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Sincerely,  
Karen Haag

### One Question At a Time, Please

One of our literacy assistants decided to integrate test prep into her third-grade, small-group lesson. The students had read about advertisements in Guided Reading so she brought an ad for a restaurant for them to read. The flyer clearly said, "Closed Sundays and Mondays."

The test question asked, "What day would you visit the restaurant?" The answer choices were Sunday, Monday, or Thursday. One little boy picked Sunday. I asked him to explain. "I like going to restaurants on Sunday," he said. "It's a good day for our family to go."

Another student disagreed. "But the ad says the restaurant will be closed on Sundays." He pointed to where it said so in the advertisement.

The student replied, "That's okay. They'll probably open it for me since it's such a good day for our family to go."

Then I said, "So what you're saying is that this company paid hundreds of dollars to buy an ad and give it to people with information that just isn't true? They lied to you? Does that make sense that they would go to all that trouble to type 'Closed Sundays and Mondays' on their flyer if they were really open?"

"Besides that," I added, "Look at your choices: Sunday, Monday and Thursday. Which answer is correct given the information on the flyer?"

"Oh. I see what you mean," the boy said.

The discussion part of this lesson is the KEY ingredient. If I had not asked this child to explain his thinking - in a small group of five - he would not have learned how to change his thinking.

Comprehension floats on a sea of talk! Therefore, instead of bombarding students with a flood of passages and multiple-choice questions, write one question for each lesson you teach ALL YEAR. Pull answer choices and questions from your state standards.

- √ Write the question in a Word document and post it on the SmartBoard.
- √ Work in small groups.
- √ Give students time to answer the question.
- √ Ask students to compare their answers to their elbow buddies' answers.
- √ Students revise their answer if they want.
- √ Ask students to share their answers with the others and the thinking that led them to draw the conclusion they did.
- √ Then, talk through the answers like the example above. Find out where thinking has gone off track. Let others explain in kid language. Continue until all students understand.
- √ Use all questions at the end of the year for your review games.

Talking about one question will move students further along in their thinking, explaining abilities, and test-taking abilities than all the test preparation we're doing. I promise.

