Putting Together a Test Preparation Unit

Standardized testing is becoming a reality for classrooms across the world. While a cultivated program consisting of choice, shared, and guided reading will get your students performing leaps and bounds in reading ability, that doesn't necessarily mean they will rock the test. In fact, some of my best readers struggled with standardized tests. For that reason, I recommend teaching a couple week unit that immerses students in the genre of your state test in addition to spiraling standardized testing throughout the year during weekly assessments.

Your reading class shouldn't differ greatly from one that is leading your readers without limits.

For the **mini lesson**, model how good test takers take tests with a read-aloud/think-aloud. In addition,

- ❑ Model the same process (ie the Steps to RTP Success) each time
- ❑ Create test questions that are similar to the ones on your state test
- ❑ Keep things active during the read-aloud/think-aloud. As you do the think-aloud, ask kids to recall which step to RTP success you are doing and which one/s you are forgetting to do.
- ❑ Not all strategies work for all students. As you model the different strategies, ask kids to reflect which strategies work the best for them and which ones don't work.
- ❑ Ask students why they chose an answer when they got an answer wrong
- ❑ Collect data frequently, and design intervention groups based on question type. For instance, group students who struggle with main idea together.
- ❑ Build soft skills like stamina and grit. Demonstrate optimism and hope every single day.
- ❑ Spiral other question types throughout each day so students get multiple exposures as you lead up to the real deal.
- ❑ Make it kid-friendly. I shared ten fun strategies you can do to make it kid-friendly in _Reading Without Limits_.

Keep things active during **guided practice**. I share a list of my favorite guide practice activities on _Reading Without Limit's_ interactive website.

Build student stamina during **independent practice**. Work up to the length of time and passages they will need to be able to do for the real deal state test. However, do not treat it in the same way you build stamina for independent reading. It's more like a marathon. Marathon athletes do not run many marathons right before the big race. Incorporate a couple real deal simulations a couple weeks before the state test, but no more. Otherwise, you run the risk of burn out and sad kiddoes.

Throughout class, and especially during **shares**, build in as many opportunities to increase student self-efficacy through reflection.

Essential Mini Lessons to Teach Test Preparation

1. Follow the steps to RTP (Reading Test Prep) Success

   ❑ Read the questions first
   ❑ Circle all text features
   ❑ Lay the questions NEXT TO the passage
   ❑ Answer the questions as you go
   ❑ Re-read if you don't understand the passage
   ❑ Find the answer with the most proof
   ❑ Put a dot next to tricky questions

2. Go back to find the answer for each question in the passage instead of trying to remember the answer

3. Avoid crossing out the wrong answer choices in the multiple choice. You may be crossing out the right choice! Circle the one you think is most right and star the one you think might be right. If you have extra time, go back and consider the starred answer.

4. Go back to the text to find the answer with the most proof. Assign a different underline for each answer choice.

5. Reread text features like the title and subtitles when answering main idea and author's purpose questions

6. Read the questions first before you read the text, and go back and reread the questions as you read the passage

7. When answering "how did the character feel when…" questions, go back to the specific moment when the test asks about how the character felt. Otherwise, you may fall for a trap if you answer how the character felt during a different part of the passage.

8. Put a dot next to questions that are hard for you, and go back and answer them later.

9. If you are unsure, and if you have extra time, go back and reread the line, paragraph or excerpt

Also, you want to model how to answer specific question types. I share a list of different question types common in state tests in *Reading Without Limits*.

**Sample Think-Aloud for a Specific Test Question**

How Does a Character Feel? Lesson #1

> Aim: Good readers can identify how a character feels by going back to the moment where the character felt that way, and analyzing their emotions and reactions

- How does a character feel?
- How would you describe a character?

In order to answer this question you must go back to the text and find the part where the question is asking how the character feels!

