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Preface

Winners have simply formed the habit of doing things losers don't like to do.

—Albert Gray, Official of
the Prudential Insurance Company of America

In this age of high-stakes testing, teachers feel pressured to spend more and more valuable time preparing students to take tests and less and less time preparing students for life beyond school and tests. The problem is kids don't really care about tests! Today's students want to be inspired, challenged—they want to see a connection between what they are learning and their lives. When we focus on rote memorization of information over meaningful learning, more and more students do not see school as a place where they are learning information relevant to their lives. And we are losing them. According to Klem and Connell (2004), “By high school, as many as 40–60% of all students—urban, suburban and rural, are chronically disengaged from school” (p. 263). Clearly, teaching to a test or focusing a majority of teaching time on test taking is not working for students (or for teachers for that matter). But tests do have their place in the world of education. So how do we strike a balance between preparing students to be effective test takers with preparing them for the world of the 21st century?

We decided to write this book to help teachers find that balance. In our many years as educators, we've discovered that the methods teachers apply to test preparation make all the difference. So we designed this book to help teachers prepare students for tests *and* for life using methods that are engaging and meaningful for students in Grades 3 through 8. The goals of the book are to (1) inspire students by helping them see themselves as competent learners and confident test takers, (2) show teachers and students the important life skills that are inherent in learning to take tests, and (3) create an efficient three-week unit of study on test taking that allows teachers and students to deeply learn the skills and strategies

Coaching Test Thinkers

If nothing else, children should leave school with a sense that if they act, and act strategically, they can accomplish their goals.

—Peter Johnston (2004, p. 29)

GAME STRATEGY FOR TEACHERS

Understand That . . .

- When students see learning as relevant and meaningful to their lives, they are more likely to transfer the skills to other areas.
- Learners can develop the sense and skills needed to be effective learners and test takers when teachers teach metacognitively and teach for transfer.
- The skills learned in test taking can be transferred to other settings.

Know

- Transfer
- Metacognition
- Scaffold
- Explicit instruction
- Think-alouds

Able to Do

- Explicitly teach strategies
- Talk metacognitively about thinking as students engage with tests
- Show how a strategy transfers from this application to a new application

THE HEAD START

As early as late July, chain stores and office suppliers begin stacking their shelves with school supplies. Notebooks sell for 79¢ and pocket folders for 10¢. Crowds of wise shoppers stock up, but most of these shoppers are teachers buying school supplies for their own students. Some participate in fan-out calling. If anyone sees a great sale, the calling chain goes into action. They want to be prepared. They know the value of a head start because, by October, it is too late. Those same notebooks will cost \$2.99, and pocket folders will cost 79¢.

Likewise, every teacher wants to get a head start on test preparation. The dates for the state-mandated tests or districtwide achievement tests are on school calendars along with teacher conferences and holiday breaks. Every building or district has its own plan for test preparation. Getting a focused and effective head start may be the most important part of that plan.

Look at the challenges facing one teacher and 28 students. It is the end of the first week of school. Shannon, a third-grade teacher, has already created a great classroom community, partially assessed the reading, writing, and math skills of each of her students, established her reading and writing routines, and now she has to prepare her students for the state tests, which are given in October. To complicate matters, by state mandate, Shannon has only the first 14 days of school to show students the test or talk about how to take it. By law, she cannot mention the test or have test-related artifacts on her classroom walls for the 10 days prior to the test. Now pause and imagine 28 third graders who are not quite ready to give up sunshine and grassy days of play. In addition, imagine the range of reading abilities, attention spans, and emotional temperaments in that classroom. How can she develop confident and competent learners and, eventually, test takers? How can she pull out a state test and tell her squirming youngsters that now it is time to learn how to take a test?

