrator outside the scene can also tell what is happening with each character, such as what the mother does to frighten the girls and how they react. For example, when the girls have to enter the outhouse, Dena pushes her younger sisters ahead but then scolds her mother for scaring them

all. Ellie tries to gather her courage when she holds on to the doorframe before going in. The narrator also reveals how Ruth feels about being the youngest sister, forced to always go first or last.

The reader would not be able to see all sides if the story were told in first person, such as by one of the girls or the mother.

Award points for specific answers as shown below (for a total of 0–3 points).

Points	Concept Addressed	Feedback for Student Answers
1	The answer describes from what point of view the narrator tells the story.	Your answer should describe from what point of view the narrator tells the story.
1	The answer describes how the point of view affects what the reader learns about the events and characters in the story.	Your answer should describe how the point of view affects what the reader learns about the events and characters in the story.
1	The answer uses examples from the story to describe from what point of view the narrator tells the story and to describe how the point of view affects what the reader learns about the events and characters.	Your answer should include examples from the story to describe from what point of view the narrator tells the story and to describe how the point of view affects what the reader learns about the events and characters.

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer describes from what point of view the narrator tells the story. Your answer also describes how the point of view affects what the reader learns about the events and characters in the story. Your answer includes examples from the story to support your response.

8. Read the sentence from Paragraph 4:

“It is the way of nature, girls,” Mother said, finally flicking the flashlight away and setting off again with the sisterly ensemble.

(a) Which word **best** tells the meaning of the underlined word?

- A. group
- B. collection
- C. lamp
- D. stride

Teacher feedback: (The correct answer is A)

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

- A.** When they arrived, their mother held up a hand to halt them.
- B.** The band continued through the towering evergreens...
- C.** “Sillies!” Mother teased then she grinned before lunging at them...
- D.** “Your turn,” Dena said, giving Ellie a push.

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.)

Read the story. Then answer the questions.

Closing Credits

(1) I tried to ignore Josh’s agitated kneecap vibrating beside me. “Hank, do we have to sit through all these credits?”

(2) A response failed me and all I could do was nod like a bobble head.

(3) Josh tried again, “Look, Dude, I’ll bet ten bucks there’s no promo for the new Captain Universe at the end.”

(4) “You don’t have ten bucks,” I fired back. “Anyway, Bobby guaranteed there was a trailer for the coming movie and there’s no reason he would lie. He knows I’m the biggest Captain Universe fan and comic collector this side of the Adirondacks.”

(5) Mercifully, Josh distracted himself by picking at a wad of chewing gum under the armrest of his chair. I settled back in mine as the credits scrolled on, but a sizable pit was swelling in my stomach. I’d dragged Josh and Dad to the sappiest romance ever for the sole purpose of catching the Captain Universe trailer at the end. At least if I’d brought Mom someone would have enjoyed the movie.

(6) Dad had migrated from the restroom and was grilling an usher in the exit doorway. Beside me, Josh had begun thumping a drum solo on the seat in front of him.

(7) “Hey!” Dad snapped at us and jerked a thumb toward the lobby as the usher scurried away. “Come on! He said there are no extras.”

(8) “It’s almost over, Dad!” I hollered back and then slouched down in my seat. I could feel tears gathering behind my eyeballs. They threatened to spill, but I willed them back and risked a glance back at Dad. Even from ten rows away, I could see his jaw clenching and releasing, clenching and releasing, but, surprisingly, he waved a hand and retreated.

(9) “I’ll be in the car,” he called.

(10) The pit had enlarged to apple-size in my stomach, but by the time the last credits ended, it had collapsed to mush. Boy, did I have egg on my face. The green “G” appeared in the rating rectangle on the cobalt screen. “G” for get going because this presentation is over! There was momentary darkness, then the auditorium lights surged, and pop tunes overtook the silence. But I couldn’t motivate my legs.

(11) Once again, Prankster Bobby had zapped someone and this time it was idiot me! Dad was probably turning the air blue, revving the motor, wanting Josh and me to get a move on.

(12) Josh was standing now, a scarecrow pretending to stretch his hamstrings. As he lurched up the aisle and I dragged behind, he hesitated and muttered over his shoulder.

“Dude, chin up. Last week Bobby told me if I wore toothpaste on my lip all day, I’d grow a moustache. At least you weren’t that gullible. I can still smell the mint.”

