Successful Smart MCAS Strategies

Kay’s comments in italics

**Reading Stamina:** One way to overcome the challenge of students skim reading is to have students work with a partner and chunk the passage.  Each pair would read short pieces of the passage and then discuss what it was about.  After students have read and discussed the entire passage we would come back together as a whole group and discuss our findings. – Lisa

Another type of question ask students to "select one quotation from paragraph 7 and one quotation from paragraph 8 that best support the answer to part a".  This question is asking students to make two selections, but it allows them to move forward if they only make one selection.

*On the Computer-Based Test (CBT), at the end of the test, the student is informed if he or she hasn’t answered all the questions. Students should always be advised to answer each question, even if it’s just their best guess; it could be correct!*

**Getting the question correct:** \*\*It is important to remind students to mark up the questions so they are positive they know what the question is asking.\*\* ~ Courtney

Another type of question asks students to put 4 main elements of the story in order.  The students are given a list of 6 elements, and they are to drag the answers into the correct spot. Some of the language in the question (drag the statements to the chart and drop them in the correct order) might be confusing for ELLs or students with specific language disabilities.  Also, it's hard for a teacher to make an example of this type of question on a practice test.

*The PARCC question site has more examples for students to practice with on this CBT sample tests site. Finding sample released tests that have this sequencing and having students number them first also helps prepare them for the computer test.*

The essay requires that students use examples from both texts.  I think this would be easier if the students had the texts in front of them, as opposed to having to flip around on the computer.  Again, this is difficult to recreate for students in a practice test setting.

*The students can scroll through a text on the left side of the screen, while not losing the questions on the right side.*

**Overcoming Vocabulary** The challenge that I see for my students is the vocabulary.  For example, words like:  loathsome, abstinence, abyss, and lucidity.  I would have the students highlight the words in the text. We would then discuss context clues, and strategies to figure out the meaning of words, when they are unsure of their meaning.   I would then have the students work in pairs, creating sentences of their own using these words.  (They would use a dictionary while doing this activity.)  We would then write these sentences on the board and discuss their context.  We would compare their sentences with those of their peers.

For unfamiliar words, student should practice with having the word context and try their “best guess” at what’s “probably true” for the general type of meaning of the word. If the challenging word isn’t key to meaning, the student can just skim over it.

**Long-term practice** with this could be a game-like practice of having students in teams or small groups. The teacher first gives the challenging word and students may guess the meaning, for 3 points. Then the teacher gives the sentence, 2 points if the team gets it close to the meaning. If no one has gotten it correct, the teacher provides the fuller context, for one point. One student assists the teacher as judge, with a dictionary to help with precise meanings.

**Finding text evidence activity** Another challenge would be finding evidence from the text.  My students work in groups and use sticky notes to mark any evidence they find.  I then have them write the evidence on file cards; one piece of evidence per a file card.  We then tape all the file cards to the board, and then the students move the file cards around, matching the cards with the cards that have the same evidence written on them. We then look to see the commonality in the evidence and decide which cards present the most relevant evidence.  They then take this information and answer the question.  This activity leads to a great discussion about what is important evidence and what is not.

**Central Idea activity** Finally, the last challenge I see for my students is finding the central idea.  I would have my students highlight any idea they feel is a central idea.  We would then decide what would be the central idea by process of elimination, looking at text evidence to support the best central idea, the central idea most likely to be true.

**Challenging Text** Begin with the earlier grade level easier passages and questions and move to grade level passages and questions. Use earlier Legacy MCAS passages, which are posted under “MCAS”on the DESE web site [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu) under “Test Questions.”

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html>

**Central idea** Teach a skill such as central idea with folktales or passages with a clear lesson

Some nice, perhaps easier passages (and questions) examples are from Legacy MCAS,

posted at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/2016/release/Gr10-ELA.pdf>

Here are relatively easier upper grade passages:

2016 Grade 10 passages  -- All of these 2016 test passages look comprehensible:

 "Game of Her Life," first passage

"Surrender of Japan," second passage, short!!

Shakespeare Sonnet 3rd passage

"Jaws"  4th passage

"Energy Drinks Promise Edge," 5th passage

On teens and summer: "Aristotle & Dante" 6th passage

**2015** gr 10 passage

Carl Sandburg's eulogy for Abraham Lincoln, p.17 Long, so do piece by piece

    Good for central idea and supporting details (Part B)

Poem "Quilts" p. 30

2013 "The Spartan Creed, p. 16 short, easy questions

Poems "Insomnia," "When They Sleep," p. 31

**2014**

"An Unfinished Season," a boy and his father, p. 16 November 2014 released Re-Take

Should be easy questions for students

2012  "Bridge of Sighs," p. 17, intriguing teen relationship, 3 pages but easy questions

**GRADE 8 2016** “Celeste’s Heart” and “Principles and Principals” close to students, easy to read, easy vocabulary

**Grade 3 2014** test Good visuals to use to teach use of visuals, on both tests