

Introduction to the ACT Plan

The **BIG** Idea

- What is the ACT PLAN, and why should I take it?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

- I. Warm Up (10 minutes)
- II. The ACT Plan Comic Book (15 minutes)
- III. Preparing for the ACT Plan (15 minutes)
- IV. Wrap Up: My ACT Plan Action Plan (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

☐ STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:

- Student Handbook page 44, Previewing the ACT Plan
- Student Handbook pages 45-47, ACT Plan Comic Book
- Student Handbook pages 48-49, Important ACT Plan Information
- Student Handbook page 50, Context Clues
- Student Handbook page 51, Guess What's Next
- Student Handbook pages 52-53, Building Word Power
- Student Handbook page 54, ACT Plan Wrap-Up

☐ FACILITATOR PAGES:

- Facilitator Resource 1, Answer Key: Previewing the ACT Plan

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, student(s) will:

- List at least two reasons for taking the ACT PLAN, such as:
 - * Prepare for the ACT, an important part of college applications process.
 - * Find out what math and reading skills students will need to work on during high school.
- Describe the procedure for signing up at his/her school and know when the ACT PLAN is given.
- Describe two things besides taking the ACT PLAN that a sophomore in high school can do to prepare for future standardized tests like the ACT, such as:
 - * Read more novels, non-fiction books, and longer magazine articles.
 - * Visit vocabulary-building websites.
 - * Make learning algebra a priority, and go to tutoring if needed.

OVERVIEW

Students learn what the ACT PLAN is, and discover some compelling reasons for taking it. After reading a comic strip that presents some basic information about the ACT PLAN (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.

In the second lesson of this unit, students will become familiar with the format of the ACT PLAN and will describe strategies for answering each type of question.

The third lesson of this unit covers post-high school tests. The purpose of this lesson is to help students recognize that even if they are not planning on attending college, they may be required to take standardized tests to get a job or be promoted.

[NOTE: Most four- and two-year colleges require that students submit scores from a standardized test. In almost all cases, colleges will accept either the SAT or the ACT. If high schools in your area focus on the PSAT rather than the ACT PLAN, use the alternate version of this lesson.]

PREPARATION

- Write the **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- In advance of this lesson, speak to your school counselor so that you can inform your students of the procedures for signing up for the ACT PLAN and the official test date. Your school counselor can also tell you if there is a per-student fee. (Sometimes testing costs are paid by a school district or state.)
- Make an overhead transparency of **Student Handbook pages 48-49, Important ACT PLAN Information**, including the current fee, if any.
- You may wish to review the information found on the ACT PLAN website (www.actstudent.org/plan/index.html).
- You may wish to write the questions below on chart paper or on the board. As each question is addressed in the lesson, you can check it off to help students keep track of what's been covered.

Questions:

1. What is the ACT PLAN?
2. What are some reasons I should take it?
3. What is on the test?
4. How long does the test last?
5. Can you cram for the ACT PLAN?
6. What are some ways that I can prepare for the ACT PLAN and the ACT?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

DO NOW:

If you prefer, you may choose to use **Student Handbook page 44, Previewing the ACT PLAN**, as a DO NOW. Give the students four minutes to answer the questions. Once the students have completed their quiz, go over the answers and then begin with the discussion in the Warm Up.

You may wish to write the questions below on chart paper or on the board. As each question is addressed in the lesson, you can check it off to help students keep track of what's been covered.

Questions:

1. What is the ACT PLAN?
2. What are some reasons I should take it?
3. What is on the test?
4. How long does the test last?
5. Can you cram for the ACT PLAN?
6. What are some ways that I can prepare for the ACT PLAN and the ACT?

For **Activity II, The ACT PLAN Comic Book**, you may choose to have your students read the comic in pairs. Give each pair a sticky note and instruct students to write down at least one fact they learned about the ACT PLAN from the comic. Students can post their notes on a piece of chart paper or the board. Once all of the pairs have completed the reading, you can bring the class together to review the key information listed on their sticky notes.

