

Reading Work Sample Practice Assessment

Task S-1: Ex-Basketball Player (Literary)

Instructions:

Read the following poem carefully and **make notes in the margin** as you read. Your notes should include:

- Comments that show that you **understand** the selection. (A summary or statement of the main idea of important ideas may serve this purpose.)
- Questions you have that show what you are **wondering** about as you read.
- Notes that show what you can tell about **main ideas, details, character interactions and beliefs.**
- Observations about the **writer's strategies** (organization, figurative language, dialogue, word choice, point of view) and how the writer's choices affect the meaning.

Your **margin notes** are part of your score for this assessment.

Student _____

SSID _____

Teacher _____

Class Period _____

School _____

School District _____

Though John Updike is known as one of America's greatest novelists, he also published eight books of poetry. This poem, written in 1993, is an example of Updike's skill in portraying someone living in an American small town.

Ex-Basketball Player

by John Updike

Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot,
Bends with the trolley tracks, and stops, cut off
Before it has a chance to go two blocks,
At Colonel McComsky Plaza. Berth's Garage
Is on the corner facing west, and there,
Most days, you'll find Flick Webb, who helps Berth out.



Flick stands tall among the idiot pumps—
Five on a side, the old bubble-head style,
Their rubber elbows hanging loose and low.
One's nostrils are two S's, and his eyes
An E and O.¹ And one is squat, without
A head at all—more of a football type.
Once Flick played for the high-school team, the Wizards.
He was good: in fact, the best. In '46

¹ "Esso" was a common brand of gasoline in the 1940s and 1950s.

*Notes on my thoughts,
observations, reactions and questions:*

He bucketed three hundred ninety points,
A county record still. The ball loved Flick.
I saw him rack up thirty-eight or forty
In one home game. His hands were like wild birds.

He never learned a trade, he just sells gas,
Checks oil, and changes flats. Once in a while,
As a gag, he dribbles an inner tube,
But most of us remember anyway.
His hands are fine and nervous on the lug wrench.
It makes no difference to the lug wrench, though.

Off work, he hangs around Mae's Luncheonette.
Grease-gray and kind of coiled, he plays pinball,
Smokes those thin cigars, nurses lemon phosphates.²
Flick seldom says a word to Mae, just nods
Beyond her face toward bright applauding tiers
Of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads.³

*Notes on my thoughts,
observations, reactions and questions:*

² A lemon phosphate is a soda-like drink.

³ Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads are brand names of candy

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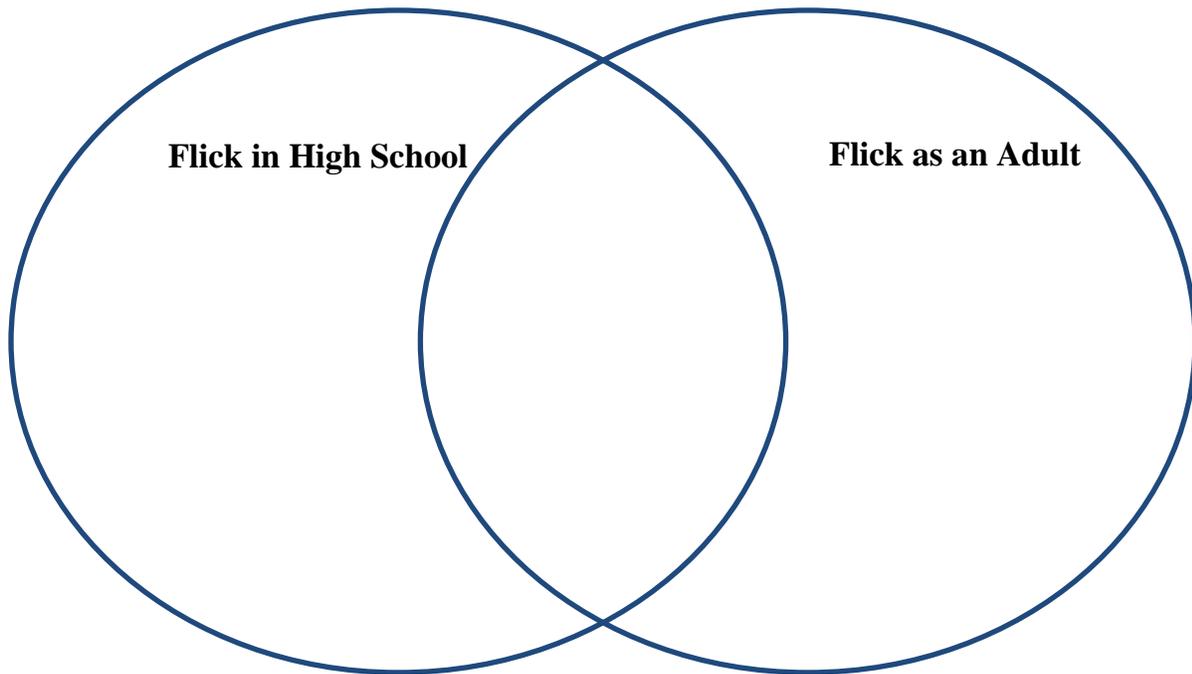
Demonstrate Understanding

1. If you were explaining the poem, *Ex-Basketball Player* to someone who had not read it, what would you say? Write a summary of this poem.

Demonstrate Understanding

2. Use the Venn diagram below to identify some of Flick’s qualities and interests when he was in high school and those he has as an adult. The center, overlapping section, should show aspects of his life that have remained the same.

Flick’s Qualities



Develop an Interpretation

3. What message (or messages) is John Updike hoping to convey in his poem? Comment on the specific lines in this poem that gave you clues that support your answer.

Develop an Interpretation

- 4. The poem starts by saying, “Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot,/Bends with the trolley tracks, and stops, cut off/ Before it has a chance to go two blocks.” How does this beginning add to the poem both in terms of literal meaning and helping convey the poem’s theme?

Develop an Interpretation

- 5. Based on information in *Ex-Basketball Player*, what do you think is most likely to happen in the next few years to Flick? Be sure to support your answer with information from the poem.

Analyze Text

- 6. Updike mentions Flick’s hands twice in this poem. What is the effect on the poem’s meaning / message?

Line from poem that refers to Flick’s hands	Effect of that line on the poem’s meaning/message

Analyze Text

- 7. What is Updike’s purpose in using personification in the second stanza? What is the effect on the poem’s meaning / message?

Analyze Text

- 8. *Ex-Basketball Player* is a poem that is bursting with images and metaphors. From the list below, choose at least two images that you feel are particularly effective and write a brief analysis of their impact on the poem. You may also choose to write about an image from the poem not on this list.

“Flick stands tall among the idiot pumps—“

“...The ball loved Flick.”

“As a gag, he dribbles an inner tube,”

“Grease-gray and kind of coiled, he plays pinball...”

“Flick seldom says a word to Mae, just nods/ Beyond her face toward bright applauding tiers...”

Image from poem	Analysis of effect / impact