

Taking the TAKS

Nearly all of the TAKS tests consist of multiple-choice questions. Only on the high school English language arts exams must students write short answers to questions that test their reading comprehension. This is an example from the ninth-grade test in 2006. Students read a 4½-page story about the relationship between a boy named Matthew and his horse, Sundance. Matthew has been hurt by a horse, and Sundance has been mistreated by a human. The two must learn to overcome their fears and trust each other.

A question students must answer:

In "A Horse for Matthew," what do Matthew and Sundance have in common? Explain your answer and support it with evidence from the selection.

Students receive between 0 and 3 points for their answer. Examples of each score are shown below.

Score Point: 0 – Insufficient

Matthew and the horse are both lonely. They keep each other company.

This response is vague, and there is no evidence in the story that supports Matthew and Sundance being lonely. More specificity, with a clear connection to the text, would be needed for a higher score point.

Score Point: 1 – Partially Sufficient

Matthew got hurt by a horse and Sundance got hurt by people.

The student offers a reasonable idea. However, there is no textual evidence provided for support.

Score Point: 2 – Sufficient

In "A Horse for Matthew," Matthew and Sundance are both afraid of each other. "Sensing that he was an apprehensive of her as she was of him" (D).

The student offers a reasonable idea (Matthew and Sundance are both afraid of each other) that is supported by a quotation of relevant text.

Score Point: 3 – Exemplary

In "A Horse for Matthew," Matthew and Sundance have the same thing in common they have experienced both physical and mental pain. Matthew not only suffered from a broken leg, but also received emotional trauma from the accident. "They removed his cast last week... He won't even go near a horse now." Sundance has also been hurt in the past and is going through the same thing as Matthew. "...someone's mistreated that little paint. You can't get close to her." Together, a friendship with a common bond and understanding can overcome almost anything. "...they came at full gallop... wounded bay and wounded horse." A friendship bond such as Matthew's and Sundance's cannot be broken.

The student offers a thoughtful analysis of what Matthew and Sundance have in common (they have experienced both physical and mental pain). This analysis is strongly supported by relevant text in the form of direct quotations.