All activities in **Activity III, Preparing for the ACT PLAN**, 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 52-53, Building Word Power** with them so they can access websites from home.

ACTIVITY STEPS

I. WARM UP (10 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 ACT?

[Students respond.]

The ACT is a test that many colleges use to help them compare students from many different high schools. If the college can only enroll 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 ACT PLAN in your sophomore year.

If you’ve never even heard of the ACT PLAN or ACT, 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 ACT PLAN?
- What are some reasons I should take it?
- What is on the test?

- How long does the test last?
 - Can you cram for the ACT PLAN?
 - What are some ways that I can prepare for the ACT PLAN and the ACT?
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now you're going to try two sample ACT PLAN questions: one math and one reading. 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. Don't worry if the questions seem hard. Next class you're going to learn strategies to help you on the ACT PLAN.

[Refer students to **Student Handbook page 44, Previewing the ACT PLAN**. Give students 4 minutes to complete it. Go over the answers, having students correct their own papers.]

II. The ACT PLAN Comic Book (15 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** If you're worried about the ACT PLAN, you're not alone. Many students get nervous about standardized tests like the ACT PLAN and the ACT. But as with most 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 45-47, ACT PLAN Comic Book**.]

To find out more about the ACT PLAN, 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. Recommend that the students read the comic strip in a theatrical way. (See **Implementation Options** for suggestions.)]

2. After reading the comic, **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Do you think Myra will take the ACT PLAN? 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 some reasons for taking the ACT PLAN? [Students respond.]

(Reasons to take the ACT PLAN include: preparing for the ACT; learning what math and reading skills you need to work on during high school.)

III. Preparing for the ACT PLAN (15 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Like Ira said in the comic, the ACT PLAN 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 four sections you're guaranteed to see on the ACT PLAN. Any idea what those four subjects are? [Students respond.] That's right – English, Math, Science and Reading.

[Put **Student Handbook pages 48-49, Important ACT PLAN Information** on an overhead or rewrite it on chart paper. Instruct students to turn to this page in their Student Handbook.]

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 50, 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 what you already know to figure out what the bolded word means.

[After 3 minutes,] **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:**

What does the word "symbol" mean in other situations? Name a symbol from a context other than this paragraph, for example, a symbol for peace or love.

[Allow students a chance to respond. Then explain that in this article, "symbol" means "something that stands for something else." In this passage, the words "I have a dream" make people think of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the struggle for civil rights.]

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 50, 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 word "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 51, 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 words to expect when you turn the page.

[Let students read the excerpt on their own 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, and then raise your hand if you know the word that will be next when you turn the page.

How did you figure it out?

The exact word is skill. Ali, who was a very poetic speaker, uses “the skill and the will” in the second to last sentence. When he connects the last two sentences using the word ‘but,’ he contradicts or changes what he said before. He’s using “skill and will” again, but saying that one needs to be stronger than the other. Earlier in the passage, Ali clearly states his belief that one’s desire or will to succeed is more important than one’s physical abilities or skills.

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 ACT in your junior or senior year.

[Refer students to **Student Handbook pages 52-53, 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 ACT PLAN Action Plan (5 minutes)

1. [Write the date and procedure for signing up for the ACT PLAN at your school on the board. Have students copy the information onto their **Student Handbook page 54, ACT PLAN Wrap-Up.**]
2. [Have students complete the remaining questions before dismissing the class.]

PREVIEWING THE ACT PLAN ANSWER KEY

SAMPLE MATH QUESTION

Directions: Read the question below and fill in the circle next to the letter that gives the best answer.

1) Mark bought 3 shirts at a clothing store. Two of the shirts were priced at 2 for \$15.00. If the average cost of the 3 shirts was \$8.00, how much did Mark pay for the third shirt?

