

## **Roads to Success: Introduction to the PSAT**

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### **FAMILY NEWSLETTER**

Please distribute copies of the High School Testing family newsletter as you begin this unit. (These newsletters should be approved by your school administrator prior to distribution.)

### **OVERVIEW**

Students learn what the PSAT is, and discover some compelling reasons for taking it. After reading a comic strip that presents some basic information about the PSAT (its purpose, how long it is, what skills it measures, and so on), the facilitator presents some skill-building strategies that can help students prepare for the reading sections of the test.

[NOTE: Some colleges require the ACT instead of the SAT. Students interested in these colleges might take a preliminary test called the ACT PLAN during their sophomore year rather than the PSAT. If high schools in your area focus on the ACT PLAN rather than the PSAT, use the alternate version of this lesson.]

### **GUIDING QUESTION**

What is the PSAT, and why should I take it?

### **OBJECTIVES**

During this lesson, student(s) will:

- List at least two reasons for taking the PSAT, such as:
  - “prepare for the SAT, an important part of college applications process”
  - “become eligible for (National Merit)” scholarship money
  - “find out what math and reading skills I need to work on during high school”
- Describe the procedure for signing up at his/her school and know when the PSAT is given.
- Describe two things besides taking the PSAT that a sophomore in high school can do to prepare for future standardized tests like the SAT, such as:
  - Read more novels, non-fiction books, and longer magazine articles.
  - Visit vocabulary-building Web sites.
  - Make learning algebra a priority, and get tutoring if needed.

### **TIME REQUIRED**

Approx. 45 minutes

- I. Warm-up (8 minutes)

- II. The PSAT Comic Book (15 minutes)
- III. Preparing for the PSAT (15 minutes)
- IV. Wrap-up: My PSAT Action Plan (7 minutes)

## **MATERIALS**

**Student Handbook page 9, No! No! Not the PSAT!**  
**Student Handbook pages 10 -12, PSAT Comic Book**  
**Student Handbook page 13, Context Clues**  
**Student Handbook page 14, Guess What's Next**  
**Student Handbook page 15, Building Word Power**  
**Student Handbook page 16, PSAT Wrap-Up**  
**Facilitator Resource 1, Key: No! No! Not the PSAT!**

## **PREPARATION**

Speak to your school guidance counselor so that you explain the procedures for signing up for the PSAT to your students.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

During the fall of their sophomore and junior years, high school students have the option of taking the PSAT. This test has several purposes. The first is to help students practice for the SAT that they will take during their junior year, and which can play a key role in college admissions. The second reason is to compete for National Merit Scholarships, which provide money toward college tuition. A third purpose is to help students identify their academic strengths and weaknesses midway through high school, so they can better focus their efforts long before their graduate. Some students do not realize that even if they are not planning to do to college, the kinds of skills that the PSAT tests come into play in other jobs they might consider.

NOTE: If students are interested in qualifying for the National Merit Scholarship, they should take the PSAT again their junior year.

The second lesson in this unit provides more opportunities to practice questions of the type found on the PSAT. The third lesson allows students to examine other tests that may be required to qualify for work or other post-secondary education.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS**

If you prefer, **Student Handbook page 9, No! No! Not the PSAT!** may be used as a Do-Now.

All activities in **Activity Step III, Preparing for the PSAT**, may be abbreviated for time. You may choose to use only one example of each technique, or focus on a

single technique. Interested students may wish to take **Student Handbook page 15, Building Word Power**, with them so they can access websites from home.

## ACTIVITY STEPS

### I. WARM-UP (8 minutes)

#### 1. SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Tests are an important part of school. Like them or not – and most people don't – tests not only affect your grades, but are often a good way to find out what you know, and what you don't know, about a particular subject. Imagine, for example, that you were about to be operated on in a hospital. Wouldn't you feel better knowing that your surgeon did really well on his tests than have a doctor who flunked every test he took? [Pretend to be a bumbling surgeon.] "Let me see, is this thing here the heart or the liver?! Oh, I don't know, let's just poke around with this knife-y thing and find out... (pause) Oops!"

For the next few weeks, we're going to talk about some of the standardized tests that can have an impact on your college and career plans – what they are, why they're important, and how you can prepare for them.

