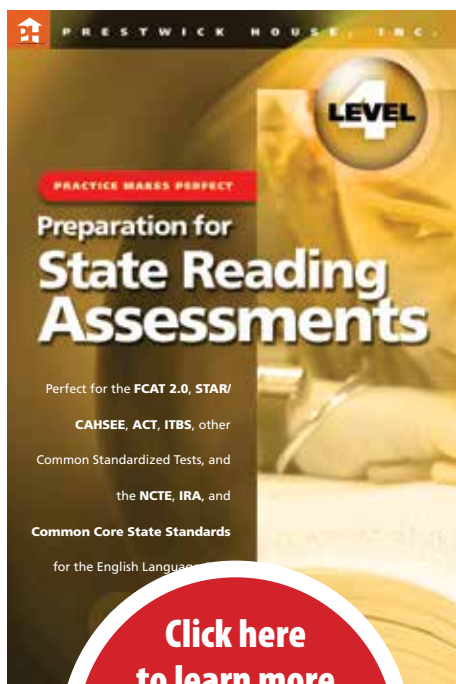




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Preparation for State Reading Assessments

Table of Contents

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 4 | <i>Introduction to the Student</i> | 44 | <i>Juvenile Diabetes</i> |
| 6 | <i>Model Passage</i> | 46 | <i>National Parks: America's Treasures</i> |
| 10 | <i>Wood Ducks</i> | 48 | <i>Ohno, Here He Comes!</i> |
| 12 | <i>Too Silly for Grownups</i> | 50 | <i>Pasta</i> |
| 14 | <i>A Dream of Unity: The Story of Tecumseh</i> | 52 | <i>Petrified Wood</i> |
| 16 | <i>Learning + Fun = Preschool</i> | 54 | <i>Minds in the Making: The Montessori Method</i> |
| 18 | <i>The Legend of Valentine's Day</i> | 56 | <i>The Columbia Gorge: Playground and Power Source</i> |
| 20 | <i>USS Monitor</i> | 58 | <i>Driving Toward the Future</i> |
| 22 | <i>Young Inventors</i> | 60 | <i>The Run for the Roses</i> |
| 24 | <i>Bowling</i> | 62 | <i>Plant Food</i> |
| 26 | <i>Rails to Trails: 20,000 Miles of Recycling</i> | 64 | <i>The Extinct Anasazi</i> |
| 28 | <i>Atlas</i> | 66 | <i>Seventeen Years Underground</i> |
| 30 | <i>Brain Power</i> | 68 | <i>Atoms</i> |
| 32 | <i>Jim Henson: The Man Behind Kermit</i> | 70 | <i>Tsunamis</i> |
| 34 | <i>Full of Hot Air</i> | 72 | <i>Nest of Voices: The Return of the Hawaiian Language</i> |
| 36 | <i>Largest Living Things on Earth</i> | 74 | <i>Those Annoying Ants</i> |
| 38 | <i>Making Friends with the Blank Page</i> | 76 | <i>Summer Anticipation</i> |
| 40 | <i>Mountain Biking</i> | 78 | <i>Weird Universe</i> |
| 42 | <i>The Master Showman</i> | | |

How to Take a Reading Comprehension Test

Taking a reading comprehension test does not have to be stressful. The following tips and methods can help you better understand how to answer the questions correctly.

FOCUS:

When you read a comprehension passage, you should try to identify the following:

- main idea
- author's attitude toward the subject
- author's purpose

Many questions want to see if you know what the author is trying to say and why he or she is saying it. Think about whether the author has an opinion on the topic: Does he or she agree or disagree with the subject of the passage? Or, does the author give you just the facts? What clues show the author's attitude?

While you read, think about the following:

- What is the subject of the passage?
- What information is important?
- What questions might you write about the passage?

When you come across a point that stands out, remember it. Ask yourself why the author included it. Information that seems to have a special purpose often shows up in the questions.

TIPS:

To find an author's attitude about the subject, look for words that show opinion, such as *sadly*, *horrible*, *surprisingly*, *amazing*, etc. Words like these show an author's views on the subject of the passage. Simple words tell you a lot about the author's feelings. Some of the articles in this book contain only facts, but some show the author's beliefs. It's up to you to see the difference.

Often, you have to identify the main idea in a passage. These types of questions do not always ask, "What is the main idea?" They may ask for the best title for the passage or what the author would most likely agree or disagree with. Pick the answer that is true for most of the passage.

You will also see questions that ask for the definition of a word. These questions check to see if you can find a word's meaning by looking at how it is used in a sentence. Sometimes, it might seem like there's more than one right

answer, but rereading the section with the vocabulary word in it will help you make the best choice.

