

First Grade Takes a Test

Overview:

The presenter reads aloud a short and poignant picture book, *First Grade Takes a Test* by Miriam Cohen, depicting the reaction of a class of first graders to their first experience with a standardized test. “George looked at the test. It said: Rabbits eat: 1) lettuce, 2) dog food, 3) sandwiches. He raised his hand. “Rabbits have to eat carrots, or their teeth will get too long and stick into them,” he said. The teacher nodded and smiled, but she put a finger to her lips. George carefully drew in a carrot so the test people would know.” Participants engage in a discussion about the limits of many standardized tests and the negative effects that testing can have on some children.

Use:

Can serve as a good springboard to a discussion of standardized testing, understanding its limits and unintended effects, and helping children do their best. In situations where reading the whole book aloud might not be appropriate, the presenter can prompt the discussion with an overhead transparency of the page about George and the Rabbit Question.

Especially appropriate for use with parents of elementary students.

Key Concepts Addressed from Public Understanding Framework:

Are Tests Accurate?
Standardized Testing

Time Frame: 15-30 minutes

Reading the Book Aloud, *First Grade Takes a Test* (5-10 minutes)
Discussing Issues of Standardized Testing (10-20 minutes)

What You Need:

For the presenter:

- o a copy of *First Grade Takes a Test*, Miriam Cohen. 1980. Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers.
- o 1 overhead transparency of “George and the Rabbit Question” ([master](#))
- o overhead projector
- o extension cord (optional)

For each participant:

- o 1 take-home handout: “Test Taking” (masters on page xx–xx)

Getting Ready:

Before the Day of the Workshop:

1. **Duplicate handouts.** Duplicate one copy for each participant of the take-home handout: “Test Taking” (masters)
2. **Decide whether to read the whole book aloud or to show an excerpt.** If the context is appropriate, consider reading *First Grade Takes a Test* aloud. It doesn’t take long and prompts discussion of several different issues that transcend the first grade setting of the story. Alternatively, the single-page excerpt we have titled “George and the Rabbit Question” can be used on the overhead projector.
3. **Make overhead transparency.** Make an overhead transparency of “George and the Rabbit Question.” (master)

Discussing Issues of Standardized Testing

1. **Read the Book Aloud.** Tell the group that you’d like to take just a few minutes to read aloud a book entitled, *First Grade Takes a Test*.
2. **When Questions are Limited.** Put the transparency of “George and the Rabbit Question” on the overhead. Invite discussion about the situation where a correct response isn’t counted as correct. After some discussion has occurred, point out (or summarize if it’s already been said) that all tests are fallible to some degree, so judgments or classifications based on them must be done with care.
3. **Unintended Effects of Testing.** Invite discussion about the effect standardized testing can have on individuals and on the classroom environment.
4. **How Parents Can Help.** Ask participants to share ways they have supported their own children through standardized testing. The range of responses might include everything from providing their children with test preparation exercises to choosing not to have their children participate in standardized testing. Do your best to draw out people’s reasoning without passing judgment.
5. **Distribute Take-Home Handout.** Distribute the Test Taking handout as an aid for those parents who would like ideas for how to support their children in the standardized testing process.
6. **Conclusion.** Conclude by reiterating that even the best tests are fallible to some degree, which is a major reason why an important decision about a student’s level of learning should not be based on a single test result.

George and the Rabbit Question

“George looked at the test. It said:

Rabbits eat:

- 1) lettuce,
- 2) dog food,
- 3) sandwiches.

He raised his hand. “Rabbits have to eat carrots, or their teeth will get too long and stick into them,” he said. The teacher nodded and smiled, but she put a finger to her lips. George carefully drew in a carrot so the test people would know.”

TEST-TAKING

Test-taking is a skill, one that can be learned just as well as the academic subjects that tests measure. Following are some good tips for helping you and your children develop this skill and some excellent resources on the topic. Not every approach mentioned below is appropriate for every testing situation and every age child, but you and your child will benefit from an overall knowledge of good test-taking. Go over these with your children and work together to adapt these hints to your children's individual learning styles and their situation.

Studying for the Test

- **Studying should begin soon after the school year starts.** Keep notes organized for review and keep up with homework.
- **Listen for hints from the teacher about what will be on the test.** Ask him for hints about where to concentrate your efforts.
- **Determine the most important information in your study materials and learn that first.**
- **Begin your intensive studying early in the afternoon or evening before the day of the test.**
- **Develop a practice test either alone or with a study mate.** You may want to write a list of questions that may appear on your test before you begin intensive studying, so the list can guide you through your studying. Or you might ask a friend to give you a practice test near the end of your studying in order to catch any final items you may have overlooked.
- **Use positive self-talk.** Research shows that students who study and work on their self-confidence perform better than those who study only. For example, thoughts such as "I am well prepared and will do fine on this test" can help maintain a calm and clear mind.
- **Gather all test-taking materials the night before.** Having to borrow a pencil right before the test can break your concentration and get you off to a bad start.
- **Don't stay up too late and eat a good breakfast.** On the morning of the test, you will perform better with a rested mind and an energized body.

Taking the Test

Phase 1: Review the Test

- **First and foremost, read the instructions very carefully and follow the directions exactly.** Missing something here can cost you dramatically. For example, your instructions might ask you to answer one of the following two essay questions; if you missed those instructions, you would waste half your test-taking time writing an unnecessary essay.

- **Quickly read through the entire test, noting which questions are most difficult, which count the most, and which you don't understand.**
- **Ask questions about anything you don't understand.** Shy children may need to practice how to ask for clarification.
- **Budget your time, allowing more time for essay questions.** ("I'll spend 10 minutes on the true/false section, 20 minutes on the multiple choice, and 30 minutes on the essay.")
- **Take a deep breath.** It will help you relax and think more clearly.

Phase 2: Take the Test

- **Answer the easiest questions first.** Not only is this good time management, but it will also build confidence.
- **Go back to the more difficult questions, but don't spend too much time on any one question until you have completed all of the others.**
- **Write clearly.**
- **Pay attention to clues and key words in each question.** For example, some choices in multiple choice questions may be eliminated because they would make the completed sentence grammatically incorrect.
- **Put something down for every question even if you don't know the answer.** You may know more than you think you know. Note: Children may be instructed while taking standardized tests that incorrect answers will cost them more deductions than answers that they have left blank. Make sure you know the exact instructions for each test.

Phase 3: Review

- **Review every item carefully before turning in your test.** You may catch a careless error or have a last-minute insight.
- **Use all of the time allowed.** The longer you review your answer, the more chances you have to discover mistakes.

Recommended Resources

Gilbert, Sara, *How to Take Tests*, William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1983.

Gruber, Gary, *Dr. Gruber's Essential Guide to Test Taking for Kids*, William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1986.

Modified and adapted with permission from: *Helping Your Child Succeed in School: A Guide for Parents of 4 to 14 Year Olds*, by Popkin, Youngs, and Healy, Active Parenting Publishers, Atlanta, Georgia, 1995. Refer to this excellent resource for more in-depth information.