#### 2. SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

How many of you have ever heard of the SAT?

[Students respond.]

The SAT is a test that many colleges use to help them compare students from many different high schools. If the college can only take a limited number of students, the test scores help them decide which students to accept. Students take this test in their junior or senior year of high school.

Fortunately, it's possible to prepare for this test ahead of time. One of the ways to get ready is to take a practice test called the PSAT in your sophomore and/or junior year.

If you've never even heard of the PSAT or the SAT, don't worry.

Today you're going to find out a lot more about these tests. Before you leave today, you'll know the answers to these questions:

- What is the PSAT test, anyway?
- What are some reasons I should take it?
- How long does the test last?

- Can you cram for the PSAT?
- What are some ways that I can prepare for the PSAT, and the SAT?

3. SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Let's see how much you already know about the PSAT by trying this quiz. All the questions are in multiple-choice format – just like many of the questions on the PSAT. Read each question and use your pencil to fill in the circle beside the best answer. When you're done, we'll go over the answers.

[Refer students to **Student Handbook, page 9 No! No! Not the PSAT!** Give students 4 minutes to complete it.]

[Go over the answers, having students correct their own papers.]

## II. The PSAT Comic Book (10 minutes)

1. SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

If you're worried about the PSAT, you're not alone. Many students get nervous about standardized tests like the PSAT, and the SAT. But as with most of tests – the more information you have about something, the more you can prepare yourself to do your best. And the more prepared you feel, the less stressed out you'll be – and the better you'll do.

[Refer students to **Student Handbook, pages 10 -12 PSAT Comic Book.**]

To find out more about the PSAT, let's have a look at a short comic strip about two high school students, Myra and Ira. Myra's a sophomore, and Ira's a junior.

[Pick two volunteers, and have them read the comic strip together, as the class follows along in their copy.]

2. After reading the comic, SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Do you think Myra will take the PSAT? Why, or why not? [Students respond.] Before we move on, let's go over some of the important information in the Myra & Ira comic. First . . . What are three reasons for taking the PSAT? [Students respond.] (*Reasons to take the PSAT include: preparing for the SAT; becoming eligible for scholarship money for college; learning what math and reading skills you need to work on during high school.*)

## III. Preparing for the PSAT (20 minutes)

1. SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Like Ira said in the comic, the PSAT is not the kind of test you can cram for. You won't be asked to name two causes of the Civil War or to explain the structure of a cell because not all students take the same courses or learn precisely the same facts.

But there are two subjects that you can guarantee you'll see on the PSAT – and lots of other standardized tests, like the SAT. Any idea what those two subjects are? [Students respond.] That's right – math and reading. These two subjects are keys to learning all other subjects.

So, how can you prepare for the math portions of a test? (*Pay attention in math class! Do your homework. Ask questions. Get extra help if you need it.*)

This is one subject that doesn't change much from school to school. So this is a really good place to put your energy if you want to perform well on standardized tests.

How do you prepare for the reading portions of the test? Read! Anything you want...Novels, biographies, magazines, newspapers, Internet articles, and more. Your big goal is to learn how writers use language, and build your own vocabulary.

## 2. SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

To get the most out of your reading, it might help to think about the techniques you use to understand the rest of the world. Let me show you two techniques that are guaranteed to improve your reading power.

The first is **context clues**, using the rest of a sentence or paragraph to figure out words you don't know. Think about the first time you saw an unfamiliar abbreviation in a text message or IM. Did you go running to the dictionary for a definition? I didn't think so! If you said something funny, and someone responded with LOL, you probably figured out that it meant . . . (*laughing out loud*). If someone typed GTG and disappeared from your screen, you probably figured out its meaning from the situation . . . (*got to go*). [Feel free to substitute current text abbreviations popular with your students for those above.] Let's see how **context clues** work in another situation.

[Refer students to **Student Handbook page 13, Context Clues!**]

Read over the first page. It is an encyclopedia article about the great civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. You'll see that one word is printed in

**bold** letters (“*symbol*”). See if you can use the words before and after the bolded word – to figure out what it means.

[After 3 minutes,] SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

What does the word “symbol” mean in this excerpt? What clues did you find in your reading that helped you define “symbol”?

