

Innovation Lab Network Performance Assessment Project
Quality Criteria for Performance Assessments
Rich Enough To Give Us All A Farm: The Homestead Act of 1862

Quality Criteria	Yes	Yes, with Slight Modifications	No	Rationale/Suggestions
1. Focus on Deeper Learning				
a. Does the task require the demonstration and/or application of complex skills (e.g., Critical Abilities, DOK Levels 3 and 4, 21 st century skills, Key Cognitive Strategies)?*	✓			This task asks students to read and analyze in detail two key primary source documents, and research and use a wide array of other sources as evidence in responding to the task prompt. Collaboration in pairs is required at several points in planning an essay and communicating ideas. The task requires the demonstration of complex skills such as DOK level 3.
b. Can students' responses to this task (what students are asked to produce) provide evidence of important college/career readiness skills and Critical Abilities (e.g., collaboration, research skills, evidence-based communication)?*	✓			Students are asked to produce a coherent and well-structured explanatory essay based on analysis of documents provided and additional open-ended research into other sources. This essay can demonstrate evidence-based writing skills at a high level of complexity (stating a controlling idea, citing and reasoning about evidence from several sources, using context and content knowledge and demonstrating an ability to organize a well-constructed essay, etc.)
c. Does the task address key concepts and skills in the discipline that are transferable to other contexts?*	✓			The task focuses on the Homestead Act of 1862. It provides key documents in the history of that act, including the text of the act itself. It also includes a set of links to other sources of information on the act and its overall impact on U.S. history. The Homestead Act and the materials provided on it here are relevant to many aspects of U.S. history and hence are transferable to those other content areas or topics. Moreover, the task guides students in a step-by-step process in the production of a carefully constructed essay that asks students to read closely, engage in research, refine a clear thesis, and develop explanations based on the evidence of various documents. This task entails the use of reading and writing skills that are transferable to many other contexts.
2. Alignment to Standards				
a. Does the task measure key skills and major claims emphasized by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and/or NGSS? *	✓			The task itself requires the use of several key skills emphasized by the Common Core – reading closely to make logical inferences from a text, locating and comparing sources, and writing and revising a carefully constructed essay in response to the task prompt. The task measures all the skills described in the CCSS standards listed in the task instructions.

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b. Can students' responses to this task (what students are asked to produce) be scored using CCSS/NGSS aligned rubrics? *	✓			Students are asked to produce an essay that closely compares two complex primary sources and relates findings about those sources to corroborating information from several other primary and secondary sources chosen by the student from a wide array of such sources. The student must formulate a controlling idea and use evidence from the sources to support that controlling idea in a carefully constructed essay. These writing skills correspond to those stated in several Common Core standards. Hence, student responses to the task can be assessed using the task's CCSS aligned rubric.
c. Are the scoring criteria--rubrics, point scoring systems, checklists (if provided)--aligned to key expectations of the CCSS/NGSS?	✓			The LDC Informational-Explanatory Student Work Rubric provided is aligned with the CCSS standards relevant to this task.
d. Is the rigor of the task appropriately matched to the grade-level standards being assessed?	✓			This task is appropriate for the grade 9-10 history or geography students it targets. The two central documents students are asked to analyze are challenging in terms of vocabulary and structure. However, the instructions and task scaffolding provide the guidance students need to be able to read, analyze, and use these sources effectively.
3. Student Choice and Agency				
a. Does the task allow for a variety of responses and/or solution pathways? *	✓			Students must formulate their essay's own controlling idea in response to the prompt, they must arrive at their own understanding of the two central sources and choose several others that they feel will supply the best evidence in support of their essay's central ideas. They must write and revise their essay as they see fit and they must respond in varying ways in several collaborative efforts with other students.
b. Does the task offer opportunities for student ownership and student choice (e.g., selecting a research question or topic; selecting sources; etc.)?	✓			Students must respond to the task prompt and the two central sources in a single way as directed by the instructions. However, they also then choose from a wide array of sources those they think best suit their essay's purposes. Their choices will shape substantially the way they formulate the essay's controlling idea and the kinds of evidence and explanations they include in it.
c. Does the task require student-initiated planning and management of information/data and ideas (e.g., determining strategies for solving a problem; designing an investigation; deciding how to present findings; etc.)?		✓		Students are given careful guidelines for constructing their essays and in particular the aspects of it that relate to the two central sources for the task. Beyond this, they will have to plan and manage a good deal of the rest of the information that will go into writing and revising their final essay.

