

These draft test specifications and sample items and other materials are just that — drafts. As such, they will systematically evolve over time. These sample items are meant to illustrate the shifts in the redesigned SAT® and are not a full reflection of what will be tested. Actual items used on the exam are going through extensive reviews and pretesting to help ensure that they are clear and fair, and that they measure what is intended. The test specifications as well as the research foundation defining what is measured on the test will continue to be refined based on ongoing research.

Founding Documents and the Great Global Conversation

The Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section of the redesigned SAT® embodies the College Board’s firm commitment to the idea that all students should be asked routinely to engage with texts worthy of close attention and careful analysis — works that explore challenging ideas, offer important insights, reveal new discoveries, and build deep knowledge in numerous disciplines. While this commitment is apparent throughout the whole exam — which calls on students to read and analyze rich texts in the fields of U.S. and world literature, history/social studies, and science and on career-related topics — nowhere is it more evident than in the Reading Test’s inclusion of U.S. founding documents and texts from the Great Global Conversation.

Over the centuries, the founding documents — a body of works that includes the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Federalist Papers — have moved, influenced, and inspired countless individuals and groups at home and abroad. The vital issues central to these documents — freedom, justice, and human dignity among them — have also motivated numerous people in the United States and around the globe to take up the pen to engage in an ongoing dialogue on these and similar matters. Those participating in this Great Global Conversation, including Edmund Burke, Henry David Thoreau, Gandhi, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Martin Luther King Jr., are notable in part for the diversity of perspectives and life experiences they represent. Though their works inevitably reflect the particulars of the places and times in which they lived, these writers are united by their profound engagement with the issues and ideas that are at the heart of civic life. The texts they have produced — spanning many nations and years — have served to build on, broaden, and enrich the “conversation” that took place in the British American colonies and the early U.S. republic.

Some test forms will contain a selection from a U.S. founding document; others will have a selection from a text from the Great Global Conversation. Although the founding documents and Great Global Conversation texts are historical in nature, it is important to note that all of the information needed to answer the associated Reading Test questions is found in the passages themselves. The test does not assume

that students will have read these passages previously. Moreover, when useful (as in the example below), a historical note will be provided to contextualize the reading for students.

The following Reading passage, adapted from a speech delivered by Congresswoman Barbara Jordan of Texas in 1974, is emblematic of the kinds of texts that have contributed to the Great Global Conversation. Although her speech is an outgrowth of specific concerns and events of the day (in this case, the possible impeachment of U.S. president Richard M. Nixon), it is, at its core, an exploration of the enduring issues of the separation of powers in government and, more basically, how political leaders in a republic may be held accountable by and to the people whom they represent. Note how Jordan repeatedly makes explicit that she is working within the tradition established by the founding documents through her frequent citation of Alexander Hamilton's *Federalist* No. 65.

This passage is adapted from a speech delivered by Congresswoman Barbara Jordan of Texas on July 25, 1974, as a member of the Judiciary Committee of the United States House of Representatives. In the passage, Jordan discusses how and when a United States president may be impeached, or charged with serious offenses, while in office. Jordan’s speech was delivered in the context of impeachment hearings against then president Richard M. Nixon.

Today, I am an inquisitor. An hyperbole would not be fictional and would not overstate the solemnness that I feel right now. My faith in the Constitution is whole; it is complete; it is total. And I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction, of the Constitution.

“Who can so properly be the inquisitors for the nation as the representatives of the nation themselves?” “The subjects of its jurisdiction are those offenses which proceed from the misconduct of public men.”* And that’s what we’re talking about. In other words, [the jurisdiction comes] from the abuse or violation of some public trust.

It is wrong, I suggest, it is a misreading of the Constitution for any member here to assert that for a member to vote for an article of impeachment means that that member must be convinced that the President should be removed from office. The Constitution doesn’t say that. The powers relating to impeachment are an essential check in the hands of the body of the legislature against and upon the encroachments of the executive. The division between the two branches of the legislature, the House and the Senate, assigning to the one the right to accuse and to the other the right to judge—the framers of this Constitution were very astute. They did not make the accusers and the judges . . . the same person.

We know the nature of impeachment. We’ve been talking about it a while now. It is chiefly designed for the President and his high ministers to somehow be called into account. It is designed to “bridle” the executive if he engages in excesses. “It is designed as a method of national inquest into the conduct of public men.”* The framers confided in the Congress the power, if need be, to remove the President in order to strike a delicate balance

between a President swollen with power and grown tyrannical, and preservation of the independence of the executive.

The nature of impeachment: a narrowly channeled exception to the separation of powers maxim. The Federal Convention of 1787 said that. It limited impeachment to high crimes and misdemeanors, and discounted and opposed the term “maladministration.” “It is to be used only for great misdemeanors,” so it was said in the North Carolina ratification convention. And in the Virginia ratification convention: “We do not trust our liberty to a particular branch. We need one branch to check the other.”

