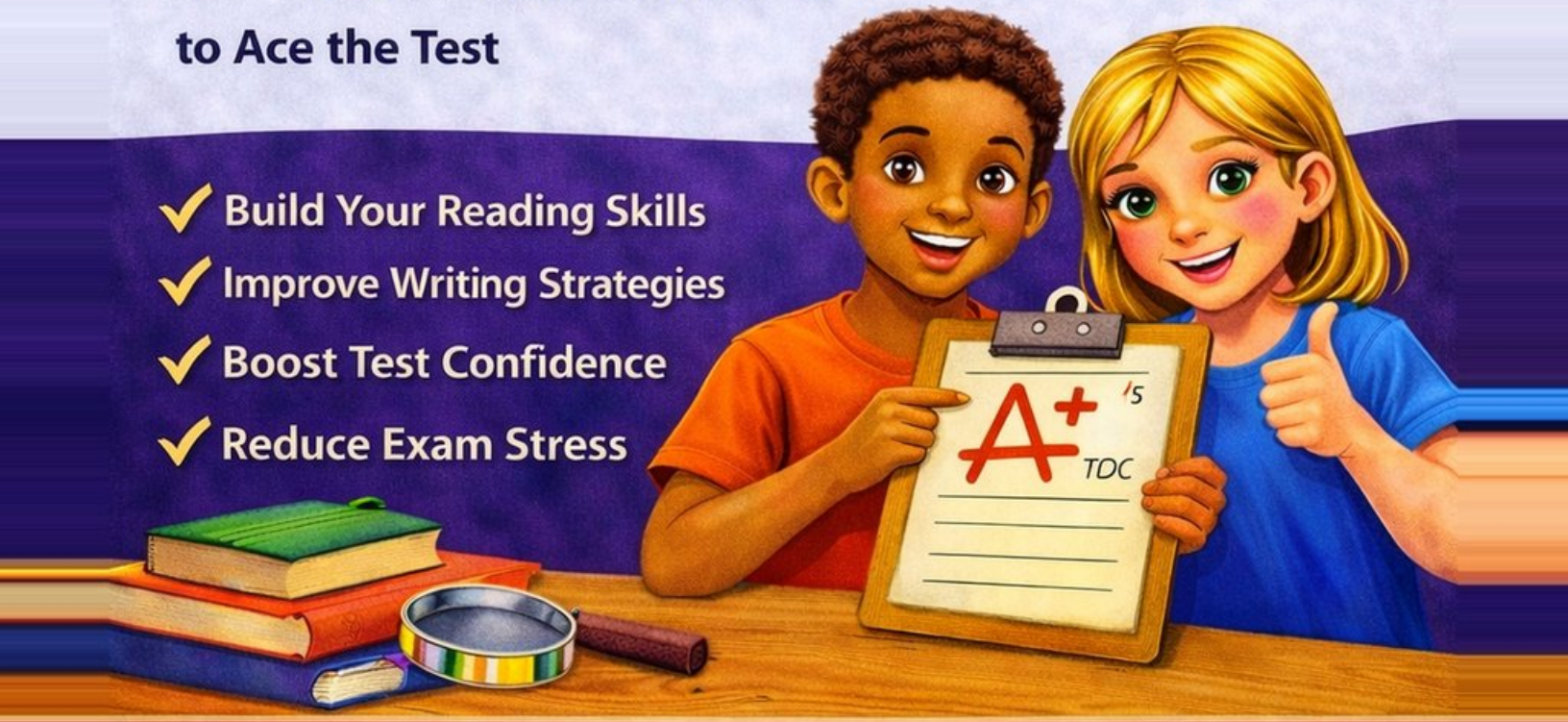
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8 Maryland Grade 8

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Smart Practice

The Difference Between Busy and Better.

Busy practice fills time. Better practice changes you. The quiet truth: the thirty minutes after a test matters more than the ninety minutes of the test itself. That is where real learning lives — in the review, not the rep. Here is what separates a score plateau from a score climb:

✓ Six Moves That Raise Real Scores

1. **Simulate the pressure.** One seat, one timer, no phone, no interruptions. Stamina is its own skill and you can only train it by using it.
2. **Preview the questions, then attack the passage.** Skim the question stems first. That turns reading from passive intake into a directed search.
3. **Annotate with purpose.** Circle transitions (*however*, *therefore*, *in contrast*). Bracket claims. Underline evidence. These marks become your map back to the answer.
4. **Do a miss audit after every test.** Sort your wrong answers into four piles: *knowledge gap*, *careless misread*, *time pressure*, *trap answer*. Each one demands a different fix.
5. **Upgrade one skill per week.** Pick one weakness — inference, vocabulary in context, claim-and-evidence writing — and make it the focus. Narrow practice beats broad review.
6. **Protect sleep like it is part of the test.** Working memory, focus, and stamina all collapse on less than seven hours. You cannot out-study exhaustion.

