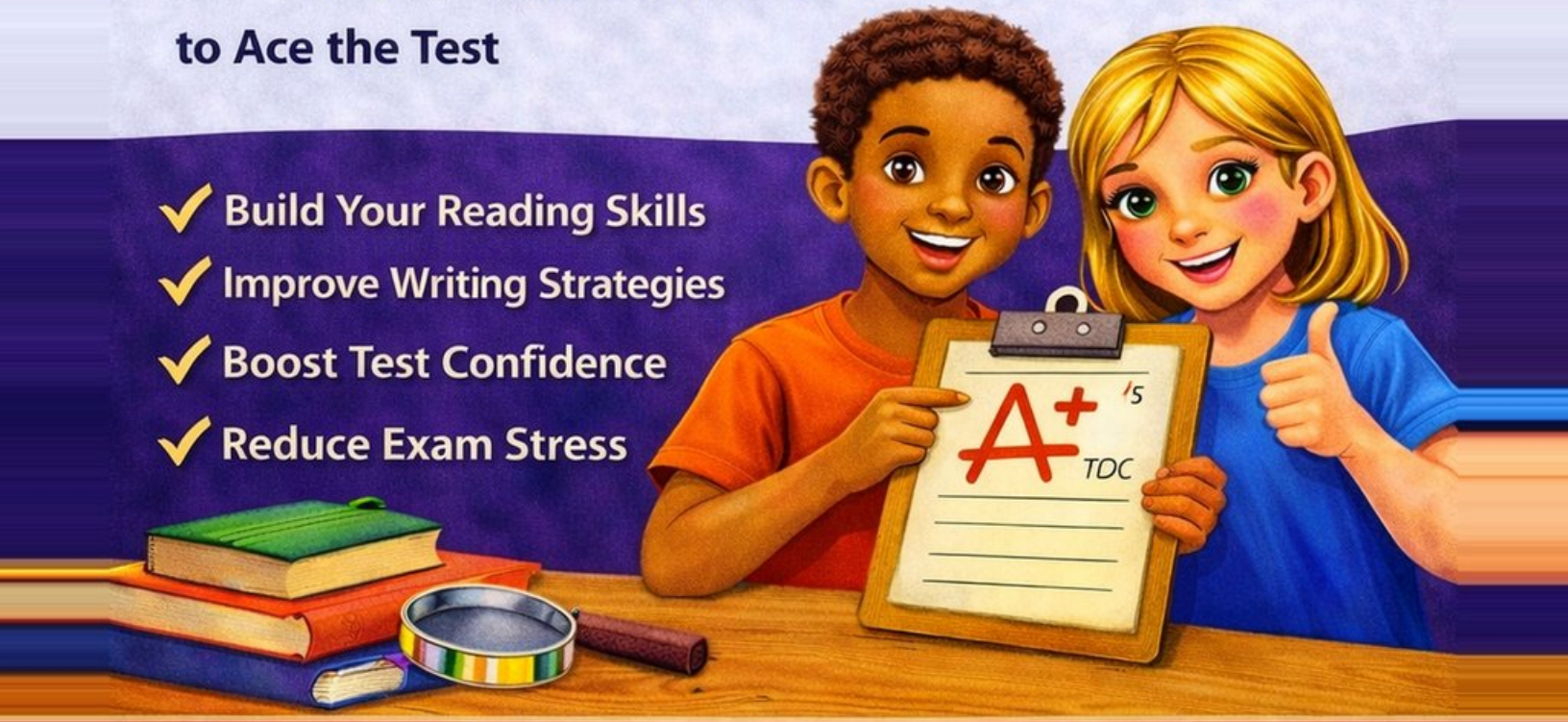
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Smart Practice

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 Pantry Ledger

1 On her first Saturday volunteering at the neighborhood pantry, Priya expected to spend most of the morning carrying boxes from the delivery van to the shelves. She did not expect the coordinator to seat her beside a clipboard ledger and ask her to track what left the storeroom every half hour. The assignment sounded less useful than lifting crates. Priya wanted to help with movement, not handwriting.

2 By midmorning, though, the list had begun to reveal things the shelves alone did not show. Rice disappeared faster than pasta. A certain kind of canned soup was requested again and again by families with older relatives. One volunteer kept searching three different bins for cooking oil because no one had updated the label after last week's reorganization. What looked at first like a page of numbers was becoming a map of strain points.

3 When the coordinator checked in, Priya pointed out the repeated delays around the oil shelf. Instead of simply nodding, the coordinator asked her to walk through the room and see what else the ledger suggested. Priya noticed that the entry table often backed up when bags were packed before fresh produce arrived, which meant volunteers had to open and repack them. She also saw that one corner shelf stayed too empty because people assumed it held only extras, even when it contained common items.

4 That afternoon, the coordinator rearranged several shelves and rewrote the signs with Priya's notes beside her. The changes were not dramatic. Still, by closing time, fewer volunteers were doubling back across the room, and the line at the entry table moved more steadily. Priya realized that the ledger had helped her see the pantry as a system rather than a pile of supplies.

Scan Me

5 As she clipped the final sheet onto the stack, Priya no longer thought of the clipboard as the least important object in the room. It had become a way of listening to motion, delay, and need. In a place built around providing food quickly and respectfully, that kind of noticing felt like work worth doing.

Stockroom

Not every useful thing is heavy.
Some service travels as a mark in a margin,
a line beside the item that vanished first.

The shelf speaks in absence,
the hallway in backtracking steps,
the waiting table in bags packed twice.

To count well is not to stand apart from the work.
It is to notice where the work keeps catching.

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9) What does the phrase *strain points* most likely mean as it is used in paragraph 2 of the story?

(A) places where the pantry's workflow is experiencing stress or inefficiency
(B) heavy boxes that volunteers should lift carefully
(C) shelves built from weak materials
(D) arguments between pantry visitors and staff

Use the story and poem to answer this question.

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

(A) She begins experienced in logistics and ends disappointed by the pantry's disorganization.
(B) She decides the pantry should stop tracking inventory entirely.
(C) She wants to work in the storeroom but is reassigned to the entry table.
(D) She moves from seeing record-keeping as less helpful than physical labor to understanding how it can improve the whole pantry system.

Use the story and poem to answer this question.

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

(A) Physical labor matters more than planning in community work.
(B) The quickest way to help is usually the most visible one.
(C) Pantries should avoid changing labels once shelves are organized.
(D) Careful observation can improve a system even when the work appears quiet or indirect.

Use the story and poem to answer this question.

12) In paragraph 4, what does the author suggest by saying the changes were not dramatic?

(A) The pantry refused to use most of Priya's suggestions.
(B) The coordinator did not trust Priya's notes enough to act on them.
(C) Small adjustments can still make a meaningful difference in how a system works.
(D) Visitors did not notice any improvement in the pantry.