... The North Carolina ratification convention: “No one need be afraid that officers who commit oppression will pass with immunity.” “Prosecutions of impeachments will seldom fail to agitate the passions of the whole community,” said Hamilton in the Federalist Papers, number 65. “We divide into parties more or less friendly or inimical to the accused.”* I do not mean political parties in that sense.

The drawing of political lines goes to the motivation behind impeachment; but impeachment must proceed within the confines of the constitutional term “high crime[s] and misdemeanors.” Of the impeachment process, it was Woodrow Wilson who said that “Nothing short of the grossest offenses against the plain law of the land will suffice to give them speed and effectiveness. Indignation so great as to overgrow party interest may secure a conviction; but nothing else can.”

Common sense would be revolted if we engaged upon this process for petty reasons. Congress has a lot to do: appropriations, tax reform, health insurance, campaign finance reform, housing, environmental protection, energy sufficiency, mass transportation. Pettiness cannot be allowed to stand in the face of such overwhelming problems. So today we’re not being petty. We’re trying to be big, because the task we have before us is a big one.

* Jordan quotes from Federalist No. 65, an essay by Alexander Hamilton, published in 1788, on the powers of the United States Senate, including the power to decide cases of impeachment against a president of the United States.

While the passages in any given form of the Reading Test cover a range of text complexity, from early high school to postsecondary entry, this particular example represents a passage at the upper end of complexity. Some aspects of the passage are less challenging than other parts, which is generally true of authentic texts.

The full set of questions that would accompany this passage (or any other passage on the Reading Test) would ask students to read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make reasonable, supportable inferences from the text. The following two samples offer some sense of how such questions might pull students back to the text and engage them in its ideas and language. Note how the answers to the questions are rooted in the passage content, not in prior knowledge about history in general or the passage’s topic more specifically.

The first sample question asks students to draw an evidence-based generalization about the speaker herself.

The stance Jordan takes in the passage is best described as that of

- A) an idealist setting forth principles.
- B) an advocate seeking a compromise position.
- C) an observer striving for neutrality.
- D) a scholar researching a historical controversy.

In this question, students must determine what perspective, or stance, Jordan takes in the passage. To answer the question, students need to have a sense of the whole passage and to look for clues to Jordan’s point of view within it. The best answer here is choice A because in numerous instances Jordan signals her idealism (e.g., “My faith in the Constitution is whole,” line 3) and sets forth principles (e.g., “The powers relating to impeachment are an essential check in the hands of the body of the legislature against and upon the encroachments of the executive,” lines 18–20). The other answer choices are all weaker than choice A. Choices B and C are ruled out when Jordan states that she is “not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction, of the Constitution” (lines 4–6), which suggests that she is not seeking compromise (choice B) or a mere observer (choice C). The fact that she describes herself as an “inquisitor” (line 1) also helps rule out choice C, as an inquisitor has an active role in the proceedings. Choice D is not the best answer because Jordan is identified as a congresswoman and an

“inquisitor,” not a scholar, and because she is primarily discussing events happening at the moment, not researching an unidentified historical controversy. While she refers to historical documents and individuals, her main emphasis is on the (then) present impeachment hearings.

The second sample question asks students to attend to word choice and its effect on meaning and tone.

The main rhetorical effect of the series of three phrases in lines 5-6 (“the diminution, the subversion, the destruction”) is to

- A) convey with increasing intensity the seriousness of the threat Jordan sees to the Constitution.
- B) clarify that Jordan believes the Constitution was first weakened, then sabotaged, then broken.
- C) indicate that Jordan thinks the Constitution is prone to failure in three distinct ways.
- D) propose a three-part agenda for rescuing the Constitution from the current crisis.

In this question, students must determine the primary effect of Jordan’s choice of words. To answer this question, students have to not only read and understand in context the series of phrases and vocabulary (“the diminution, the subversion, the destruction”) but also determine what rhetorical purpose the series serves in the passage. The best answer here is choice A, as each successive phrase suggests a more calamitous consequence, the series ending in the “destruction” of the Constitution. By contrast, the passage does not suggest that Jordan sees the series of phrases representing a sequence of three events (choice B), three different ways the Constitution might fail (choice C), or three steps to saving the Constitution (choice D).

As these two sample questions indicate, test-takers reading a portion of a U.S. founding document or a text from the Great Global Conversation on the redesigned SAT need to bring an array of skills to bear in order to both comprehend the information and ideas in the passage and understand how the author or speaker constructs his or her text. The passages themselves not only offer a rich context for assessing students’ reading achievement but, more importantly, also introduce students to profound, often eloquent answers to the pivotal question of how we the people ought to live together in civil society.