

TAKS- Fifth Grade Reading

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills
Fifth Grade Reading- Responses to Challenges
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The TAKS test can be a blessing or a nightmare for Texas educators. Students who are in the 5th grade are required to pass the reading section with a 2100 score. (www.tea.state.tx.us/ See Student Assessment Division.) Students are given three opportunities to pass- in February, in April and then finally one in June. If a student still does not pass in the June assessment then a committee will determine whether to place that student in the 6th grade or retain him. (www.tea.state.tx.us/ See Interactive Flowcharts for Students Taking TAKS). Teachers can view this as having high expectations for students or view this as unnecessary stress to students and teachers.

I've been a teacher for twenty years, and before the TAKS we had the TAAS and before that, we had TEAMS. I've never allowed my love for teaching to be interfered by the state test. I always felt teaching was fun, that was before kids had to pass the state test in order to proceed to the next grade level. I thought that I was limited to teaching the test and practice taking the test. I was determined to find a way to make learning fun, and at the same time prepare my students for the TAKS test. In this paper, my goal is to share with teachers the programs, training, and resources I have used and that have been beneficial in preparing my 5th graders for the TAKS Reading test.

The TAKS test assesses four objectives. These four objectives incorporate the curriculum or TEKS/SE (Texas Essential Knowledge of Skills/Student Expectation (See Appendix A) The TAKS test contains a total of 42 questions of those questions, 31% or 13 questions are from Objective 1 (basic understanding); 19% or 8 questions from Objective 2 (literary elements); 19% or 8 questions from Objective 3 (Analysis using reading strategies and 31% or 13 questions from Objective 4 (analysis using critical-

thinking skills (TEA-Blueprint-Curriculum, Assessment, and Technology September 2002)

In Objective 1, prefixes and suffixes are difficult for students to understand or remember, especially ESL students. Vocabulary is very difficult for our students. Successful resources that I use are games by Cheryl Cox Educational Games, <http://www.cherylcoxedu.com/> or Kamico Instructional Media, Inc., www.kamico.com to reinforce these skills. Of course we don't just touch on this once, but reinforce them across the curriculum and throughout the school year. Other areas that students have the most difficulty are with main idea, implied main idea and summary. We teach these skills in various ways and use graphic organizers from Big Muscles, www.bigmusclelearn.com to help our kids organize their thoughts. Strategies like "Get the Gist" from the Third Grade Academy, www.texasreading.org, introduced in 3rd grade are reiterated and reinforced in 4th and 5th grade. Since more than 60% of the questions from the TAKS test are pulled from Objective 1 and Objective 4, those are the objectives the students will practice the most. The following are some websites that contain with lessons, activities or games for Objective 1

www.readinga-z.com –prefixes and suffixes
http://www.internet4classrooms.com/skills_5th_lang.htm -lesson plans main idea
<http://www.time4learning.com/scope-sequence/5th-language-arts.shtml> -lesson plans for synonyms
<http://www.oswego.org/ocsd-web/match/dragflip.asp?filename=jwildeprefix> –games for prefixes and suffixes
<http://www.sadlier-oxford.com/phonics/crstcast/crstcastle.htm>
http://maize.usd266.com/education/components/links/links.php?sectiondetailid=9596&sc_id=1194294666&PHPSESSID=0790216e22b8d076e781316282810852 –lesson for context clues, prefixes and suffixes.
<http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/Tools/Index.htm> -summarization

Objective 2 for me is the most enjoyable to teach. I use Read Alouds many times to teach literary elements. For the point of view skill, I use a resource from Steck-Vaughn Point of View Stories. One of its books is Cinderella (4.5 reading level). The beginning of the book is Cinderella's story and her point of view, then you turn it around, upside down and it becomes a story told by the one of the stepsister's point of view. The story is entitled That Awful Cinderella. It's humorous and helps kids see two different points of views of a classic. Of course many other skills can be taught using these books, like character traits, relationships, motivations, etc. Another resource I used is Making Meaning by Developmental Studies Center. It's a kit of rich children's Read Aloud literature with four, 20-30 minute lessons. I've read, Read Alouds to the class and 5th graders love to be read to. I demonstrated "think aloud" strategies to help model thinking skills. Students practice "Think, Pair, Share" strategies during the lesson. The idea is to teach students to think, and respond orally their ideas, thoughts and feeling. They learn to make predictions, wonder and draw conclusions. It helps students to develop trust and confidence. They trust that their ideas aren't going to be criticized so therefore feel free to express themselves, even though others may not agree. These lessons give the ESL students more opportunities to practice the English language in an informal way. It also helps LD students who have a difficult time expressing ideas on paper express them orally. Some of the following websites are resources for graphic organizers and reading strategies.