- (A) \$7.00
- (B) \$7.67
- (C) \$8.50
- (D) \$9.00
- (E) \$16.50

Explanation: It can help to think about what answer is logical before doing the calculations. Two of the shirts are 2 for \$15, or \$7.50 each. If the average price is \$8, the third shirt must cost more than \$8.00. Now you do the calculations to see which is correct.

$$\text{average cost} = \frac{\text{total cost of all shirts}}{\text{number of shirts}}$$

$$8 = \frac{15 + x}{3}$$

$$3 \times 8 = 15 + x$$

$$24 = 15 + x$$

$$24 - 15 = x$$

$$x = 9$$

SAMPLE ENGLISH QUESTION

Directions: Read the paragraph below and determine the best alternative for the underlined words. You are to choose the one that best expresses the idea and makes the statement appropriate for standard English.

2) D. W. Griffith and the Art of the Close-Up

[1] It took the genius of D. W. Griffith to change this method of filming. [2] When we watch this proposal scene, he argued, our eyes move. [3] We watch the expressions on the faces of the characters; we look at the hands as the man presented the engagement ring to the woman.

- (A) NO CHANGE
- (B) presents
- (C) having presented
- (D) has presented

Explanation: The underlined word must match the tense of the other verbs in the sentence: We watch. We look. The man presents.

SOURCE: <http://actstudent.org/plan/tips/index.html> (Sample Test Questions)

PREVIEWING THE ACT PLAN

SAMPLE MATH QUESTION

Directions: Read the question below and fill in the circle next to the letter that gives the best answer.

- 1) If you have gone 4.8 miles in 24 minutes, what was your average speed, in miles per hour?
- (A) 5.0
 - (B) 10.0
 - (C) 12.0
 - (D) 19.2
 - (E) 50.0

SAMPLE ENGLISH QUESTION

Directions: Read the paragraph below and determine the best alternative for the underlined words. You are to choose the one that best expresses the idea and makes the statement appropriate for standard English.

2) Bessie Coleman: In Flight

After the final performance of one last practice landing, the French instructor nodded to the young African-American woman at the controls and jumped down to the ground. Bessie Coleman was on her own. She lined up the nose of the open cockpit biplane on the runway's center mark, gave the engine full throttle, and took off into history.

- (A) NO CHANGE
- (B) one finally ultimate
- (C) one final
- (D) one last final

One Day in the Lunch Room

1

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

Hey, Myra. What's up?

Nothing much, Ira. OK, that's a total lie. I'm actually kinda freakin' out here. It's that ACT PLAN thing. I HATE Tests. I'm going to totally BOMB.

2

Chill, Myra. Your pal Ira can help you put things in perspective.

Now let's go over some basic stuff.

SIGH.

OK, but just so you know—I'm DOOMED!