[Allow students a chance to respond, then explain that, in this article, “symbol” means “something that stands for something else.” If there’s time, ask students to brainstorm an example or two of symbols, e.g. American flag for patriotism; a snowflake on a calendar as a symbol for winter.]

3. SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Now let’s try another example. Turn to the next page in your handbook, where you’ll find a passage from *National Geographic Explorer*. It’s called “Mystery Monster” and is a first-person story about a visit to China.

[Refer students to **Student Handbook page 13, Context Clues.**]

Your mission is to read the second passage, “Mystery Monster,” and see if you can figure out the meaning of the word in bold in the last sentence – **lichen**.

[After 3 minutes,] SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

What does the words “lichen” mean in this passage? How can you tell? (*The definition is right after the word.*)

4. SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Here’s another technique to build your reading power. As you read, see if you can predict what’s going to come next. If you’re a fan of video games, this technique is nothing new. As you play, you’re always on the alert for obstacles you’ll need to avoid or places where bad guys may be hiding. When you’re reading, you need to pay attention in the same way so you always have an idea of where the writer is “headed.” You can practice this skill by guessing what the next word is going to be each time you turn the page. Let’s try an example.

[Refer students to the **Student Handbook page 14, Guess What’s Next.**]

This excerpt comes from the novel *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer’s Stone*. Read it silently to yourself, and see if you can figure out what word to expect when you turn the page.

[Let students read the excerpt for about 3 minutes.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

What word or phrase do you think might come next?

[Students make predictions; then you can read the text that actually follows:  
“Next morning, however, he had gotten up to find his hair...exactly as it had been before Aunt Petunia had sheared it off. He had been given a week in his cupboard for this, even though he had tried to explain that he couldn't explain how it had grown back so quickly.”]

5. SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

The final example is a quote from the famous prizefighter Mohammed Ali. Read the passage, then raise your hand if you know the word that will be next when you turn the page.

How did you figure it out?

It doesn't really matter if you get the exact word right, but if you're with the writer the whole way through, you should have a general idea of what comes next. Keep practicing, and you'll get really good at this.

6. SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

One last tip: If you learn just one word a day, you'll know hundreds more by the time you take the SAT in your junior or senior year.

[Refer students to **Student Handbook page 15, Building Word Power.**]

Check out these websites for a new word and definition each day. Practice these words in your writing and conversation, and you'll remember them if they turn up on tests later on.

#### IV. WRAP-UP: My PSAT Action Plan (7 minutes)

1. [Write the date and procedure for signing up for the PSAT at your school on the board. Have students copy the information onto their **Student Handbook page 16, PSAT Wrap-Up.**]
2. [Have students complete the remaining questions before dismissing the class.]



**NO! NO!  
NOT THE PSAT!**

**DIRECTIONS:** Use a pencil to fill in the circle next to the letter that gives the best answer for each question.

1) The letters PSAT stand for:

- (A)  Picky School Assessment Tool
- (B)  Preliminary SAT
- (C)  Pencils, Sitting and Torture
- (D)  None of the Above

2) How long does it take to complete the PSAT?

- (A)  About 2 minutes
- (B)  About 2 hours
- (C)  About 2 days
- (D)  About 2 years

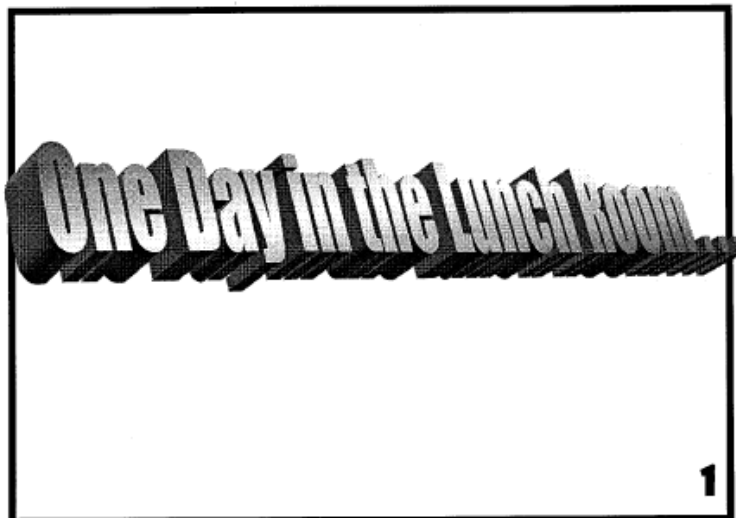
3) When is the PSAT offered?