⋆ The Rewrite Habit

After each test, pick one short response and rewrite it — cleaner claim, tighter evidence, sharper analysis. Do this just three times across this book and your writing will visibly level up. The rewrite, not the first draft, is where eighth-grade writing becomes high-school-ready.

The Big Day

Your Test Day Playbook.

Calm is a skill. This is how to bring it with you.

◯ The Night Before

- Pack everything tonight. Pencils, eraser, water, ID, approved calculator if needed.
- Do light review only — a single short passage. No new material. No all-nighter.
- Eat something familiar. Tonight is not the night to experiment with anything new.
- Phone out of the room an hour before bed. Protect your sleep like it is part of the grade.

◯ The Morning Of

- Eat protein and complex carbs. Skip the sugar spike — the crash comes during the test.
- Move your body for five minutes. Walk, stretch, shake out your hands. Lower the nerves.
- Arrive early enough to settle, not so early that waiting builds up pressure.
- At the door, four slow breaths: *in for four, hold for four, out for six.* It works.

Read the story and the poem. Then answer questions 9–19.

The Greenhouse Key

1 Every Thursday after school, Laila passed the locked greenhouse behind the science wing and glanced through its fogged panels at the rows of plants inside. The place seemed to belong to a separate climate and a separate schedule from the rest of the campus. One afternoon, her biology teacher stopped her in the hallway and handed her a small brass key. The gardening club needed someone to water seedlings over spring break, and everyone else was traveling.

2 On the first day, Laila treated the task as simple maintenance. She followed the checklist, moved carefully between trays, and tried not to disturb anything. But by the third visit, she began noticing differences that had not registered before: one row leaned toward the glass more strongly than another, some soil held moisture longer, and tiny leaves had uncurling patterns she could almost predict. The greenhouse stopped feeling like a room full of identical tasks and started feeling like a set of ongoing conversations.

3 Near the back wall, one flat of tomato seedlings looked weaker than the others. Their stems had stretched thin, and several had tilted sideways. Laila reread the instructions twice, then carried the tray nearer to the brighter bench by the south window. She was not sure whether she was allowed to make changes, but doing nothing suddenly felt less responsible than making a careful adjustment.

4 When her teacher returned, Laila apologized before explaining what she had done. Instead of scolding her, he walked to the bench, studied the seedlings, and smiled. *You noticed what they needed*, he said. For the rest of the afternoon, he asked her more questions than he answered, as if the real lesson was not whether the tomatoes had improved, but whether she could explain why she had moved them.

5 Later, when Laila locked the greenhouse again, the key felt different in her hand. It no longer seemed like permission merely to enter a room. It felt like evidence that attention itself could become a kind of responsibility.

Caretaker

At first I thought the task was only water,
a measured pour,
a list to finish before the light changed.

Then the leaves began speaking in angles,
in color,
in the slow grammar of turning toward what they lacked.

Now I know care is not only doing what was written.
It is noticing when the living thing asks for more.

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9) What does the word *uncurling* suggest in paragraph 2 of the story?

(A) drying out from too much heat
(B) opening gradually from a folded shape
(C) breaking from the stem
(D) changing color overnight

Use the story and poem to answer this question.

10) How does Laila change over the course of the story?

(A) She moves from following instructions mechanically to understanding care as observation and judgment.
(B) She begins confident about gardening and ends overwhelmed by it.
(C) She decides the greenhouse should stay locked permanently.
(D) She loses interest once spring break is over.

Use the story and poem to answer this question.

11) Which statement best expresses a theme of the story?

(A) Rules should always be ignored when a person feels uncertain.
(B) Real responsibility involves noticing needs, not just completing assigned steps.
(C) Plants grow best when moved often.
(D) Teachers should avoid giving students independent work.

Use the story and poem to answer this question.

12) What does the author suggest by saying the greenhouse became a set of ongoing conversations in paragraph 2?

(A) Laila started talking aloud to the plants every day.
(B) The gardening club met there after school every afternoon.
(C) The plants communicated their needs through patterns Laila learned to notice.
(D) The teacher was giving Laila instructions through hidden speakers.