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**Sincerely,
Karen Haag**

You Gotta Teach This Lesson! (Teacher Research and Test Study Preparation)

I just tried this lesson in a third-grade class and I think it worked amazingly well. I highly recommend you try this lesson, ask me to teach it, or read the lesson and teach your own version. What an eye-opener!

Materials

Pick a one-page reading selection. Run 2 copies for each student. (I included the passage I used.) Overhead, SmartBoard or Doc Cam copy for you.

1. Give students one selection to read. Tell them that they are going to read the passage as if it were an end of grade test and then they will answer some questions. Tell them you are doing research. You will be walking around and taking notes as you observe what they do while they take the test.
2. When they start, note the time. Record it.
3. Walk around and observe. Write names and notes:
 - Who prepares by writing on the paper? Who circles words, underlines or writes summaries in the margin?
 - Unusual strategies you notice like the child I saw fixing the test by capitalizing words and the child I saw fixing spelling. (By the way, the words they fixed were fine. They just thought they needed fixing.)
 - What time each person finished. (This fell into groups for me. There were 5 fast finishers; they finished reading one passage and answering 7 questions in 5 minutes. The next group finished in 7 minutes and the rest of the students finished in 10.)
 - Doodlers, etc.
4. Collect the papers.
5. Bring the students to the floor to share your discoveries. My conversation went something like this... (*Students' answers are in Italics.*)

How many of you skimmed the passage before you started reading it to see what it was about? (3 did.) Brain research shows that your comprehension will improve dramatically if you will take the time to see (1) whether you recognize the topic or genre. If you do, you should think a minute about what you know about the topic, genre or author to help you when you read. If you don't, you will have to read it *slower* and give it more attention than selections you know something about.

How many selections do you think you will need to read when you take THE test?

What's a selection?

99 pages. 15.

You will need to read 8 selections in 115 minutes. You will answer *50 reading questions*. Let's figure out the math: 5 children finished in 5 minutes. 8 selections x 5 minutes = 40 minutes. 115

minutes – 40 minutes = 75 minutes. What are you going to do for 75 minutes?

Read.

Nothing.

ME: “You’re right --- check it or nothing.”

One group finished in 10 minutes. $10 \times 8 = 80$. $115 - 80 = 35$ minutes. What will you do with 35 minutes?

Check

What does the math tell you?

We have plenty of time to go slowly.

The slower students probably did better. BINGO!

What will the state include in those 8 selections? (*They didn’t know.*) There will most likely be a poem, a recipe, advertisement, or some other kind of consumer selection. The other 5 selections will be either nonfiction or fiction.

Ask students why they did what you observed. For example:

The student who capitalized thought the name of the animal should be capitalized.

One student thought the story shouldn’t say, “A javelina...” but “Javelinas...”

Are there mistakes on an end of grade test? (NO) Are there mistakes on my tests? (Sometimes)

Are there mistakes on the quarterlies? (Yes) But, are there mistakes on end of grade test?

NO!!!! So if you think you see a mistake, what do you need to do?

Think again.

Look back over it to see if you read it right.

Try to figure out why you think there’s a mistake and think differently.

ME: YES! And please don’t fix the spelling or the capital letters.

Two children put words in the margin of their papers. I showed their papers. Ask the children to explain to the class what they wrote and how they knew what to write.

“I read each paragraph 2 times and wrote what the paragraph was about in the margin.”

“I figured out the important details and underlined them. I wrote on the side what the paragraph was about.”

ME: YES! That’s a good thing to do. Where did you learn that worked for you?

One student asked me, “What am I supposed to mark?” because I said, “Read and mark your paper” when I gave directions. What are you supposed to mark? I teach them to:

1. Circle words you think they will ask you about.
 2. Underline details you think they will ask you about.
 3. Write a word for each paragraph or stanza in the margin.
- Underline (details) --- Circle (words) ---- Summarize (main ideas)

Notice, reading a “test” is different than reading for Book Clubs. For Book Clubs, you prepare for discussion so you mark the words and details *you don’t understand*. When taking a test, mark *what you think will be in the questions* so you will be ready to find the answer quickly.

How many vocabulary words will be tested for each passage?

Five students thought 4 words.

Other answers were 8, 4, and one child thought 1 word.

You will be asked to define about 1, maybe 2 words, per passage. The words will most likely be bolded, *italicized*, and/or defined in context AND they will be words you probably don't know without reading the passage. But, here's the good news. *If you can find the word and read the words around it (the context) you should be able to figure it out.* NO ONE should miss the vocabulary because *the definition will be in the text.* This is not a test of what you know. It is a test of whether you can use context clues.

Example: These animals are *nocturnal*. They are awake at night and sleep in the day. This word will probably be tested because it is in Italics and the definition is in the passage.

6. Score the papers, but don't count them.

Day Two:

1. Give students back the scored copy of their mini-test. Ask what surprises them. Go over each and every question and ask, "What tripped you up? What didn't you get?" Give definitions for words they ask about.