- (A)  every month
- (B)  once a year, in July
- (C)  once a year, in October
- (D)  only during a total eclipse of the sun

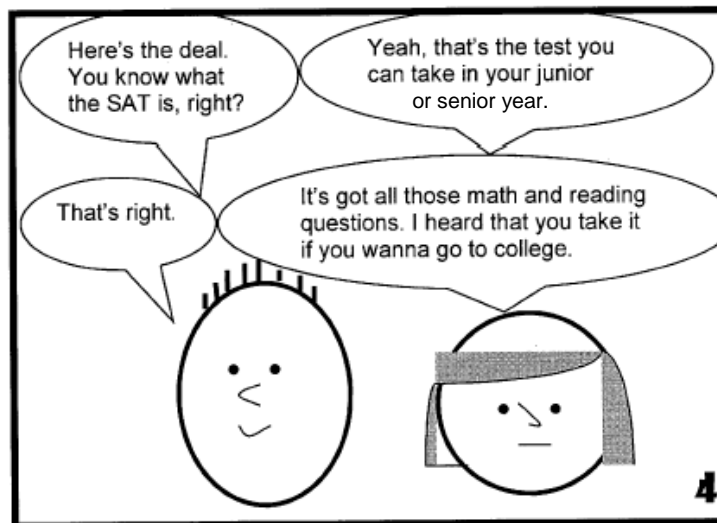
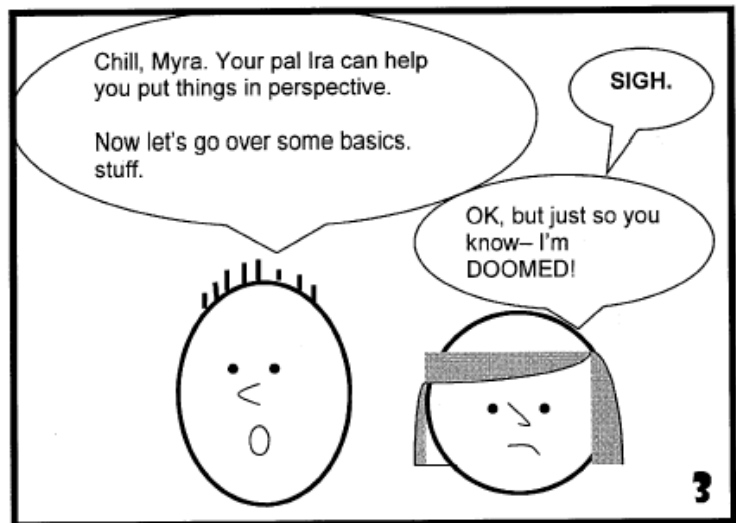
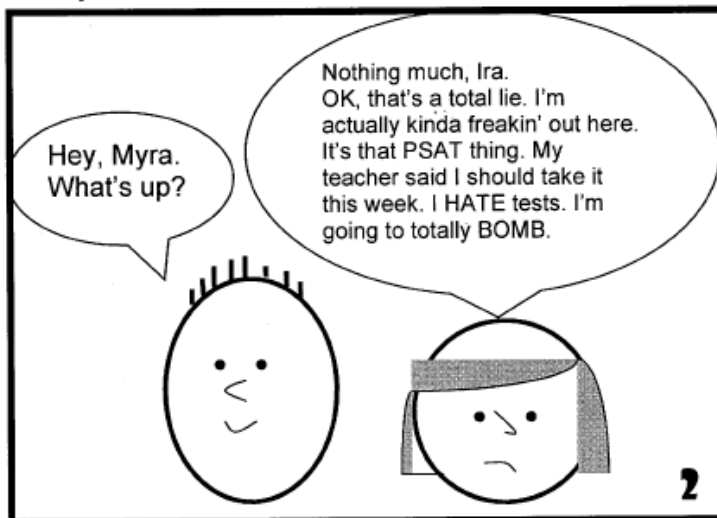
4) What is a good way to prepare for the PSAT?