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

9. Answer the questions about the story.

(a) Which sentences tell a theme of “Closing Credits”?

Choose **all** answers that are correct.

- A. Good things come to those who wait.
- B. It never pays to expect too much.
- C. People are not alone in the disappointments they experience.
- D. The best friends are the ones who stick by people through the bad times.

Teacher feedback: (The correct answers are C and D.)

(b) Which details from the text support the answers in Part (a)?

Use examples from the story and your own ideas to support your response.

Model Answer

People are not alone in the disappointments they experience could be the theme because at the end of the story Josh revealed to Hank that Bobby had played a trick on him with toothpaste and Josh felt just as foolish.

The best friends are the ones who stick by people through the bad times could also be the theme. An example of this is when Josh stayed with Hank while he was waiting for the closing credits to end. Hank felt more and more foolish the longer he waited, and then in the end when he discovered Bobby had tricked him, Josh did not heckle him and make him feel worse. He just tried to make Hank feel better by sharing his pain and telling him he had been Bobby’s victim, too. That’s the mark of a true friend.

Award points for specific answers as shown below (for a total of 0–1 points).

Points	Concept Addressed	Feedback for Student Answers
1	The answer uses details to support the answers the student chose in Part (a).	Your answer should include details to support the answers you chose in Part (a).

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer uses details to support the answers you chose in Part (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.)

10. Read these sentences from Paragraph 10:

The pit had enlarged to apple-size in my stomach, but by the time the last credits ended, it had collapsed to mush. Boy, did I have egg on my face.

Which statement **best** tells the meaning of the first sentence?

- A. Hank feels like there is an apple seed in his stomach that is growing.
- B. Hank dreads that he will be disappointed at the end of the movie and he is.
- C. Hank ate an apple while he was watching the closing credits of the movie.
- D. Hank thinks he has something growing inside and he can't focus on the movie.

Teacher feedback: (The correct answer is B.)

Score: (1 point)

11. Read these sentences from Paragraph 10:

The pit had enlarged to apple-size in my stomach but by the time the last credits ended, it had collapsed to mush. Boy, did I have egg on my face.

Which statement **best** tells the meaning of the second sentence?

- A. Hank feels like his face is messy.
- B. Hank is worried that Josh will tease him.
- C. Hank feels like a fool for falling for Bobby's prank.
- D. Hank is angry about being tricked by Bobby's prank.

Teacher feedback: (The correct answer is C.)

Score: (1 point)

12. Read this sentence from Paragraph 3:

Josh tried again, "Look, Dude, I'll bet ten bucks there's no promo for the new Captain Universe at the end."

(a) Which word **best** tells the meaning of the underlined word?

- A. review
- B. period
- C. preview
- D. extension

Teacher feedback: (The correct answer is C.)

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

- A. “You don’t have ten bucks,” I fired back.
- B. “Anyway, Bobby guaranteed there was a trailer for the coming movie...”
- C. ...there’s no reason he would lie.
- D. He knows I’m the biggest Captain Universe fan and comic collector...

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.)

13. How are Josh and Hank’s actions at the movie theatre different? Why does each boy act this way?

Support your answer with details from the story.

Model Answer

Josh is nervous while waiting for Hank to watch the closing credits of the movie. This shows by the fact that he is jiggling his knee, picking at the gum under the armrest, and drumming on the back of the seat in front of him. This could be because he is a nervous person usually or that waiting makes him nervous.

Hank seems more emotional because he is fighting tears as he knows the end of the credits is coming and that he is about to be disappointed. Hank is also concerned that he has disappointed and made his dad angry (his dad is clenching his jaw, jerking his finger toward the exit, and snapping at Hank) for bringing him to a movie he didn’t like. Hank’s worry and dread show in the fact that he has a bad feeling in his stomach and that he can’t motivate himself to get up.

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 Josh’s actions at the movie theater, and gives an example to support the answer.	Your answer should explain Josh’s actions at the movie theater, and give an example to support the answer.
1	The answer explains Hank’s actions at the movie theater, and gives an example to support the answer.	Your answer should explain Hank’s actions at the movie theater, and give an example to support the answer.

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer explains Josh and Hank’s actions at the movie theater. Your answer includes details from the story to support your answers.

14. How are the themes and topics of “The Nightly Journey” and “Closing Credits” similar and how are they different?

Support your answers with details from both stories.