3

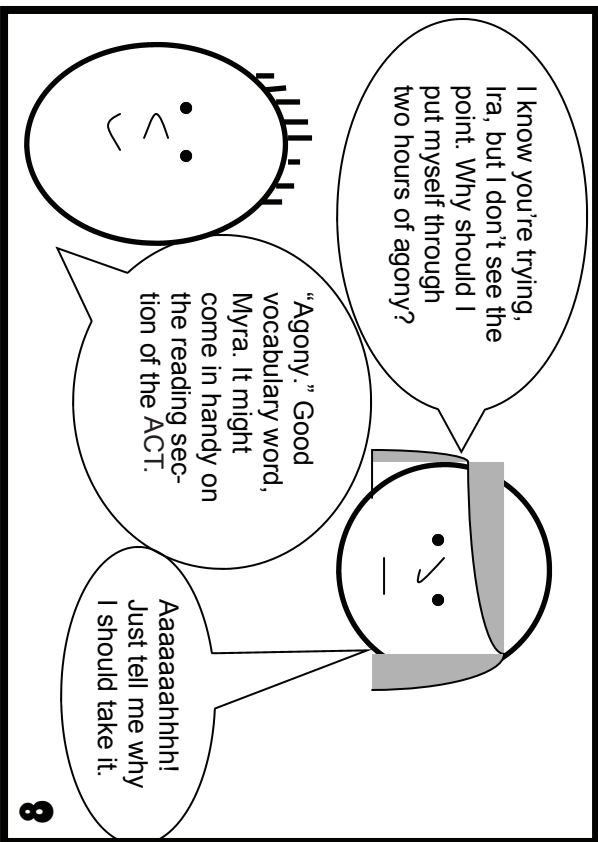
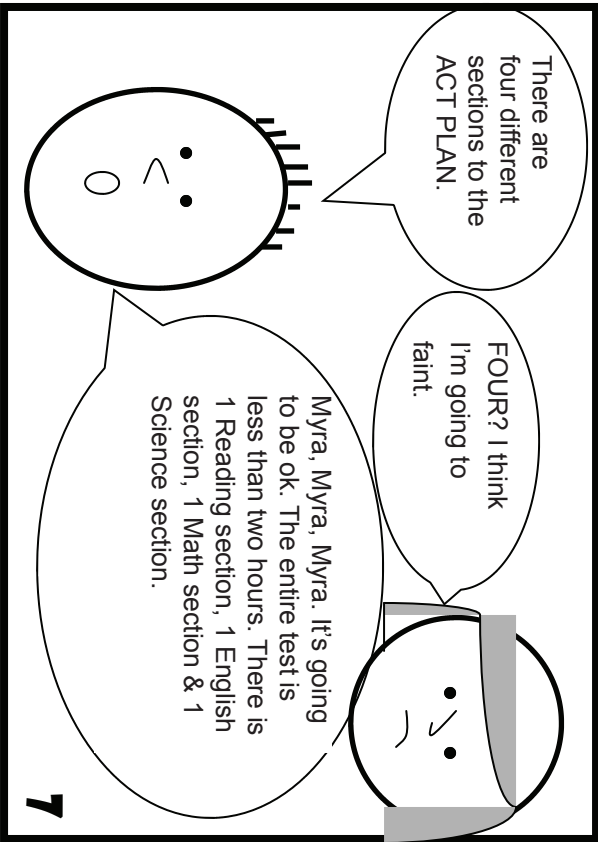
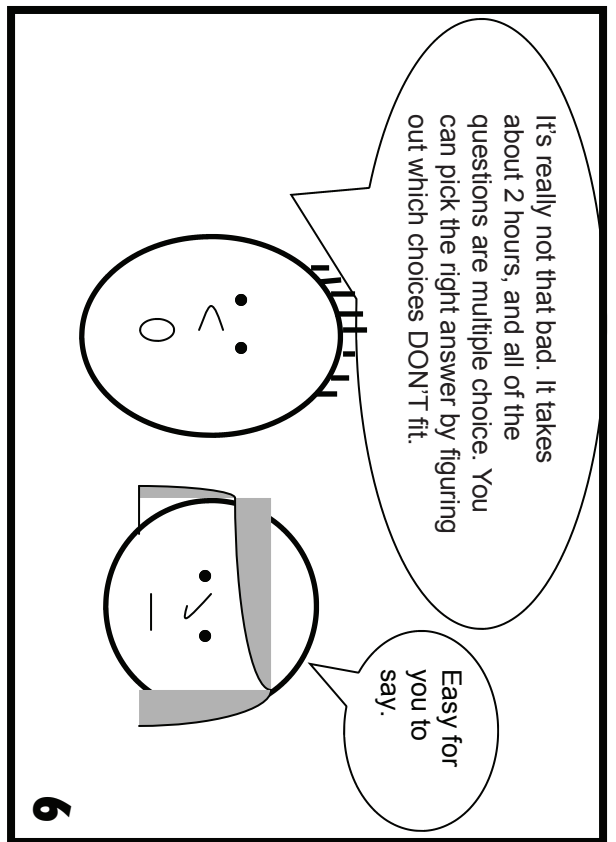
