Student-Led Test Prep

Objective: Students will review material for a test in a manner consistent with theories about how people learn. The task will allow students to engage in metacognition and provide an opportunity for them to learn through social interaction.

Overview: This is a jigsaw activity. For the first part, students will work in small groups to decide on test questions that might be used on the upcoming test. Each small group is assigned a different portion of the material to review. These groups are split up and new groups are formed containing a representative from the original groups. The groups discuss all of the questions which were generated in the jigsaw.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to tell you how multiple choice questions are constructed. Have examples of good and bad questions. Discuss the difference between trivial and important questions.
2. Assign groups and break up the material. You could do something like 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, etc.
3. Each student is assigned to generate, on his/her own, one (should this be 2 or 3?) multiple choice questions that would test the assigned materials.
4. Have the groups meet and discuss the merits of the questions which were generated. They should pick the best question each student has written.
5. As a group, they should discuss anything that is missing from the questions, and write one question which fills this gap. Emphasize that everyone in the group must understand the questions and the answers.
6. Teacher collects all the students’ questions. The group questions will have the names of all group members attached.
7. The second phase of the jigsaw begins. Form new groups which contain one member from each of the original jigsaw groups. This is made easier if the letters were assigned. A’s meet here, B’s, meet here, etc.
8. The group will discuss the questions and the answers, making sure everyone understands why answers are correct. You could have the group produce an explanation of why answers are correct, which would be a daily grade for the assignment.
9. Tell students if you use a question they generated, or the group question, they will receive 1 extra point on the test. You will add other questions you feel are important.

The reason for the explanation in step 8, which is not part of the way I did this assignment, is that research on collaborative learning is crystal clear that it benefits high achievers ONLY when they are required to generate an explanation. The low achievers also need to hear explanations, not just the correct answers. If this is done, your small groups will lead to much more learning.