

3rd Grade TCAP Writing Task

Student Directions

Today you will be taking the Grade 3 Writing Task. The task is made up of two texts and a prompt about those texts. You are to plan and write an essay about the texts according to the instructions provided. Your essay will be scored as a rough draft, but you should watch for careless errors.

There are some important things to remember as you complete the task:

- The time you have for reading both texts and answering the prompt will be 90 minutes.
- Read the prompt carefully and think about the best way to answer it.
- Type your essay using the computer at which you are sitting.
- Write only about the texts and prompt you are given.
- You may use the blank paper provided to you for pre-writing activities and notes, but only responses typed on the computer will be scored.

Topic

Penguins often live in very cold places. These places can affect their lives. This task will address Emperor penguins and little penguins and how they both live.

Texts

- **“The Emperors’ Challenge”** by Deborah Churchman
- **“Waiting for the Little Penguins”** by Vijayalakshmi Chary

**Please note that this task has been modified from the version that appears on the MIST platform and at http://tncore.org/sites/www/Uploads/ELA_Tasks/K_3/Grade3Practice2Penguins.pdf in order to fit in this training material. For the final version, please visit the link above.*

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The Emperors' Challenge

By Deborah Churchman

Text 1 Introduction

In "The Emperors' Challenge" by Deborah Churchman, the author discusses Emperor penguins and the challenges of penguin life.

Out of the Water

Emperor penguins can't fly, but they're astonishing swimmers and divers. They can dive deeper than any other kind of bird—down to 1,800 feet (550 m). And they can stay underwater for up to 22 minutes!

The birds spend their summers in the chilly Antarctic Ocean, diving for fish, krill, and squid. But as the days get shorter and the ice thickens, the birds leap out of the water. . . . and head inland. . . .

Egg-Sitting

At the penguin colony, males and females call, waddle, and bow to each other. Finally, most of them pair up. . . . A couple of months later, the female lays an egg. She holds it on her feet to keep it from touching the ice. (If she drops the egg, it will freeze in less than two minutes!)

Then she and her mate do a very difficult thing. They stand very close together, and the male uses his bill to move the egg from the female's feet to his feet. He scoots the egg next to his bare-skinned brood patch¹, and covers it with his long belly feathers.

By this time, none of the penguins has eaten for two months. Just laying her egg has used a lot of each female's energy, so she must return to the ocean to feed. Her mate stays—for two *more* months. He shuffles around through wind and storm with the egg on his feet, trying to keep it from freezing.

The Chick, At Last!

¹ brood patch: a flap of loose skin that keeps the eggs warm

Finally, the chick inside begins to peck its way out. Soon it's resting safely. About this time, its mother comes back—and has to find her family in the huge, noisy colony. She finds them by listening for her partner's call. She then meets her baby for the first time. The baby whistles, Mom opens her mouth, and—erp!—she brings up a big, fishy meal for her little one.

By this time, the male has lost up to a third of his weight. He transfers the baby to its mother's feet and waddles off on the long journey back to the ocean to feed.

Waiting for the Little Penguins

By Vijayalakshmi Chary

Text 2 Introduction

In “Waiting for the Little Penguins” by Vijayalakshmi Chary, the author describes the challenges of the daily journey of the smallest penguins in the world.

Bottled-nosed dolphins, green sea turtles, brightly colored fish, and the coral reef are all part of Australia, ocean life. Did you know that the little penguins² are too?

At the Phillip Island Nature Park near Melbourne, visitors bundle up in jackets, scarves, and mittens. They have come to see the little penguins. After walking along a high boardwalk, they huddle on the bleachers at Summerland Beach. They keep their eyes glued to the sea, and they wait.

Behind the waves, the little penguins call one another and group together. After dark, groups of royal blue and white, little penguins appear on the seashore. These groups are called rafts. Little penguins are safer when they are in rafts; in one raft there can be as few as three or as many as 300 penguins! Many rafts appear scattered along the beach. Within three hours, 26,000 little penguins come home from the sea!

Once they are on the beach, the little penguins trudge through the bumpy sand to their separate burrows on the sand dunes. This long, hard trek from the sea to their burrow is a dangerous one because predators are nearby. Dogs and foxes can smell them. White-breasted sea eagles and Pacific gulls can spot them. Darkness helps protect them because it is harder to see them.

The little penguins search for their burrows as the visitors walk back on the boardwalk. They waddle a few feet, stop, look, and plod along again. “Huk, huk!” The little penguins are calling one another. A penguin colony is a noisy one. Some little penguins are fighting over burrows. Some are calling their mates. . . .

Every morning before sunrise, the little penguins hurry across the sand in the opposite direction of the night before. This time they splash into the cool sea.

The little penguin is a quick swimmer and excellent diver. All day long, it hunts for small fish, squid, and crab larvae³. After it captures a prey, a few jerks of the penguin’s head

² little penguins: the smallest penguins in the world.

³ crab larvae: early form of crabs.

can swallow a fish up to 15 centimeters long—almost half its height! But it must take care in the sea too. It can become a nice meal for a hungry shark or a leopard seal.

After a long day at sea, the little penguins swim once again towards the seashore, calling one another. Just before sunset, many bundled visitors gather on the bleachers. They keep their eyes glued to the sea. They wait for the little penguins again.

Writing Prompt

You have now read two texts about penguins and their lives:

- “The Emperors’ Challenge” by Deborah Churchman
- “Waiting for the Little Penguins” by Vijayalakshmi Chary

Write an opinion essay about which group of penguins has a more difficult time living in its environment. Be sure to use facts and details from both texts to support your opinion. Follow the conventions of standard written English. Write your essay in the space provided.

Knowledge, Skills, and Habits

What knowledge, skills, and habits do students need to be successful on this 3rd grade task, given the demands of the standards?

Knowledge	Skills	Habits

Preparing for 3rd Grade

What do students need to be doing in 1st grade or 2nd grade so that they are prepared to be successful in 3rd grade? Use the standards to backwards map.

	Grade 2	Grade 1	Grade Prek-K
Informational Text			
Foundational Skills			
Writing			
Speaking and Listening			
Language			