2. Explain: 1/3 of your test will be literal; that is, the answer will be in the test. Give an example: Where do the javelinas live? *In North and South America.*

Read the sentence that tells you that. "*Javelinas live in North and South America.*"

3. Explain: 2/3 of your questions will be inferential. In other words, the answer will not be in the text *directly.*

Example: Which statement is an opinion? (A) They're teeth look nasty. (B) They have sharp teeth. (C) They live in North and South America. (D) They grow to about 20 inches tall.

The answer will not be written in the text but the references will still be there.

You will have to know what the word *opinion* means. An *opinion* is the answer most people would agree with. Let's ask the class. (D) Do javelinas grow to be 20 inches tall? (Yes) (C) Do they live in North and South America? (Yes) (B) Do they have sharp teeth? (Yes. They have to tear pear cactus apart.) (A) Do their teeth look nasty? In our class, everyone agreed to B, C, and D. But, A was a toss-up because some people thought javelina teeth were cute. So the answer would be A.

4. Another thing you need to know... Tests use *formal* English. We talk in *informal* English. In other words, I say, "I'm gonna." But the test would say, "I'm going to."

The test says, "What is the best summary of the first paragraph?" We would say, "What's the main idea of the first paragraph?" Easier, right?

The test says, "What detail supports this conclusion: Javelinas are crazy looking.? We would say, "How do the javelinas look crazy?"

The test says, “What detail supports the main idea, Javelinas act like pigs in some ways,”? We would say, “How is a javelina like a pig?”

5. Give the each student a new copy of the selection and questions.
6. Show them how you would mark the passage so they can see you work: SmartBoard, Doc Cam or overhead. Guided Practice: ask students to circle, underline and summarize like you do. Independent Practice: Ask everyone to mark the last paragraph independently. See how students marked the passage the same. See how their markings are different. Everybody will be a bit different but you should be able to infer what words will be tested and what facts are important. Their summaries should be basically the same for each paragraph.
7. Give the students an opportunity to answer the questions a second time.
8. Discuss: How was the experience different? How did students “read better” the second time?
9. Ask, what did you learn? Here’s what I hope:
 - Scan before you read to set your purpose and pace.
 - Take your time. You have plenty of time. It’s not a race. 115 minutes, 8 passages, 50 questions.
 - Mark you paper. Underline (details) --- Circle (words) ---- Summarize (main ideas)
 - Underline whole sentences rarely. Just underline words or phrases so the words stand out. If you underline everything, it’s like underlining nothing.
 - Mark your paper differently than you would if you were preparing to go to reading group. Mark what you think you will be asked about so you can find it quickly!
 - The tests will be written in formal English that you will have to decipher sometimes.
 - Questions are in formal English, too. Figure out what the question wants you to find.
 - 1/3 of the questions will be literal, 2/3 will require thinking. The references are there but you have to figure them out like a puzzle or game.
 - Tests CANNOT be wrong. Don’t fix the test. These tests are field-tested!

Answers to selection on next page: 1-A, 2 – D, 3 – B, 4 – A, 5 – A, 6 – B, 7 – C, 8 - D

Name _____ Date _____

Javelinas are interesting but little-known animals. Another name for Javelina is peccary. The peccaries look some thing like hogs, but not exactly.

Javelinas are cousins to pigs. They are hairy animals. Javelinas have light hair around their necks and all over their bodies. Javelinas are 20 inches tall with their rounded backs. Javelinas have sharp teeth that look nasty. They are crazy looking,

Javelinas dig for their food. A javelina has to get down on his knees to dig. Then he can use his sharp teeth to bite prickly pear cactus. Javelinas eat roots, also.

Javelinas live in different places than pigs. Javelinas live in mountains and rain forests but only in wild areas. They can be found in North and South America.

Circle the letter of the *best* answer to each question:

1. What is the *best* summary of the second paragraph?
 - A. Javelinas --- look different than pigs.
 - B. Javelinas – kneel for food
 - C. Javelinas --- live lots of places.
 - D. Javelinas --- are peccaries.
2. This selection would be classified as
 - A. biography
 - B. realistic fiction
 - C. poetry
 - D. nonfiction
3. Which statement is based on *opinion* (or bias), not fact?
 - A. Peccaries can be found in North and South America.
 - B. Javelinas care crazy looking.
 - C. Javelinas teeth are sharp.
 - D. Javelinas have hair around their necks.
4. The word *peccary* means...
 - A. a wild pig
 - B. root eater
 - C. short animal
 - D. cousin
5. What is the purpose of writing this book?
 - A. To inform readers
 - B. To be entertaining
 - C. To describe javelinas
 - D. To give directions
6. You might find this story in a book
 - A. of big animals
 - B. of little-known animals
 - C. of animals in North America
 - D. of untrue animals
7. What detail supports the main idea, "Javelinas act like pigs in some ways."
 - A. Javelinas live only in wild areas.
 - B. Javelinas grow to be about 20 inches tall.
 - C. They squeal.
 - D. They have a collar of hair around their necks.
8. What detail supports this conclusion: "Javelinas are crazy looking."
 - A. Javelinas are active at night.
 - B. Javelinas squeal.
 - C. Some javelinas live in Mexico.
 - D. Javelinas have big round heads.