<http://www.edu-cyberpg.com/Literacy/default.asp>

<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/ChildrenLit/reading.html>

<http://www.multiculturalchildrenslit.com/>

<http://www.sldirectory.com/libsf/resf/bookplans.html>

For Objective 3, I have used Big Muscles book of graphic organizers. The author, Mr. Durham came to our district and gave us training on how to use his book of graphic organizers. In that training we used big white boards and worked in cooperative learning groups. With this type of activity, students are motivated to learn using hands-on tools. From the historical data, we found that our kids' greatest weakness in science is Earth Science. I found some wonderful short nonfiction six pack books from Benchmark Education Company, Navigators Comprehensive Literacy Program. Our school purchased three reading levels- 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade. I've used some of these books in my small group for reading and I'm able to integrate science and social studies. We don't necessarily read the whole book, but take sections that correlate with the TEKS/SE we are working on in that 6 weeks. One week we were working on cause and effect. I pulled the science 6 pack books, one on Earthquakes and the other on Global Warming. Half of the group worked on the Earthquake book and the other half on the Global Warming book. They worked on the cause and effect lesson, the each group shared their lesson with each other. They not only learned science concepts, but without knowing integrated reading skills. National Geographic is another resource that has science thematic units that are differentiated. They come in 6 pack books. National Geographic has taken a theme, such as energy and created four reading levels that cover the same concept. They are labels, level A, B, C, and D. Level A is a Fry score of 3.2; Level B is a Fry score of 4.4; Level C is a Fry score of 5.5; and Level D is a Fry score of 6.8. Using these nonfiction books, students can combine graphic organizers to analyze text and make connections. With these types of books, it is easy to incorporate Mr. Muscles' graphic

organizers and strategies. The following are website that may be helpful for this objective.

<http://www.readingquest.org/strat/home.html>

<http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/Tools/Index.htm> -cause/effect

<http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=2983> –graphic organizers

<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/graphic-organizers/printable/6293.html> -strategies and graphic organizers

<http://www.thinkport.org/Technology/template.tp>

Objective 4 is probably our most difficult objective because it involves higher level thinking skills. This is the high level of Bloom's Taxonomy. I think the most difficult thinking skills to teach are author's purpose, author's point of view, drawing inferences and recognizing how the author organized the text. By the end of the year most kids do well on this part of the test, but those that don't, just don't do well at all. I do use the newspaper and advertisement adds to teach these skills, but these are skills that need to be taught in many different ways and using variety of resources. The following websites are good resources.

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=275 –compare and contrast

<http://www.effectiveteachingsolutions.com/readingworkshop.htm> -drawing conclusions

<http://www.taks-reading.blogspot.com/> - making inferences, author's point of view

Because of accountability, teachers are designing their instruction, activities and assessments more meticulously. Teaching has become more challenging since NCLB. Schools can no longer meet accountability standards without inclusive practices (All sub-groups of students must achieve. NCLB 2004)

Teachers are pulled by their instincts to teach and inspire children using rich literature and Blooms Taxonomy's questioning strategies. Unfortunately, those who develop academics (textbooks, academic resources, etc.) are not on same page as those

who assess academics (TAKS). Therefore, I've had to approach assessment differently. It was after I attended Kilgo Data Driven Decision Workshop, that I realized I needed to approach teaching and assessing more strategically. I compared the two different types of authors that affect our students-academic and assessment. These two types of authors have two different purposes. One, the academic author strives to enhance learning and the other, the assessment author, strives to test knowledge in all levels possible. It hit me, I could still teach as creatively and enjoyable as before, but when it came to assessment; I needed to be more tactical. My team and I studied the Kilgo Research Model. (Data-Driven Decisions Kilgo Consulting, Inc., www.margaretkilgo.com) We review the TAKS objectives and TEKS/SE strands. We paid close attention to the verbs used in SE and check the possible ways it could be assessed. We check our campus history data to determine students' performance to identify gaps in the instructional program resources and materials. We asked ourselves-"What are the lowest scoring student expectations?" We identified the most significant errors our students make on state assessment and why? We not only developed our instruction more efficiently, but also create assessment questions that correspond with the TAKS questions. (Data-Driven Decision Kilgo Consulting, Inc., www.margaretkilgo.com)