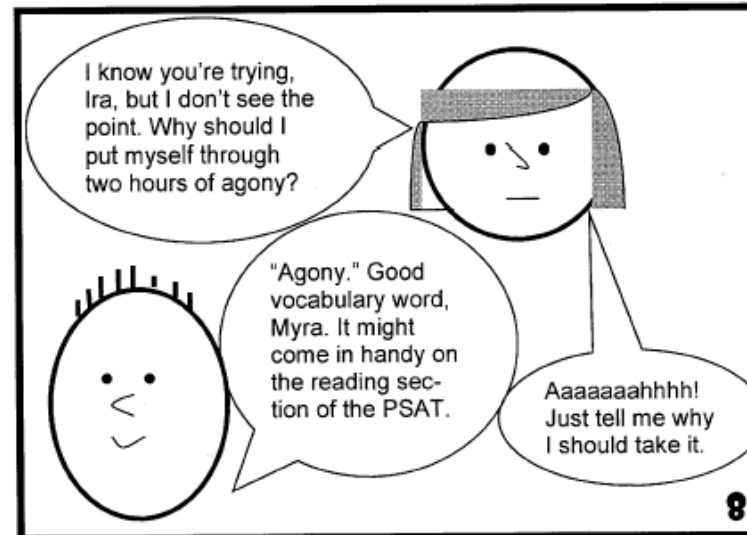
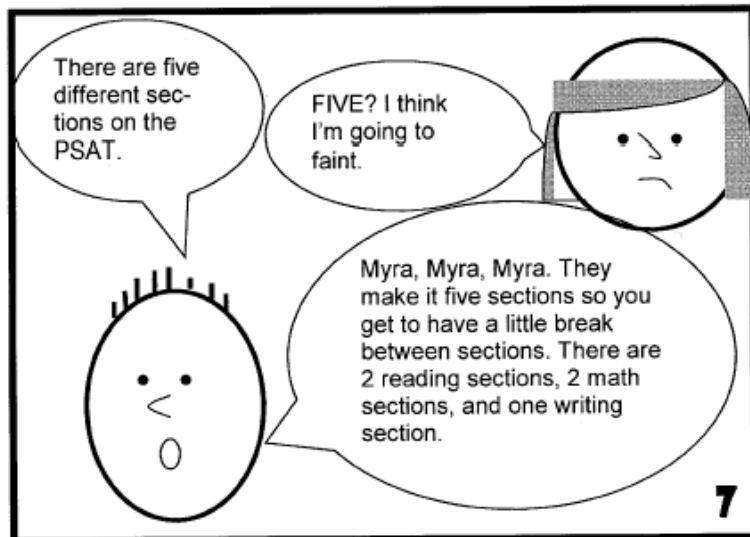
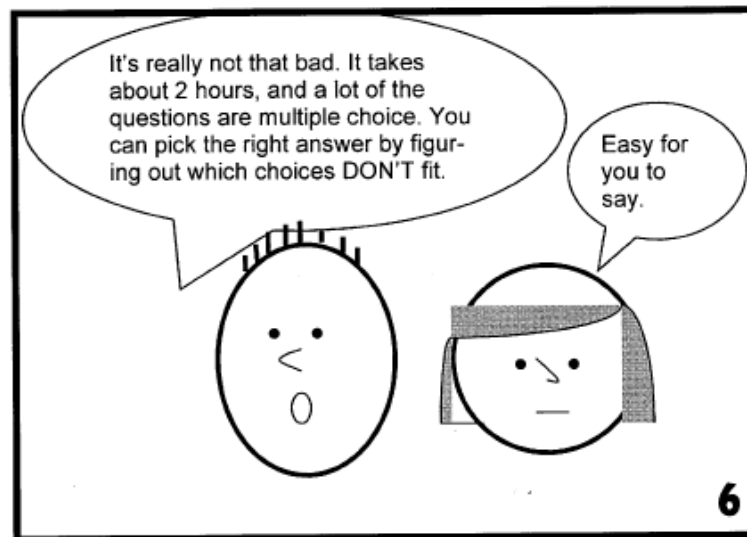
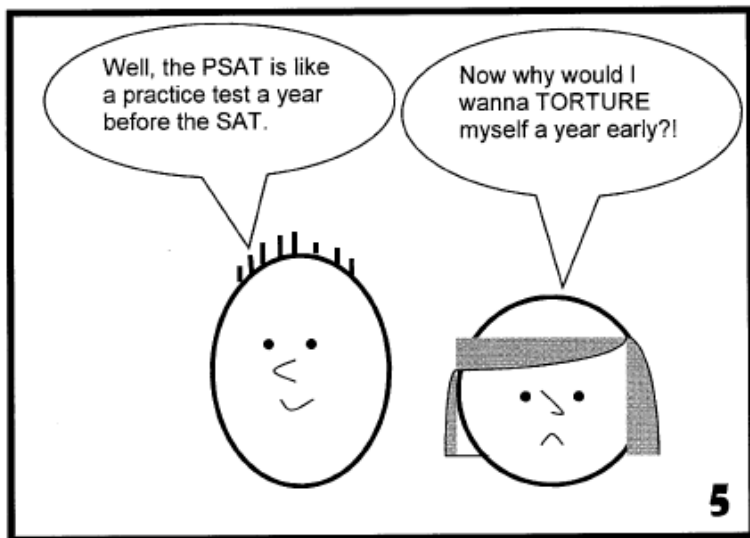
- (A)  pay attention during algebra and geometry classes
- (B)  visit Web sites that help you develop and practice vocabulary
- (C)  take lots and lots of naps
- (D)  both A and B

