

# Bookstore Founder Starts Testing Fundamentals Program

**“There is a direct relationship between time spent teaching test-taking strategies and subsequent gains in achievement test scores.” Berliner (1986)**

When Robin Cohen started her first bookstore in 1991, little did she realize that fifteen years later, the Schoolwide Student-Run Bookstores would be so important to students and teachers across the country. Back then, she couldn't have known that Schoolwide, Inc., the company founded and run by her son, Jess Cohen, would be so successful. And she also could not have foreseen that she'd be back in the "business" this year heading up the development of Testing Fundamentals, a test preparation program that uses trade books to help teachers prepare students for the rigors of test-taking.

## The Bookstore

Robin's first bookstore began in her classroom with a lending library. Over time, books began "disappearing"; she started a fine system. For every book that wasn't returned, she charged students \$1 or \$1.50. But this didn't stop the disappearances. In fact, Robin began to see that the books students had "paid" for were cropping up during reading time at school—peeking out of backpacks and pockets. When she asked students what was going on, they told her: they paid for the books, so now they owned them. She immediately saw the connection between her disappearing lending library and the need of her students to own their own books. Many had no means to purchase their own books, prohibited either by cost or by convenience. Book clubs put books in the hands of her students, but the time from order to receipt was often too long for students to wait—their interest changed too quickly—and the act of browsing for something perfect was impossible. For younger students, especially, the wait was too hard. Robin needed a bookstore for the students.



A teacher and students celebrate their bookstore!

She asked her principal, who suggested writing a grant; she wrote a grant proposal; she got the grant funding. At her next school, the parents backed this worthy endeavor . . . and the Student-Run Bookstore model was born. Schoolwide is now working toward getting hundreds of bookstores in place across the country. Over the years, the bookstore has been featured in several national magazines including *American Educator* and *Parade Magazine*. (Contact Stephanie Klempner for more information on Schoolwide's Student-Run Bookstores and opportunities for your school to win a grant to open a bookstore for free, visit the web site: <http://www.schoolwide.com/pages/winafree.htm>; email Stephanie at [sklempner@schoolwide.com](mailto:sklempner@schoolwide.com).)

## Teacher/Staff Developer/Curriculum Designer

After working for eight years as a primary teacher of grades K–2, Robin became a reading teacher/staff developer for five years. For the last six years, Robin was a test-preparation specialist. In that position, she worked on designing instruction to connect test-taking skills to reading comprehension. For many years, she was a key player in determining staff development and curriculum for her district. Recently, she won the New York State Teacher of the Year award. She is now retired and is sought after by many districts for her expertise. Schoolwide is thrilled to have her onboard to work on developing the Testing Fundamentals Program for grades 3 and 4 (forthcoming). But even in retirement, with Testing Fundamentals as a focus, Robin has been

working on a major book (coming soon) on what primary grade teachers can do to support and teach students what they need to develop test-taking strategies in the later grades. The book will include a series of literacy lessons that directly connect to reading, writing, and test-taking skill acquisition.

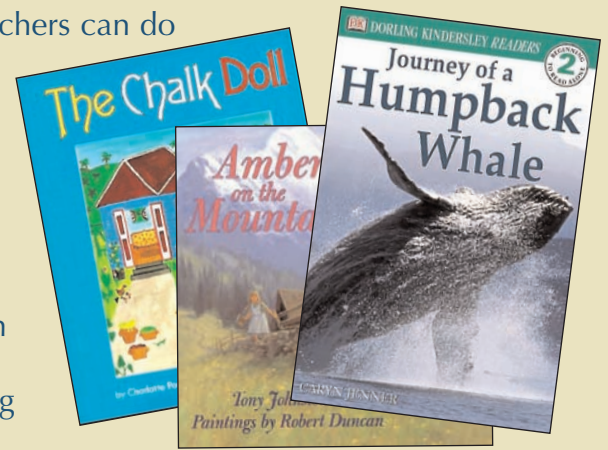
## Testing Fundamentals

Helping to create a groundbreaking test preparation program, Robin is leading a nationally experienced team of writers and developers, including a team of testing-writing experts specializing in combining children's literature with test preparation (headed by Karen Smith).