For the last question of each section, you will need to write two-to-four sentences. Be sure to include a few details from the passage.

If you can't decide on the answer, skip the question, and come back to it after you have answered the rest of the questions for that passage. You may even find the answer when you are working on other questions. If you still can't answer it, make your best guess and move on.

Some people suggest reading the questions before you read the passage so that you know what information you will need. If this works for you—terrific! For many people, however, this takes too much time. They can't focus on what they read. You should use whatever method you're comfortable with.

REMEMBER THESE THREE IMPORTANT POINTS:

1. Read the passage and answer the questions carefully!

Look for tricky words such as *not*, *always*, *true*, *opposite*, etc., because these words will help you find the correct answer to the question.

2. If you can't remember what you read, go through the passage again!

3. Always read all the possible answers!

Even if you think you've found the right answer, you might miss the correct one if you don't read them all.

Model Passage

The following model passage is a good example of how you should use the reading tips. You will see that there are underlined words and phrases in the passage and notes in the margins. The notes are examples of how you should think about the passage as you read, including questions or comments about information you think might be important.

The Railroads Connect

¹This passage will probably be about the problems surrounding the “Wedding of the Rails.”

On May 10, 1869, the Transcontinental Railroad was finally connected after years of hard work, but the celebration of the “Wedding of the Rails” was troubled by misunderstanding and other problems.¹

²What will these funny errors be?

The real story is quite a comedy of errors.² First,³ the event actually took place at Promontory Summit, Utah, but, it wasn’t on the map, so the press reported that it occurred at Promontory Point. As a result, postcards, souvenirs, and even textbooks show the wrong location. Second, on May 4, 1869,⁴ the president of the Central Pacific Railroad, Leland Stanford, told his friend, David Hewes, that nothing had been made to honor the event. Hewes was upset by this fact and tried to have a solid gold rail made. He couldn’t find anyone willing to pay for it, so he had \$400 worth of his own gold melted and molded⁵ into a “Golden Spike.” Three other spikes were also made for the event. The next problem came about when the event had to be moved to a later date because unhappy workers and bad weather delayed the arrival of officials from the Union Pacific Railroad. Finally, on May 10, 1869, the officials from both the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific railroads convened⁶ for the celebration.

³The points are listed. The word first tells me to look for second, next, finally, and similar words.

⁴That’s only six days before the ceremony.

⁵Wow, \$400 of his own gold! Why? What kind of question could be asked about this fact?

⁶I should look at other words in the sentence that contains this bolded word. What does it mean?

⁷Those spikes were just dropped in the holes, not nailed.

⁸This was a huge event if the entire nation needed to know about it.

⁹The name of the event is mentioned again. It must be important.

A laurelwood railroad tie was laid in place at the junction, and the specialty made spikes were dropped into pre-drilled holes. Not one of them was actually hammered into place.⁷ Then, the laurelwood tie and the spikes were replaced with a regular tie and iron spikes. The last spike and the hammer were connected to the telegraph line so that the whole nation could learn about⁸ the “Wedding of the Rails.”⁹ The

sound of the hammer hitting the spike would then travel across the U.S. through the telegraph line. Leland Stanford was given the first swing, but he missed the spike and hit the wooden tie. Thomas Durant, vice-president of the Union Pacific Railroad, swung at the spike, but missed completely. In the end, a railroad employee hammered in the final tie,¹⁰ and the telegraph operator sent the message to the country: “D-O-N-E.”

¹⁰That is funny—after all of the problems, the important people who were supposed to hammer the spike could not do it.

¹¹That is funny, too. I cannot believe no one showed up. It seems as if no one cared.

It’s no surprise that when the 50th anniversary celebration was held, not one person showed up. Maybe they all went to Promontory Point.

1. Which of the following best states the author’s purpose?

- A. to make fun of the Transcontinental Railroad
- B. to tell a true story of an important event in U.S. railroad history
- C. to explain the importance of the Golden Spike
- D. to show how history books sometimes have incorrect information

(B) *The author correctly describes the confusion and problems surrounding the “Wedding of the Rails” celebration. The other choices just support the main point of the passage.*

2. Which of the following would be the best title for this passage?

- A. The Golden Spike Disaster
- B. Where the Railroads Meet
- C. Leland Stanford’s Spike
- D. The Wedding of the Rails

(D) *The passage is about the whole “Wedding of the Rails” ceremony. The ceremony’s title is mentioned twice in the passage, making it important information that works as the title. Although the event had many problems, it was not a “disaster,” (A). Finally, the passage does not focus just on Leland Stanford’s spike or where the event occurred, (C, B).*

3. Which of the following did NOT add to the confusion on May 10, 1869?

- A. the telegraph operator
- B. bad weather conditions
- C. last-minute planning
- D. uncertainty about the location

(A) *The article does not say that the telegraph operator made any errors. The bad weather delayed officials, (B). David Hewes had to donate his own gold for the spike due to the last-minute planning, (C). Uncertainty about the location led to incorrect information, (D).*

4. As used in the passage, the word *convened* most nearly means

- A. left.
- B. met.
- C. planned.
- D. paid.