What Shannon chooses to do is focus her test preparation on a few effective test-taking strategies and explicitly teach them so her students can use the strategies with increasing confidence, competence, and independence. She will also teach across the year knowing that her third graders will take the same state test next October in fourth grade. Teaching for transfer and independence are at the top of Shannon's planning list. Her plan is part of a grade-level plan that was designed by her building and is supported by her district.

If you are reading this book, you, like Shannon, are facing a state-mandated, high-stakes test at some point in your academic year. You are looking for solutions to the challenges you face as you prepare your

lems; and deliberate monitoring during practice develops evaluation of current understanding in order to develop flexible and adaptive use (p. 236).

Think about your own reading. As effective readers, you transfer knowledge every time you pick up a text. You integrate a complex series of skills and strategies to engage with the text. For example, you probably

Students transfer knowledge of

Procedures to manage a task effectively and efficiently

Skills to decode and comprehend a text or use mathematical concepts and formulas

Strategies for questioning, clarifying, summarizing, elaborating, identifying, or monitoring

Processes that enable generating, revising, or problem solving

scan the text and identify the genre. If it is a science textbook, you know that textbook is harder to read because it is written in a formal style and contains difficult and technical vocabulary. You know to slow down and reread this kind of text. You know that the author will put this vocabulary in boldface and the definition of these boldfaced words will be in the paragraph. You also know textbooks have headings and subheadings that name the focus of the information. You rely on these aids because you know there will be questions at the end of the chapter, and you have learned that the boldface and headings will help you skim for the answers to these questions. Plus you know that important

information is in the graphs, tables, maps, and illustrations. You are a successful textbook reader because you transfer this knowledge and use it to read your social studies, math, or English textbook. Unfortunately, struggling readers do not use and transfer skills like this unless a teaching coach has explicitly taught them to do so.

Similarly, if students are to become successful test takers, they will need to transfer knowledge learned across a school year or accumulated over several years of school to a test setting. They may be asked to read and comprehend a passage and then answer multiple-choice questions. As a result, they must know how to use a series of cognitive skills and strategies that require conscious thinking and decision making as well as the procedural knowledge of reading the questions, matching the question with the blank on the answer sheet, and filling in blanks without smudging the marks.

The day of the test, your students will face unfamiliar reading, but if you have taught them well, the format of the test will be familiar, and they will transfer the skills and strategies taught to this new setting. They will know what is expected of them.

Therefore, teaching students to approach test taking with a level of game sense makes a difference. What is game sense? It is the ability to predict an outcome and develop or adapt strategies to determine a goal, a

<p>Huddle: Assess and reflect</p>	<p>(Have students share their experiences with the class. Do they all agree on what kind of person the main character is? Do they agree on what the main character wants? Have the characters changed?)</p>
<p>Review game strategy: Link</p>	<p>Remember as you read, watch the characters carefully. Questions will be asked about them and you may use their actions, motivations, or words to answer them.</p>
<p>Closing the session</p>	<p>(In their game plan books, have students record notes about this strategy in their own words. If you are charting the strategies, add: "Pay close attention to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what the characters want • what the characters do • whether the characters change" to the "Test-Reading Game Strategies" chart.) <p>Students, be sure to treat your game plan book with care. It holds valuable information. You do not want to lose it.</p>

Life Skills Connection

Readers know how stories go. They know the characters drive the plot. When reading a novel, they connect with the characters and watch them as the story unfolds. It's like when you go to see a movie, you expect it to have characters that you connect to. If the characters are not appealing, you probably won't like the movie.

What other real-life connections can you suggest to help your students see the relevance of this game strategy?

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Test-Reading Game Strategies

- Keep your interactive voice loud and clear.
- Reread to notice important details and clear up confusion.
- Notice the text structure of expository text by watching the word cues; they will help you understand the text and know what is important.
- Study graphics carefully to see how the information presented is related.
- When reading narrative text, pay attention to the characters, setting, plot (problem and solution), and theme of the story.
- Pay close attention to
 1. what the characters want
 2. what the characters do
 3. whether the characters change