Model Answer

In both “The Nightly Journey” and “Closing Credits,” the characters deal with times when people take advantage of them. In “The Nightly Journey” the girls’ mother teases them about being frightened on the way to the outhouse. In “Closing Credits” Bobby plays a mean trick by telling Hank there will be a trailer for a movie about his favorite cartoon character. Hank is disappointed not only that there was no such movie trailer but also because Bobby is not the friend Hank thought he was.

The themes are similar because they both deal with people’s feelings: in “The Nightly Journey,” the girls are afraid and their mother realizes how they feel when she becomes afraid herself. In “Closing Credits,” Hank’s feelings are hurt by Bobby’s mean trick. And yet Hank feels better when Josh sticks with and comforts him in a way that doesn’t cause more embarrassment.

The themes of the stories are different because in “The Nightly Journey,” the girls get the chance to show their mother how being frightened feels. In “Closing Credits,” however, Hank does not get a chance to show Bobby how he feels. His only consolation comes when he finds out Josh was one of Bobby’s victims, too.

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 explains how the themes and topics of “The Nightly Journey” and “Closing Credits” are similar, and uses examples from the story to support the answer.	Your answer should explain how the themes and topics of “The Nightly Journey” and “Closing Credits” are similar, and use examples from the story to support the answer.
2	The answer explains how the themes and topics of “The Nightly Journey” and “Closing Credits” are different, and uses examples from the story to support the answer.	Your answer should explain how the themes and topics of “The Nightly Journey” and “Closing Credits” are different, and use examples from the story to support the answer.

Feedback for completely correct answer:

Your answer explains how the themes and topics of “The Nightly Journey” and “Closing Credits” are similar and how they are different. Your answer includes details from both stories to support your answers.

15. You have read stories in which people deal with the unknown or the unexpected, such as a prank. Write a personal account at least three paragraphs long about a time you had to deal with something unexpected. Be sure to describe the setting, tell about the characters, and summarize what happened. Use showing language that helps your readers imagine events in their minds. Use connecting words that help to make your writing clear and tell the order of events. Include a satisfying conclusion.

- (a) Write a personal account at least three paragraphs long about a time you had to deal with something unexpected.
- (b) Write from the first-person point of view.
- (c) Describe the setting, tell about the characters, and summarize what happened.
- (d) Use showing language that helps your readers to imagine events in their minds.
- (e) Use connecting words that help to make your writing clear and tell the order of events.
- (f) Include a satisfying conclusion.

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 personal narrative that tells about a time the student had to deal with something unexpected. The writing describes the setting, tells about the characters, and summarizes what happened. The writing uses showing language to help readers imagine events in their minds. The writing uses connecting words to make the writing clear and to tell the order of events.	The writing is a personal narrative that tells about a time the student had to deal with something unexpected. The writing mostly describes the setting, tells some about the characters, and mostly summarizes what happened. The writing uses some showing language to help readers imagine events in their minds. The writing uses some connecting words to make the writing clear and to tell the order of events.	The writing may not be a narrative. The writing may not tell about a time the student had to deal with something unexpected. The writing may not describe the setting, tell about the characters, or adequately summarize what happened. The writing may not use showing language to help readers imagine events in their minds. The writing may not use connecting words to make the writing clear or to tell the order of events.
Structure and Organization	The writing takes the form of a personal narrative and follows this form consistently. The writing is written consistently from the first-person point of view. The writing is at least three paragraphs long. The writing tells about events in the order in which they happened. The writing includes a satisfying conclusion.	The writing mostly takes the form of a personal narrative and mostly follows this form. The writing is written mostly from the first-person point of view. The writing is at least two paragraphs long. The writing mostly tells about events in the order in which they happened. The writing includes a mostly satisfying conclusion.	The writing may not take the form of a personal narrative or may not follow this form consistently. The writing may not be written from the first person point of view. The writing is less than two paragraphs long. The writing may not tell about events in the order in which they happened. The writing may not include a satisfying conclusion.
Language and Word Choice	The writing uses many examples of showing language to explain how things looked, sounded, smelled, felt, or tasted. The writing consistently uses connecting words between ideas and paragraphs.	The writing occasionally uses examples of showing language to explain how things looked, sounded, smelled, felt, or tasted. The writing mostly uses connecting words between ideas and paragraphs.	The writing may not use examples of showing language to explain how things looked, sounded, smelled, felt, or tasted. The writing may not use connecting words between ideas and paragraphs.
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.

