

Language Arts November eNews 2018

During the 2018-2019 school year, each division at WCCHS has set one specific goal to further contribute to student growth. In addition to the language arts division's fundamental mission to **"to develop an environment and a curriculum that encourages a lifelong appreciation of reading, writing, and speaking as universally attainable means of profoundly enriching one's own life experiences"** and our motto **"Find your voice,"** English teachers are designing and sequencing five lessons to support freshman, sophomore, and junior students' success on the reading section of the PSAT/SAT, which is administered annually in April.

Students are learning a variety of procedures and strategies to effectively analyze the reading passages and correctly answer the questions, which evaluate one's ability to make simple and complex inferences, analyze vocabulary in context, identify best evidence, synthesize theme, and evaluate an author's purpose. At the conclusion of each lesson, students chart their individual progress to track growth.



Prior to completing the second reading passage, teachers review a series of basic reminders that students can immediately implement.

- 1. Read the description of the source for the passage, the author's name, and the year of publication, which are in italics, to get some background info before you read.**

The citation information from a practice passage completed by tenth graders is listed below.

Example:

Questions 1-9 are based on the following passage.

This passage is adapted from Marilyn Robinson, Gilead. @ 2004 for Marilyn Robinson

Although the title, author, and date of publication may not have been helpful to readers of this passage, other passages such as one titled, "Multitasking to Distraction," authors such as "Indira Gandhi," or dates such as "in 1971 the United States sued the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to prevent the newspapers from publishing classified military documents" provide readers with background knowledge that can increase their comprehension of the passage.

- 2. Return to the passage and reread when the question includes a line number.**

A vocabulary in context question from a practice passage completed by ninth graders is listed below.

Example:

As used in line 35, “orient” most nearly means

- A) point.
- B) learn.
- C) adapt.
- D) understand.



When the student rereads line thirty-five, which states, “Newly hatched turtles need a dark night sky to *orient* themselves toward the sea,” the reader can eliminate letters “B,” “C,” and “D” because they do not accurately complete the sentence. Rereading the vocabulary word in context and using the process of elimination can help readers accurately answer this type of question, as well as other questions that include the line number and ask readers to make an inference.

3. Questions that ask the reader to identify the “best evidence” are connected to the previous question. The reader must find the evidence that best supports the answer to the prior question.

Most passages have two pair of questions that ask the reader to make an inference about characterization, theme, etc. in the first question and then provide the “best” textual evidence from the passage in the second question to support the student’s first answer. These questions often challenge students because of the conceptual load, as well as the interdependence of the questions. Students should remember that they practice these same skills in English class when they make claims about literature and provide textual evidence during discussions or formal written arguments.

Since students will complete five practice reading passages, teachers will continue to provide them with more in-depth and precise techniques and strategies prior to each session. Likewise, teachers of juniors offer students more sophisticated procedures and processes to use when taking the SAT. AP English teacher, **Nicole Osborne**, models strategies such as “cut the fluff,” “50/50,” and “eggs in a basket” for her eleventh graders. Osborne says,

“IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT STUDENTS FIND A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES THAT WORK FOR THEM.

WE WORK ON THOSE STRATEGIES WITHIN THE TIME CONSTRAINTS OF THE TEST. HOWEVER, IT IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT THAT STUDENTS TRACK THEIR OWN DATA TO ADDRESS THE SPECIFIC TYPES OF QUESTIONS (CONTEXTUAL, BEST EVIDENCE) THEY ARE MISSING TO UNDERSTAND BOTH COMPONENTS ON THE EXAM, WHICH PROVIDES STUDENTS THE BEST OPPORTUNITY TO SUCCEED IN ANY ASSESSMENT SITUATION.”

Students also have strategies and advice to share with their classmates. More than 100 freshmen, sophomores, and juniors completed a self-reflective survey on their PSAT/SAT preparation experience thus far this year. 92% percent of students who have completed two or more passages have improved their scores, and by charting their growth can begin to reflect on the kinds of questions that



need their attention. Moreover, students have identified their own challenges and take-aways from these lessons this year.

Challenges:

"I feel the hardest part is being able to deconstruct and understand the passage in the amount of time we are given per each passage."

"Understanding words that aren't in your own vocab yet"

"Time management and knowing how long to spend on certain questions and passages"

"The hardest part is answering the questions that come in pairs."

What have you learned?

"All the different types of questions must be approached in different ways, and there is a trick to each that can help you answer the question."

"I have learned different techniques to narrow the questions down into categories, making them easier to understand and answer. I have also learned different strategies on how to eliminate answers and how to know that the answer you chose fits with the question being asked."

"It takes practice to do well."

Advice for younger test takers. . .

"I would advise them to read more often and more challenging books."

"Make sure to get as much practice as possible. Take every PSAT you can because it really does replicate the feeling and atmosphere that will be felt in the SAT."

"Take it seriously because it can help you see what you personally need to improve on."

Students and families that are interested in more information about PSAT or SAT practice may contact the student's English teacher, Mary Howard, the language arts division chair at mhoward@d94.org, or Len Egan, the counseling division chair at legan@d94.org.