For example: How did Casey's team feel at the end of the story?
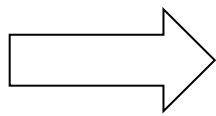
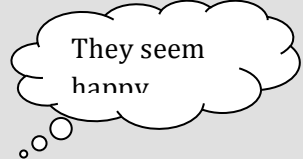Go to the END OF THE STORY and look for CASEY'S TEAM ☺

David looked at Casey and grinned. Then he swung at the ball and hit a home run. The ball sailed over the fence, and the Green Team won the big game.

"Great hit!" Casey yelled, as David rounded the bases.
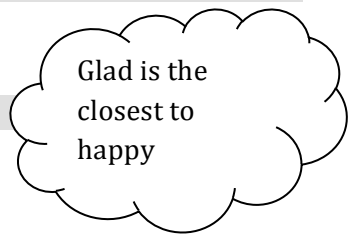
"Great cheerleader!" David told Casey.

"Great team!" all the players agreed.

glad

They seem happy

How did Casey's team feel at the end of the story?

a. glad
b. worried
c. angry
d. calm

Glad is the closest to happy

You Can Tell That...Lesson #2

Aim: Good test takers can find answers to questions that don't have right there proof. They look for proof that could be relevant to the different answer choices and choose the answer choice that has the most relevant proof.

Sometimes, the answer is NOT right there. If that's the case, then you MUST carefully reread the text. As you reread you must look for the answer with the most proof.

1. You can tell that Casey

a. has never played baseball before

b. is the best player on the team

c. is a good sport

d. is better at batting than at catching

Hmmm... I need to go back and reread to find out which answer has the most proof!
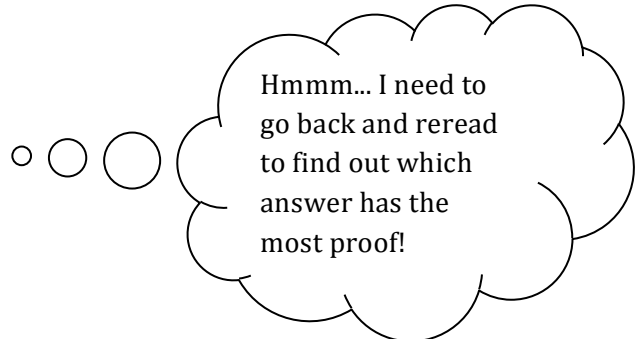
Casey

It was the first half of the ninth inning of the big game. The game was tied. Casey wanted his team, the Green Team, to win. He wanted to help them win.

The first two batters on the Red Team were out. The third batter hit the ball hard. It flew into left field where Casey was. "I've got to get it," Casey said as he jumped up and missed the ball. The Red Team batter made a home run, and Casey felt bad.

Soon it was the second half of the ninth inning. It was the Green Team's turn to bat. There was a runner on first base, and Casey was up to bat. "We need a hit now," Casey's friend David whispered.

Casey swung at the first ball and missed. He swung harder at the second ball and missed. He swung as hard as he could at the third ball and missed it too.

Casey felt awful. "I can't catch or hit or do anything right today," Casey muttered. He sat down at his friend David stepped up to the plate.

Casey stopped thinking about how awful he felt and yelled, "Horray for David. He's our man. If anybody can, David can."

David looked at Casey and grinned. Then he swung at the ball and hit a home run. The ball sailed over the fence, and the Green Team won the big game.

"Great hit!" Casey yelled, as David rounded the bases.

"Great cheerleader!" David told Casey.

"Great team!" all the players agreed.

1. You can tell that Casey is-

> a. has never played baseball before...
> *It doesn't say this game is his first game. He could have played for a while, there's no proof.*
> b. is the best player on the team
> *He didn't catch the ball and he didn't hit the ball. That doesn't seem to be good proof for the 'best' player.*
> c. a good sport
> *"Great cheerleader" "Horray for David"*
>
> d. is better at catching than batting
> *He didn't do well at either...*

Remember:

Go through each answer choice to make SURE you have the right answer