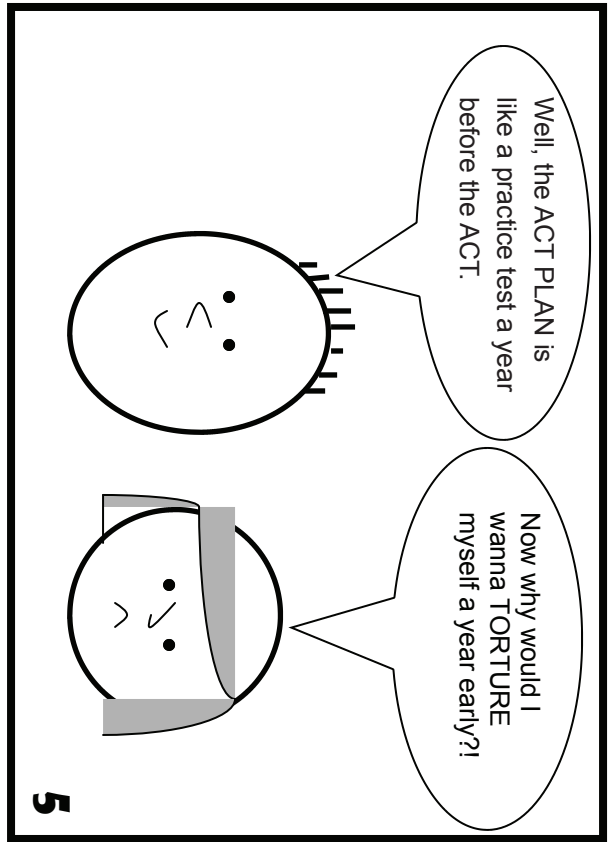
Here's the deal. You know what the ACT is, right?

