

APPENDIX C

NJ ASK English Language Arts Reading Sample and Sample Multiple-choice and Open-ended Item

INTRODUCTION: Read this informational article about Isaac Asimov, one of the greatest science fiction writers of all time.

The Bookworm Who Became a Science Fiction Writer

by Marc McCutcheon

A microscopic team of humans in a minuscule submarine cruises through the veins of a sick man's body. . . . A robot takes desperate measures to become human. . . . Citizens of an alien world panic as they witness their first nightfall in 1,000 years. . . .

These are the plots of just three of the wondrous stories either written or co-written by Isaac Asimov, one of the greatest science fiction authors of all time. Asimov, who started writing at the age of 11, wrote in nearly every category—history, science, language, religion, geography, chemistry, ecology, math, mystery, reference, juvenile, humor—but it is his science fiction works that he is most famous for. Chances are good that you or somebody in your family has read a short story or book by Asimov or seen a movie based on one.

Few authors top him in sheer production, as he wrote nearly 350 books. And his scientific essays and science fiction stories have inspired numbers of readers to become either scientists or science fiction writers themselves. So how did the young Isaac gain the ability and talent necessary to write so many books? What kind of childhood led him to imagine robots, space travel and life in the future?

Isaac was born in Russia in 1920, then was taken by his parents to America when he was three. He taught himself how to read at age four and began to write stories when he was 11. He graduated from high school at 15. Because his family was too poor to buy books, Isaac went to the local library. In his autobiography, he recalls himself at age nine:

I read omnivorously and without guidance. I would stumble on books about Greek myths and fell in love with that world. When I discovered . . . the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, I took them out of the library regularly. I enjoyed them and read and reread them, often beginning again as soon as I had finished, until I had almost memorized them . . . I read Dumas and Dickens and Louisa May Alcott and, indeed, almost the entire gamut of 19th-century fiction.

Isaac read some books as many as 26 times. As most bookworms do, he preferred reading to any other activity. Because of this and because his parents needed him to work



Isaac Asimov, as photographed in 1965

Incorrect use of ellipses. Use periods or semicolons.

This reads like publishing jargon.

Awkward passive voice: "he is most famous for his science fiction works."

The exclamation point doesn't make the sentence any more interesting.

Avoid using "fascinating question" one that is not answered in this piece, unfortunately.

"Microscopic" should modify "humans," not "team."

u spelling error

too vague

Be consistent - use last name on 2nd & subsequent references. Use of first name smacks of juvenilia.

Unlikely. Evidence?

Nor does it help here. Avoid!!!!

long hours in their candy store in New York, he spent little time with friends or playing like other kids. But it was in the candy store that he found the time to read. ~~You~~ might feel sorry for Isaac, but he didn't feel sorry for himself.

Although Isaac was a voracious reader, meaning no matter how many books he read it just wasn't enough, he didn't discover science fiction until he was 10. He stumbled upon the monthly magazines *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Stories* and from the first few pages, was hooked. *Astounding Stories* was the best science fiction magazine of its day, and some of America's most imaginative writers contributed stories to it. The tales of aliens, robots and time machines so enthralled Isaac that he would often retell them to groups of fellow junior high students on the sidewalk outside of school.

Isaac not only read and reread every issue of these magazines (luckily, his father stocked them in the candy shop so he could read them for free), he would also write to their editors and critique each story. Some of his letters were even published. As Isaac learned more about science fiction, he began to believe that he could write as well as some of the authors he was reading. Why not try?

Although Isaac had penned his first story at age 11, it wasn't until his mid-teens that he began to get serious. He then churned out a rapid succession of stories, which he submitted to the editors at *Astounding Stories* and *Amazing Stories*. His first dozen efforts were rejected, but persevered.¹ He worked tirelessly at becoming a better writer. At 18, he wrote a story called "Marooned Off Vesta." It earned him the breakthrough he was waiting for—it was published in *Amazing Stories* a few months later, and Isaac giddily collected his first writing check for \$64 (approximately \$820 in today's dollars). The rest, as they say, is history.

Asimov eventually sold nearly everything he wrote. This included such short stories with titles as "Ring Around the Sun," "The Martian Way," "I, Robot," and "Stowaway." Today his short stories have been collected in no fewer than 33 volumes. Among his best works is a story entitled "Nightfall," which he wrote when he was just 20. The members of the Science Fiction Writers of America voted it the greatest science fiction story ever written.

One key to Asimov's popularity was his simple writing style; another was his attention to accuracy. Unlike many writers of his day, his science fiction had real science in it. When he that the sun was 93 million miles away or that the sound of an explosion could not be heard in space, readers could be assured he was right.

While many authors describe their work as difficult—even agonizing—Asimov never did. He loved to write. He wrote as much as 18 hours a day, even when he was sick. He wrote on his birthday. He wrote on holidays. And it was this passion for his craft that made him so successful. At the peak of his career, he sold a piece every six days.

Isaac Asimov's career came full circle in 1976 when a new science fiction magazine was named after him. *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* is still being published today and is cultivating a whole new generation of award-winning authors. In 1987 he was given the ultimate recognition from his peers: the coveted Grand Master of Science Fiction award for his lifetime of achievements in the field. He died in 1992.

¹ persevered: continued in a course of action in spite of difficulties

1. Which sentence best states the central idea of the article?

- A. Asimov's short stories are still read today.
- B. Asimov had an exciting and adventurous life.
- C. Asimov's childhood helped him succeed as an author.
- D. Asimov preferred reading to working in his father's candy store.

I honestly have no idea if they want A or C. Unless it's B? No. C. Definitely. Or A?

9. Which quote best expresses the writer's opinion about why Asimov was successful as a writer?

- A. "... Isaac Asimov, one of the greatest science fiction authors of all time."
- B. "Isaac ... would also write to their editors and critique each story."
- C. "As Isaac learned more about science fiction, he began to believe that he could write as well as some of the authors he was reading."
- D. "He loved to write. He wrote as much as 18 hours a day, even when he was sick."

I'm guessing but I can't tell they want D. I'm totally getting behind C. Or even B.