There are currently two units of study in development: one for third grade and one for fourth grade. A key component of the development/design is a focus on how reading strategies directly connect to test preparation, a link many students are unaware of but need to know to become savvy about test-taking. The program teaches students how reading comprehension strategies relate to test-taking skills while using quality trade books, an important feature of the program. Each unit comes with books for teaching whole-group lessons, small-group instruction, and practice on short and longer tests (visit Schoolwide Online for more information: [www.schoolwideonline.com](http://www.schoolwideonline.com)).

Units of study begin with a reading of all trade books from which teaching strategies will be taken. Then, sections of lessons will cover various kinds of typical questions students encounter in tests: vocabulary, literal, main idea, and inferential. Each of the lessons in Testing Fundamentals covers some very basic areas of instruction. The following are the parts of a typical lesson:

- *Rationale:* The rationale is the learning objective, stating the basic understanding the students gain from the lesson.
- *Preparation:* Each lesson contains a list of the materials and the basic instructions a teacher will need to teach the lesson.
- *Teaching:* This feature includes lesson-explicit, whole-class instruction with the lesson's instructional goal as a focus. The substance of the lesson comes from what is known about teaching reading comprehension and the connection to critical skills necessary for proficient performance on tests. From a multi-state analysis of the types of passages and questions presented to students during testing situations, design of teaching and other materials has moved forward. Each lesson models teaching language that can be used to teach the lesson or to guide the teacher's adaptation to meet specific student needs. The teaching portion of each lesson includes the following subsections:
  - ✓ "Inform" lets the teacher inform the students, as explicitly as possible, about what they will be learning during the lesson, including the necessary background knowledge needed to comprehend the text they will be working with.
  - ✓ "Present" is the part of the lesson in which teachers model the strategy with a passage or passages from a trade book. Students learn the details of the strategy.
  - ✓ "Engage" is the portion of the lesson during which students actively apply the strategy. Students participate in guided practice and engage in a variety of ways working individually, in pairs, in small groups.
  - ✓ "Practice" links the lesson to the requirements and format of an actual test—students work through questions, further applying what they have just learned. Authentic children's literature is used to



Featured books in the Testing Fundamentals Program.

formulate questions.

- ✓ “Additional Support” offers teachers ideas for providing additional instruction to students who appear to need more guidance in mastering the strategy introduced in the lesson.
  - ✓ “Trick and Traps” begins at the earliest stages of the units of instruction, helping students become aware of various kinds of questions. A chart is created early on (a sample is provided) that helps explain some of the tricks and traps students will encounter in real testing situations. This section in each lesson builds on that teaching/learning. Discussion involves what students may encounter on an actual test and how it is related to the strategy just studied in the lesson.
  - ✓ “Reiterate/Reflect” is the part of the lesson that encourages the teacher and students to think about the important points of the lesson and how the strategy taught links directly to taking a test. Students will be asked to reflect on the strategies they have learned and how this information will help with related questions on a test. This is essentially a review of what was taught/learned.
- *Extension:* This is the part of every lesson in which the strategies taught can be tied to other parts of a reading workshop during the days and weeks following the introduction of a strategy. Many of the ideas in the *Extension* and referenced texts can also be used for independent and guided reading.
  - *Suggestions:* Included in this section are ongoing activities (such as creating reference charts) that will help to keep the learning alive and relevant as teachers move through the lessons.
  - *Appendix:* The appendices include the support materials and reproducible materials necessary to assist with the instruction.

### **Meeting Teacher and Student Needs—“Schoolwide”!**

Testing preparation is an important part of instruction these days—and that’s a fact. Schoolwide, to meet the needs of teachers and students, has conceived and developed Testing Fundamentals with Robin’s help (and the help of Karen’s team of test writers). But the units of study are more than test preparation for the classroom; they can also be used as the instructional tools for an after-school program because of the clarity and explicitness of the lessons. Paraprofessionals or teaching assistants could deliver the lessons and guide students in small groups.

The books that are part of this program (eighty-two books in total for each grade: third and fourth) also substantially add to a classroom library. All are high-quality exemplar texts that offer students fiction and nonfiction of high-interest from major publishers of children’s literature. As well as adding reading material to a classroom library, many of the books included in the sets can be used for writing instruction (see Writing Fundamentals—a writing program developed by Schoolwide—for information on writing instruction using trade books).

Testing Fundamentals was designed as a tool to provide strategy instruction for students, allowing them to be better prepared to meet the demands of standards-based testing. At the same time, Schoolwide’s thinking is to use quality literature for that instruction so that essential test preparation does not eclipse reading instruction in the weeks prior to state testing, but rather supports pre-testing or anytime throughout the year.