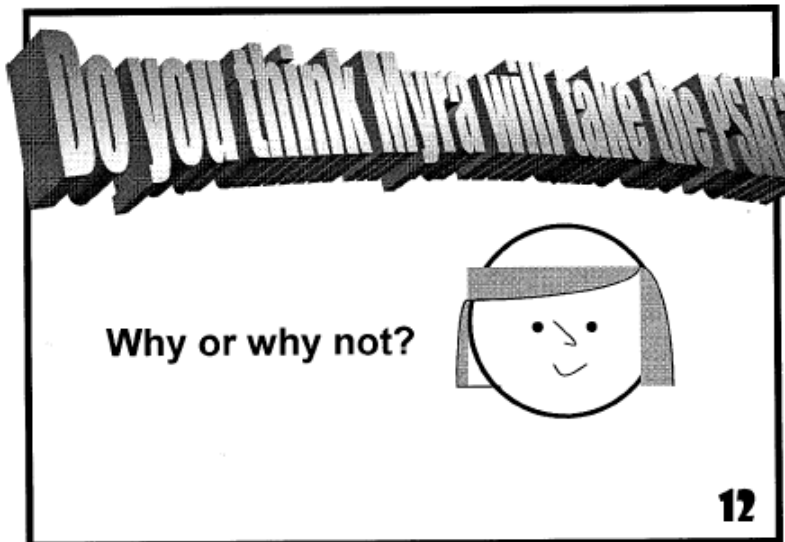
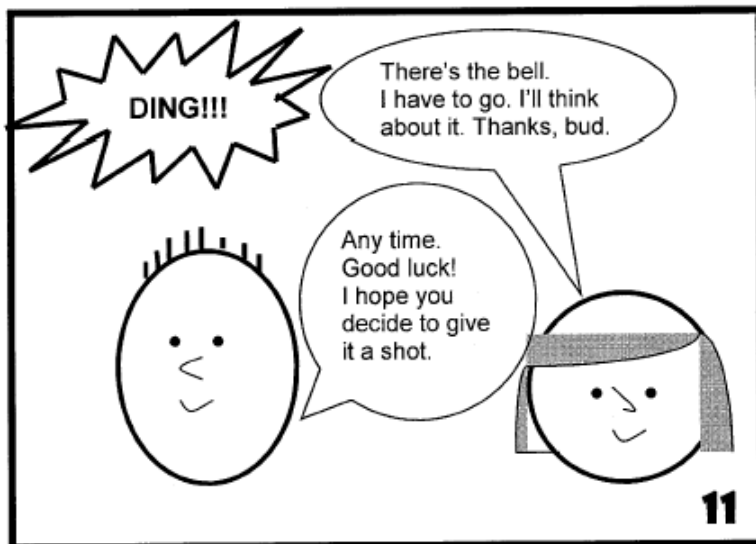
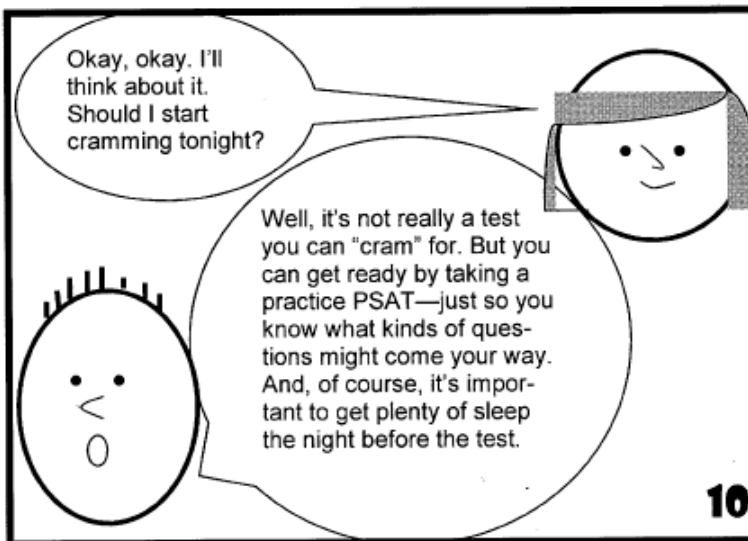
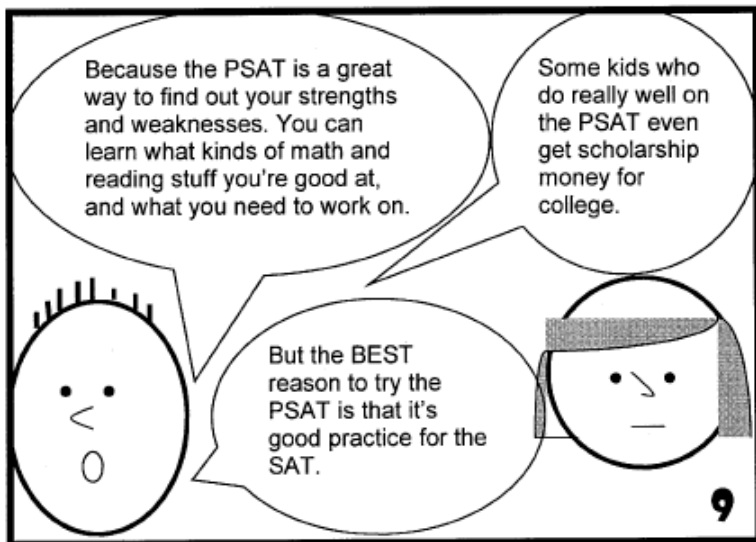




