

**New Paltz Central School District
English Language Arts
Grades 3-5**

Test Taking as a Genre

Lessons for Part I – Multiple Choice

Lesson 1 – Reading the Test Passages

“...as we gathered youngsters for whole-class demonstrations and instruction, we tried to teach the reader, not the reading.”

“...we began to focus less on correct answers and more on developing a repertoire of strategies students can use to find answers on standardized tests.”

- Teacher reads the passage and the questions aloud; students work with partners to answer the questions and share their thinking; whole-class share.
- With a partner, student reads the passage and the questions and collaboratively works with partner to answer questions; whole-class share.
- Individually, student reads the passage and answers the questions; whole-class share.
- Use the following questions to guide thinking:
 - Why did/didn't you choose this answer?
 - What was your thinking as you worked through this question?

Resources

- ELA tests from previous years
- Calkins, Lucy. 2010. *A Guide to the Reading Workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. (Pages 114-119)
- Montgomery, Kate, Lucy Calkins, Beverly Falk, and Donna Santman. 1998. *A Teacher's Guide to Standardized Reading Tests*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. (Pages 107-110)

Lesson 2 – Avoiding the Traps

“In recent years, teachers have approached tests as another genre to be read, explored, pondered, and questioned.”

“During the genre study of tests, students construct knowledge together about these unique sources of print.”

- Teach students to read the question and then predict what the answer might be instead of getting lured from the right answer by distractor options.
- White out the choices and have students, with partners, write the answers instead of choosing from the options.

- Using the same format, instead of writing the answers have students circle the part of the text that provides the answer to a particular question.
- For the above activities, students share their thinking with the whole class.
- Use the following questions to guide thinking:
 - Why did/didn't you choose *this* answer? And why/why not *this* one?
 - What was your thinking as you worked through this question?

Resources

- ELA tests from previous years
- Fuhrken, Charles. 2009. *What Every Elementary Teacher Needs to Know About Reading Tests*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse. (Pages 2-3)
- Calkins, Lucy. 2010. *A Guide to the Reading Workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. (Page 116)

Lesson 3 – The Language of Reading Tests

“Most tests are written in a unique form of English, sometimes called super-English or hyper-English because it is exceedingly proper.”

“...more often than not, the word in the question was just another way of saying a word they already knew.”

Based on data from the Data Action Team the following is a sample of questions with wording that students might find confusing.

- Why does the author **most likely** include Kirby in the story? (ELA Grade 4, 2010)
- What will Tanya and Brian **most likely** do the next time they need to name a pet? (ELA Grade 4, 2010)
- In the poem what is Abigail **most** afraid of? (ELA Grade 4, 2010)
- Which event from the poem could **not** really happen? (ELA Grade 4, 2010)
- What should you do **right after** filling the glass halfway with water? (ELA Grade 4, 2010)
- What type of information is **mainly** given in the section under the heading “Warning: Bird Listening”?
- With the whole class, teacher reads a question and thinks aloud about what the question is asking, and substitutes a synonym (or two) and re-reads the question with the new language.
- Working with a partner, students read through previous tests and compile a list of words or phrases that make the questions confusing for them; whole-class share.
- With the whole class, and using the list from above, teacher and students substitute synonyms or phrases and re-read the questions using the new language.

- Working with a partner, students read through previous tests and use new language to answer questions. Whole-class share.

Resources:

- ELA tests from previous years
- Montgomery, Kate, Lucy Calkins, Beverly Falk, and Donna Santman. 1998. *A Teacher's Guide to Standardized Reading Tests*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. (Page 102)

Lesson 4 – Mastering the Tricks

(Probably will be done in small group and only for those who need it)

“Students need to be privy to honest discussions about tests to minimize their confusion and anxiety about them. They need opportunities to feel prepared and competent not just as learners in classrooms but also as test takers. Confidence comes as a result of a deep awareness of test formats, test language, test tasks, and other test features that affect students’ ability to demonstrate what they know about reading.”

- Teach students to expect that when they are reading short passages the text will go by them quickly and to be extra-alert from the very start. In fictional stories, students will be looking for a challenge a main character faces and how he or she resolves it. Model what this looks and feels like.
- Teach students how to look back and to get them to think, will the answer to this be in the beginning of the passage, middle, or end?, then scan just that part.
- Teach students how to jump from one passage to a completely different one, erasing one passage from mind before reading the next one. Let students invent their own ways.
- Teach students a few survival strategies to deal with difficult text. Teach them how to keep going.
- Teach students how to monitor time by figuring out how many questions there are and how many minutes they have.
- Teach students how to check their work.

Resources:

- ELA tests from previous years
- Calkins, Lucy. 2010. *A Guide to the Reading Workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. (Pages 115-118)
- Fuhrken, Charles. 2009. *What Every Elementary Teacher Needs to Know About Reading Tests*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse. (Page 226)