

Innovation Lab Network Performance Assessment Project
Quality Criteria for Performance Assessments
The Johnstown Flood of 1889

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 book passages and study several written and visual primary and secondary sources closely. They must compare and contrast these sources, focusing on their explanations of the causes of a single historical event, the Johnstown flood. Students must argue in favor of their own view as to the causes of this catastrophe based on the reasoning and evidence in the sources they choose to use. The task therefore 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 argumentative essay based on their research among a wide array of sources made available to them. This essay can provide evidence of writing skills at a high level of complexity (stating a claim, citing and reasoning about evidence from several texts, using context and content knowledge and demonstrating an ability to organize a well-constructed essay.)
c. Does the task address key concepts and skills in the discipline that are transferable to other contexts?*		✓		The task focuses on a single catastrophic disaster, the Johnston Flood. In investigating the causes of this event, students may well contend with content-related concepts of importance more generally in U.S. history – environmental matters, resource management, industrial development, etc. However, the task instructions do not indicate at all what the broader concepts and issues are on which students are expected to focus and about which they are to construct an argument. This flaw could be corrected with some alterations and additions to the instructions. The task instructions are effective in guiding students to produce a carefully constructed essay that requires the use of reading and writing skills that are transferable to many other contexts - such as researching among a selection of sources, analyzing source claims against the evidence they provide, comparing varying points of view and assessing causation in historical events.
2. Alignment to Standards				
a. Does the task measure key skills and major	✓			The task itself requires the use of several key skills emphasized by the

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claims emphasized by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and/or NGSS? *				Common Core – reading closely to make logical inferences from a text, interpreting words and phrases in a text critically, evaluating reasoning and tone in a text, assessing causal factors described by a text, comparing points of view in contrasting texts, writing a carefully constructed argument to support a claim, etc.
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 a highly complex essay that makes an argument in favor of a clearly stated claim. The essay must use evidence based on a careful and critical reading of several sources. These writing skills correspond to those stated in several Common Core standards.
c. Are the scoring criteria--rubrics, point scoring systems, checklists (if provided)--aligned to key expectations of the CCSS/NGSS?	✓			The LDC Student Work Rubric - Argumentation 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 should be appropriate for the grade 6-8 history students it targets. Its prompt poses a clear and easily grasped question about a single historical event. It asks students to select from an array of sources a few to read critically, compare and use as evidence to support a claim in an argumentative essay. However, the task may be a bit too open-ended for such students in its lack of any support or guidance in selecting among the sources and seeing the broader significance of the task (see concerns in 1c above).
3. Student Choice and Agency				
a. Does the task allow for a variety of responses and/or solution pathways? *	✓			Students must formulate their own claim in response to the prompt, and they must analyze certain sources chosen from a wide array of such sources. Students will vary in what they choose to stress and what conclusions they draw from the sources they do examine.
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 a single research question, but they may choose from a wide array of sources those they think most useful to addressing the claim or claims they make in their essays.
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 plan and manage on their own only in the sense that they choose from the sources offered. Otherwise, the task prompt is set, a number of pre-set mini-tasks must be carried out by all students, the organization of the required essay is described in detail

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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 consists of vivid accounts and explanations of one catastrophic event in history. It is not hypothetical at all; it happened. It deals with tragic events in a community that students should be able to relate to and see the relevance of to their own lives.
b. Is the task related to real world problems, contexts, and/or purposes?		✓		The task deals with a kind of natural disaster (with man-made aspects as well) that can and does occur in the real world often enough to justify careful analysis to understand it better.
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 involves reading written texts and analyzing visual sources. Some videos are used to support some of the mini-tasks.
c. Does the task provide instructional scaffolds to support student learning and skill development toward successful completion of the task?	✓			The task instructions describe what students are to do and how the essay they are to write is to be organized. These are detailed and a good deal of helpful scaffolding is provided in the form of checklists and graphic organizers of various sorts.
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 does seem clear enough. It asks students to "argue the primary cause(s) of the flood." However, it is not completely clear why this task is described as an "argumentation" task as opposed to "explanatory." As noted in 1c above, the task instructions do not provide any sense of what alternative ideas about causation are to be found in the array of sources provided in the List of Primary Sources. There may well be such contrasting views for students to argue about in their essays. Yet without greater clarity on this, the task seems to lend itself more to an explanatory essay - that is, one that "explains the

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				primary cause(s) of the flood." Either the task could be redefined this way, or more direction could be offered on how to identify conflicting explanations over which to argue in the essays.
b. Is task information presented in an organized way?		✓		The task instructions are extremely well presented, clear and organized. Again, consistent with 1c and 6a above, it would help if just a bit more guidance were provided to help students focus on what the alternative causal factors are over which they are to argue.
7. Curriculum-Embedded				
a. Is the task feasible for most school/classroom environments (e.g., access to necessary resources)?	✓			As long as the classroom includes computer access for purposes of viewing the videos used and accessing the online materials referred to in the list of primary and secondary sources.
b. Does the task include opportunities for independent work as well as interaction/collaboration with peers?	✓			This task is essentially asking students to write an explanatory essay. This requires independent work. A good deal of interaction/collaboration in pairs and small groups is also called for.

Task Materials	Yes	No
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: This a challenging task, in that it asks young students to engage in fairly open-ended research - or at least research based on their own choices of materials from a wide array given to them. The topic is, however, confined to a single, dramatic event, and this makes it manageable. Some revision of materials may be needed to give students some greater guidance in selecting sources to use as well as to clarify whether the central task is realistically one of writing an argumentative essay or writing an explanatory essay. See points 1c, 6a and 6b above.

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