Meet Myra and Ira. She's a sophomore. He's a junior. They've been friends forever.







## Context Clues

**Directions:** Read each passage. Then figure out the meaning of the **vocabulary word** by using the words before and after it.

### Martin Luther King Jr.

"I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream...a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

These were the words of Martin Luther King Jr., a black Baptist minister, speaking at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The occasion was the largest civil rights rally in the history of the United States. More than 200,000 people filled the grassy area around the monument on that sizzling August day in 1963. Since that day the words "I have a dream" have become the **symbol** of Martin Luther King Jr., and his nonviolent efforts to secure justice for black Americans.

- What does the word "symbol" mean in the above paragraph?
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### Mystery Monster

Later, many villagers are sitting around an outdoor fire. I join them. They tell me about their forest home. They tell me about some of the animals that live there.

I learn about a legendary creature. It is a large animal that looks like a man. It has long brown fur and big fangs. They seem afraid of it.

The description sounds familiar, though. I take out a book and show them a picture. It's of the animal they are talking about. It is the rare and beautiful snub-nosed monkey. . .

I tell the villagers that the snub-nosed monkey is the only monkey that lives in these cold mountains. I also tell them that it eats **lichen**, a kind of moss-like plant.

- What does the word "lichen" mean in the above paragraph?
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[Martin Luther King excerpt from Grolier's The New Book of Knowledge, which appears on Scholastic.com  
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/mlk/news/index.asp?article=mlk> ]

[Mystery Monster excerpt from "People of the Misty Mountains" an article from National Geographic.com Kids  
<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngexplorer/0701/articles/mainarticle.html> ]

## GUESS WHAT'S NEXT

Directions: Read each passage, and see if you can figure out what word would come next.

### **Harry Potter And The Sorcerer's Stone**

"The problem was, strange things often happened around Harry and it was just no good telling the Dursleys he didn't make them happen.

Once, Aunt Petunia, tired of Harry coming back from the barbers looking as though he hadn't been at all, had taken a pair of kitchen scissors and cut his hair so short he was almost bald except for his bangs, which she left "to hide that horrible scar." Dudley had laughed himself silly at Harry, who spent a sleepless night imagining school the next day, where he was already laughed at for his baggy clothes and taped glasses. Next morning, however, he had gotten up to find his hair . . ."

- What word or phrase do you think will appear at the top of the next page?
- 

### **Mohammed Ali**

"Champions aren't made in gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them a desire, a dream, a vision. They have to have last-minute stamina, they have to be a little faster, they have to have the skill and the will. But the will must be stronger than the . . ."

- What word or phrase do you think will appear at the top of the next page?
- 

[Excerpt from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling  
<http://www.scholastic.com/harrypotter/books/stone/chapter.htm>

## Building Word Power

Want to build your reading power? Learn a new word each day at any of these websites!

<http://education.yahoo.com/college/wotd/>

Yahoo's WOTD (Word of the Day) has links to a dictionary and thesaurus.

### SAMPLE:

<b>rationale (noun)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>DEFINITION:</b> an underlying reason or explanation</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>EXAMPLE:</b> At first, it seemed strange that several camera companies would freely share their newest technology; but their rationale was that offering one new style of film would benefit them all.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>SYNONYMS:</b> account, excuse</li></ul>

<http://www.number2.com/exams/sat/daily/word/>

This site has a word of the day and lots of other free test prep info.

### SAMPLE:

<b>adhere (verb)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To stick fast or cleave; to hold, be attached; to be in accordance; to agree.</li><li>• In the Middle Ages, those who refused to adhere to the teachings of the church were sometimes condemned as heretics.</li></ul>

<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/students/wordofday/index.html>

From the *New York Times*, this website tells you how many times this word has appeared in recent newspaper articles and gives you an example of its use.

### SAMPLE:

<b>gregarious (adjective)</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>a:</b> tending to associate with c others of one's kind : SOCIAL <b>b:</b> marked by or indicating a liking for companionship : SOCIABLE <b>c :</b> of or relating to a social group</li></ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. <b>a:</b> of a plant : growing in a cluster or a colony <b>b:</b> living in contiguous nests but not forming a true colony -- used especially of wasps and bees</li></ol>

## PSAT Wrap-Up

1. Date the PSAT is given at my school: \_\_\_\_\_

2. How do I sign up for the PSAT?

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3. If I have more questions about the PSAT, who should I ask?

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(or check out the official SAT website, [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com).)

4. List 2 reasons for taking the PSAT.

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5. List 2 things you can do right now to help prepare for the PSAT and SAT.

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**DIRECTIONS:** Use a pencil to fill in the circle next to the letter that gives the best answer for each question.

1) The letters PSAT stand for:

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- (D)  None of the Above

2) How long does it take to complete the PSAT?

- (A)  About 2 minutes
- (B)  About 2 hours
- (C)  About 2 days
- (D)  About 2 years

[The test takes 2 hours and 10 minutes overall. That includes two 25-minute critical reading sections, two 25-minute math sections, and one 30-minute writing skills section.]

3) When is the PSAT offered?

- (A)  every month
- (B)  once a year, in July
- (C)  once a year, in October
- (D)  only during a total eclipse of the sun

[The PSAT is usually offered in October. Students usually take it during the fall of their sophomore or junior year.]

4) What is a good way to prepare for the PSAT?

- (A)  pay attention during algebra and geometry classes
- (B)  visit Web sites that help you develop and practice vocabulary
- (C)  take lots and lots of naps
- (D)  both A and B