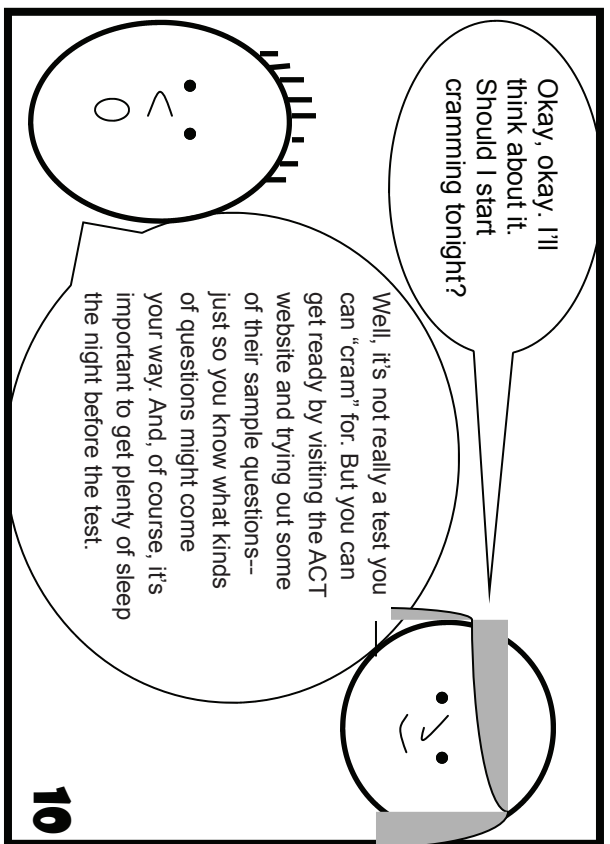
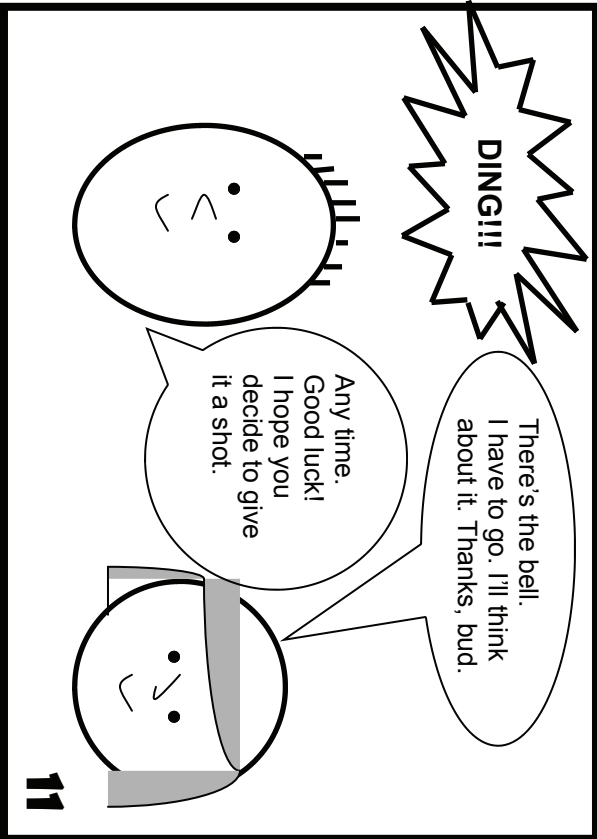
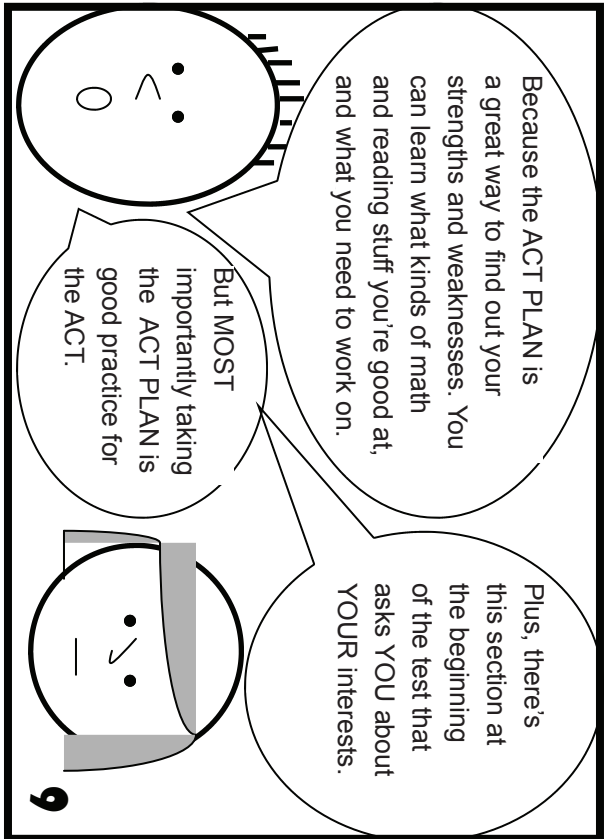
Yeah, that's the test you can take in your junior or senior year.