(B) *The passage is about joining the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific railroads, so the two officials would be traveling to the same location to meet for the event. The ceremony was already planned, (C), and there is no mention of the men paying for their trip, (D). Choice (A) is incorrect because the men were arriving for the celebration, not leaving.*

5. Based on the information in the passage, why do you think David Hewes used his own gold to make the Golden Spike?

- A. He was angry that no one would help him.
- B. He wanted to become famous for his part in the celebration.
- C. He could find no one willing to pay for or donate the gold.
- D. He had too much gold, so he could afford to donate some of it.

(C) *Hewes tried to find someone to pay for a gold rail, but was unsuccessful, so he had to use his own gold. Since Hewes looked for someone to pay for the rail, it's clear that he did not have more gold than he needed, (D). The article doesn't mention that he was looking for fame, (B). Finally, the passage states that he was upset that nothing was made to honor the event, not that he was angry about finding no one willing to help, (A).*

6. Answer the following question using complete sentences:

Why does the author call the “Wedding of the Rails” a “comedy of errors”?

The event is funny because it was a major celebration of the uniting of the railroads in the United States, and everything that could go wrong did: Railroad officials arrived late because of unhappy employees and bad weather; the Golden Spike was not even hammered in; a railroad employee, not any of the officials, completed the actual connection of the rails. Finally, even though the “Wedding of the Rails” was an important event in U.S. railroad history, no one showed up for the 50th anniversary celebration.

Wood Ducks

YOU ARE FEEDING the ducks at the pond in your local park, and you notice that one of the ducks is very different from the others. As he swims toward you, his head bobs back and forth. He is much more colorful than the brown and green mallard ducks. This duck looks like a hand-painted wood carving. His feathers are colored in blocks of reddish-brown, tan, and white. The **iridescent** feathers on his head and back appear to be green, but as he turns in the sunlight, you see flashes of blue, gold, and red. White stripes neatly outline his eyes, the crest on his head, and the blocks of color on his body.

You are looking at a wood duck. The wood duck is probably the most colorful of all North American ducks. They live in wooded areas near freshwater swamps, marshes, ponds, and creeks. A pair of wood ducks builds a nest in a hole in a tree near the water. These nests are usually very high above the water, sometimes nearly 300 feet up a tree. Wood ducks are different from other ducks because they have claws on their feet that allow them to perch up in the trees.

The female wood duck lays between seven and fifteen eggs at a time. After about thirty days, the brown ducklings hatch. In just one day, they are ready to find their own food. They line up at the hole in the tree, jump, and glide down! They are able to land safely even from a very high nest.



Building the nest over the water helps to make the landings soft, but the ducklings can even land unharmed on the ground.

These beautiful ducks were once hunted so that people could have colorful feathers for their hats. The meat of the duck was considered a delicious dinner. As more and more ducks were

hunted, they began to disappear. People began to fill in wetland areas in order to build new towns and roads, and places for ducks to live also disappeared. In the early 1900s, laws were passed to limit how many wood ducks hunters could shoot. Other laws limited the amount of wetlands that humans could use. People began to make home-made nest boxes as well and put them up in forests near water. Soon, the number of wood ducks began to climb again. Fortunately, these beautiful animals are still around for you to enjoy at the local park. ●

Q U E S T I O N S

1. The author's main purpose for writing this passage is probably to

- A. persuade people to save wood ducks.
- B. tell a story about brave baby ducks.
- C. teach people to take care of ducks.
- D. inform people about a special kind of duck.

2. You would not find a wood duck nest

- A. in a forest.
- B. near an ocean.
- C. next to a pond.
- D. along a stream.

3. What would be the best title for this article?

- A. Saving a Special Duck
- B. Building Wood Duck Homes
- C. Wood Duck Nests
- D. A Beautiful Duck

4. As used in the passage, *iridescent* most likely means

- A. turning in the sun.
- B. many colors shining.
- C. painted by hand.
- D. feathers standing up.

5. Based on the passage, which of the following is true?

- A. New laws saved wood ducks from disappearing.
- B. Building nest boxes helps the environment.
- C. Wood duck babies are as colorful as their parents.
- D. Ducklings can fly when they are born.

6. Answer the following question using complete sentences:

If you wanted to help wood ducks by building a nest box, what would you do to make it work best for the ducks?