Well, I felt a little more confident with TAKS, but now another challenge landed on my shoulders. Our district moved to inclusion which allows Special Education students to stay in the regular classroom with their peers and not be pulled out for instruction. At first this was overwhelming, until our campus received training from Region XV (Co-Teaching & Differentiation: Strategies for Teaching Diverse Learners). I

was sold on the idea. I remember seeing how some of my students hated to leave the classroom, afraid they would miss something.

I now teach inclusion with two 5th grade teachers. I parallel teach with the classroom teacher. I get half of the class and she gets the other half. We teach the same concept such as main idea, but in a different way. On Monday I'll get group A and then we'll switch and on Tuesday I'll get group B. On Wednesday and Thursday, the classroom teacher and I will work with small groups of 3 (struggling students) while the rest of the class works in stations. It seems to be working out. We plan together, and we are using the Kilgo model. After studying the data we realized that our kids do well with cause and effect, but not so well on author's purpose, main idea, and drawing conclusions. We plan our lesson to focus more on those concepts and give the kids plenty of opportunities to practice.

This year is especially difficult because students in Special Education will be taking the same test on grade level TAKS test called TAKS M or TAKS Alt. In the TAKS M test, accommodations are designed for each Special Education students who qualify. These accommodations may be: enlarge print, fewer questions, have the question and answer choices read to them, or have the test format changes. I made a TAKS M benchmark from the 2007 release test so that our Special Education students could practice. The catch to it all is that the TAKS-M is in 5th grade reading level and our Learning Disable students are not at that reading level. I was pleasantly surprised that with the changed format, most of the students made an 80% or above score. TAKS ALT is restricted to 2% of the campus Special Education population.

(www.tea.state.tx.us/ , See Student Assessment Division- What New-TAKS-M Blueprints).

Yes, teaching is not what it use to be. A teacher can still bring life and wonder to learning, but in order for her students to pass the TAKS test, she better be prepared and prepare her students well.

Appendix A

Objective 1 The student will demonstrate a basic understanding of culturally diverse written text.

- 5.09B draw on experiences to bring meaning to words in context such as interpreting figurative language and multiple-meaning words
- 5.09D determine meanings of derivatives by applying knowledge of meanings of root words such as like, pay or happy and affixes such as dis-, pre-, and un
- 5.10F determine a text's main (or major) ideas and how those ideas are supported with details
- 5.10G paraphrase and summarize text to recall, inform, or organize ideas

Objective 2 The student will apply knowledge of literary elements to understand culturally diverse written texts.

- 5.12H analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts, point of view, relationships, and changes they undergo
- 5.12I recognized and analyze story plot, setting and problem resolution

Objective 3 The student will use a variety of strategies to analyze culturally diverse written texts.

- 5.10E use the text's structure or progression of ideas such as cause and effect or chronology to locate and recall information
- 5.10I find similarities and differences across texts such as in treatment, scope or organization
- 5.10L represent text information in different ways such as in outline, timeline, or graphic organizers
- 5.12A judge the internal consistency or logic of stories and texts such as "Would this character do this?"; "Does this make sense here?"
- 5.12C identify the purposes of different types of texts such as to inform, influence, express, or entertain
- 5.12E compare communication in different forms such as [contrasting a dramatic performance with a print version of the same story or] comparing story variants
- 5.12J describe how the author's perspective or point of view affects the text

Objective 4 The student will apply critical –thinking skills to analyze culturally diverse written text

- 5.10H draw inferences such as conclusions or generalizations and support them with text evidence [and experience]
- 5.10J distinguish fact and opinion in various texts
- 5.11C support responses by referring to relevant aspects of text [and his/her own experiences]
- 5.11D connect, compare, and contrast ideas, themes, and issues across text
- 5.12B recognize that authors organize information in specific ways

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