

# Grade 8 English Language Arts

## READING COMPREHENSION

### DIRECTIONS

This session contains two reading selections with fourteen multiple-choice questions and two open-response questions. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

*Paul Laurence Dunbar was an African American poet who wrote in the late 1800s and early 1900s. His poem "Sympathy" speaks of the feelings of a bird in a cage. Read the poem and answer the questions that follow.*

### SYMPATHY

- I know what the caged bird feels, alas!  
    When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;  
    When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,  
    And the river flows like a stream of glass;  
5      When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,<sup>1</sup>  
    And the faint perfume from its chalice<sup>2</sup> steals—  
I know what the caged bird feels!
- I know why the caged bird beats his wing  
    Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;  
10   For he must fly back to his perch and cling  
    When he fain<sup>3</sup> would be on the bough<sup>4</sup> a-swing;  
    And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars  
    And they pulse again with a keener sting—  
I know why he beats his wing!
- 15   I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,  
    When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—  
    When he beats his bars and he would be free;  
    It is not a carol of joy or glee,  
    But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,  
20   But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—  
I know why the caged bird sings!

—Paul Laurence Dunbar

---

<sup>1</sup> *opes* — opens

<sup>2</sup> *chalice* — a cup or goblet

<sup>3</sup> *fain* — gladly

<sup>4</sup> *bough* — branch

"Sympathy" by Paul Laurence Dunbar. In the public domain.

- 1 Which of the following words **best** describes the feeling created by the description in line 3?
- A. peaceful
  - B. surprised
  - C. impatient
  - D. suspenseful
- 2 In line 4, the phrase “like a stream of glass” suggests the water is
- A. cold.
  - B. deep.
  - C. dirty.
  - D. smooth.
- 3 In line 5, what do the “first bird” and the “first bud” **most likely** represent?
- A. the cage
  - B. the springtime
  - C. the bud’s beauty
  - D. the bird’s ancestor
- 4 How is the first stanza **most** different from the rest of the poem?
- A. The stanza suggests the bird is bored with his life.
  - B. The stanza describes how the bird looks, rather than how he acts.
  - C. The stanza suggests the bird is unwise for wanting his life to change.
  - D. The stanza describes what the bird likely desires, rather than what he experiences.
- 5 Which of the following words **best** describes the tone of the poem?
- A. fearful
  - B. apologetic
  - C. passionate
  - D. wondering
- 6 Which meaning of the word *faint* is used in line 6?
- A. exhausted
  - B. whispered
  - C. lacking courage
  - D. barely noticeable