That's right.

It's got all those math and reading questions. I heard that you take it if you wanna go to college.

4





IMPORTANT ACT PLAN INFORMATION

What's On the Test?

The ACT PLAN includes 4 sections:

- One 30-minute English section
- One 40-minute Math section
- One 20-minute Reading section
- One 25-minute Science section
- The entire test lasts for 1 hour and 55 minutes.

1. ENGLISH TEST

This section has 50 questions:

- This section consists of 4 prose passages, each followed by several multiple-choice questions.
- Prose is a fancy word that refers to writing that is not poetry. Anything that is not poetry is prose (e.g., fiction, biography, non-fiction, news articles).

2. MATH

This section has 40 questions:

- 22 pre-algebra/algebra questions
- 18 geometry questions
- All questions are multiple choice.
- You may use a calculator in this section.

3. READING TEST

This section includes 25 questions:

- There are 3 prose passages, each followed by several multiple-choice questions.

3. SCIENCE TEST

This section includes 30 questions:

- This section is made up of five sets of scientific information: 2 in research summaries, 2 in data representations, and 1 in conflicting viewpoints format.
- You may NOT use a calculator in this section.

DATES

- The ACT PLAN is given in fall of 10th grade. Your school counselor will have information on the exact test date at your school.
- You must sign up for the ACT PLAN at your school. The test is given at your high school. (There is no online registration for the ACT PLAN.)
- The fee for the ACT PLAN is _____.

CALCULATOR USE

Important Tips:

- Take a calculator you are comfortable with.
- Practice sample questions with your calculator on hand.
- You will not be allowed to share calculators with other students.
- You are allowed to use most four-function, scientific, or graphic calculators.

Below is a list of types of calculators you are NOT allowed to use:

- Pocket organizers or laptop computers
- Calculator that makes noises or “talks”
- Electronic writing pad or pen-input devices
- Cell phone calculators or other electronic communication devices
- Calculators with built-in computer algebra systems

Please check in advance of the test for the most current information.

ADAPTED FROM: <http://actstudent.org/plan/tests/index.html>

Context Clues

Directions: Read each passage. Then figure out the meaning of the bolded **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?
-

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?
-

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 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 next?
-

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 next?
-

Harry Potter excerpt from Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone by J.K. Rowling, Scholastic Inc., 2008

Mohammed Ali's excerpt from Quotation Collection <http://www.quotationcollection.com/quotation/14/quote>

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:

rationale (noun)	
•	DEFINITION: an underlying reason or explanation
•	EXAMPLE: 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.
•	SYNONYMS: account, excuse

<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:

adhere (verb)	
•	To stick fast or cleave; to hold, be attached; to be in accordance; to agree.
•	In the Middle Ages, those who refused to adhere to the teachings of the church were sometimes condemned as heretics.

<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:

gregarious (adjective)	
1.	a: tending to associate with others of one's kind : SOCIAL b: marked by or indicating a liking for companionship : SOCIABLE c : of or relating to a social group
2.	a: of a plant : growing in a cluster or a colony b: living in contiguous nests but not forming a true colony -- used especially of wasps and bees

EXAMPLE FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

The word gregarious has appeared in 122 Times articles over the past year, most recently in **"Intrigue on an Ill-Fated Train, Moscow-Bound"** on July 18, 2008.

..."Transsiberian" is a handsomely remodeled variation of a cherished genre you might call the mystery-train movie. Updated by the director Brad Anderson ("The Machinist"), who wrote the screenplay with Will Conroy, it skillfully manipulates familiar tropes: innocents abroad, ominous glowering foreigners, conspiracy and duplicity, erotic intrigue. Until it fizzles in an anticlimactic train crash, it is extremely entertaining...

...Into this human clutter arrive Roy (Woody Harrelson) and Jessie (Emily Mortimer), a naïve American couple returning to the United States from China where they have been teaching English as part of a church-sponsored charity program. There are ominous portents. Early in the trip they are regaled with the story of a passenger from whom a corrupt Russian policeman extorted thousands of dollars and cut off two toes because the name on his passport was misspelled.

Roy is a chirping parody of the **gregarious** American abroad. Jessie, an amateur photographer, is a reformed bad girl with a history of drug and alcohol abuse. Roy met her when she had hit rock bottom and stood by her during her recovery...

ACT PLAN Wrap-Up

1. Year given: _____

2. How many sections make up the ACT PLAN?

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

4. List 2 reasons for taking the ACT PLAN.

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

For more information, check out: www.act.org