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4. Relevance and Authenticity				
a. Is task content represented in a way that is appropriately authentic (i.e., not overly hypothetical), relevant (i.e., relatable), and/or meaningful to students and the discipline (e.g., topic connects to students' lives, task simulates authentic purpose and audience)? *	✓			The task content is based on the text of a complex federal law and the official forms a single frontier settler filled out in conformity with that law. Neither of these documents is at all hypothetical. The other materials the task links students to, both on the law itself and on the experiences of many Homestead Act settlers, should make it easy for students to relate in meaningful ways to the topic.
b. Is the task related to real world problems, contexts, and/or purposes?		✓		Since the topic deals with important aspects of the settlement of the American West, it is relevant to many issues that still connect to students' lives in significant ways today.
5. Suitable for Diverse Student Populations				
a. Is the task, at its core, free of bias that might disadvantage specific student populations and free of stereotypes in language, content, and design? *	✓			
b. Does the task include, or allow for the use of, a variety of stimuli?	✓			The task is based on two written documents and a writing task focused on them. However, the three web links for additional materials make available a rich assortment of written, pictorial, and graphic information (charts, maps, etc.), as well as videos, for students to choose from and use in researching and developing their essays.
c. Does the task provide instructional scaffolds to support student learning and skill development toward successful completion of the task?	✓			The task provides clear and specific instructions regarding a variety of mini-tasks. Several effective kinds of scaffolding are provided for some of these tasks.
d. Does the task include appropriate recommendations for accommodations and differentiation to provide access for diverse students?			✓	
6. Design of Student Task				
a. Is the overall task prompt clear (e.g., clear student directions, unambiguous graphics)? *		✓		The task prompt is adequate, but not entirely clear. It asks students to explain "how the Homestead Act allowed people like the Ingalls' family to become farm owners." This seems a bit vague. Moreover, other parts of the task instructions appear to want students to compare the Ingalls family's experience with that of other settlers, including those

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				who failed as well as those who succeeded. This focus on success and failure seems to suggest students should assess the overall impact or value of the Homestead Act. It is not easy to find such assessments in the links provided. The sites linked to are mainly very admiring of the Homestead Act, though some critical perspectives on it are to be found. Perhaps some additional guidance for students to help them find such items would be a good idea. One additional source with a brief, critical take on the Homestead Act can be found in Mark C. Schug and William C. Wood, <i>Economic Episodes in American History</i> . Morristown, NJ: Whol Publishing, 2011. (See Chapter 10: "The Homestead Act of 1862: Was Free Land Really Free?")
b. Is task information presented in an organized way?		✓		The task instructions are clear and thorough. One possible area to consider strengthening might be the "Gathering Information" mini-task described on page 9 of the instructions. Given the large amount of material on the web sites students are to investigate, 50 minutes may not be enough time to complete this mini-task. (This is also related to the point made about the task prompt in 6a above.)
7. Curriculum-Embedded				
a. Is the task feasible for most school/classroom environments (e.g., access to necessary resources)?	✓			
b. Does the task include opportunities for independent work as well as interaction/collaboration with peers?	✓			This task essentially asks students to write a well-researched and planned explanatory essay. This requires independent work. A good deal of collaboration in pairs and small groups is also provided for.

Task Materials	Yes	No	Comments
a. Is the task missing any referenced accompanying materials (resources, handouts, rubrics etc.)? If yes, please indicate which materials are missing.		✓	
b. Does this task contain topics/materials/texts that might be sensitive for some students? If yes, please explain.		✓	

Comments: Students are asked here to take on a challenging task. They do some independent research on sites that provide a wide range of materials on the Homestead Act. They must then make choices from among this material that will help them develop and support an essay focus and controlling idea of their own. At the same time, the task is delimited by basing it primarily on two documents. Good scaffolding is provided to guide students in analyzing and using these two sources. This grounds the task realistically. The additional sources ensure students will be able to gain a sense of historical context and use it to develop their essays in a broader, more meaningful way.

Criteria summarized in this document were derived from the following sources:

- *Quality Criteria for Performance Assessments*, SCALE, 2013
- *Criteria for High-Quality Assessment*, SCOPE, CRESST, LSRI, June 2013
- *Quality Performance Assessment: Harnessing the Power of Teacher and Student Learning*, Brown & Mevs, February 2012
- *ThinkReady Task Review Checklist*, 2013