

INTERMEDIATE EDITION Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

September 2015



Book Picks

■ *The Illuminating World of Light with Max Axiom, Super Scientist* (Emily Sohn)

Real science meets graphic novel in the Graphic Science Series. In this episode, Max Axiom takes readers on a journey explaining the science of light. Your child will learn about different types of light, how light moves, and ways it affects everyday life. (Also available in Spanish.)

■ *Fish in a Tree* (Lynda Mullaly Hunt)

Ally is a whiz at math and art, but the sixth-grader has a secret she's embarrassed about: She has dyslexia. To keep people from getting close enough to find out, she pretends to be a troublemaker. Will her act keep her new teacher from learning the truth—and helping her?



■ *Nuts to You* (Lynne Rae Perkins)

When a hawk grabs Jed the squirrel, his friends set out to rescue him. Soon they're on a mission to relocate an entire squirrel community before its habitat is destroyed. Humor and adventure combine with a cast of resourceful squirrels in this tale of friendship.



■ *What Is the Statue of Liberty?* (Joan Holub)

The statue's real name is "Liberty Enlightening the World," but you may call her "Lady Liberty" for short. This book explores the Statue of Liberty from head to toe, including how it arrived in New York in 1885 in 214 crates!



Be a reading family

Did you know that children read more when their parents are readers, too? Consider these ways to get your family excited about reading together.

Collect frequent-reader "miles"

A trip around the world covers almost 25,000 miles. Let one book = 2,500 miles, and have a race to see who will be the first to read her way "around the world." *Bonus:* Your youngster will practice math skills, too, as she tallies her miles.



Become super-sleuths

Encourage your child to draw conclusions by reading short mysteries aloud. Try a book like *Five-Minute Mini-Mysteries* (Stan Smith), or read online at kids.mysterynet.com. Before revealing the solution, let each person make a prediction and tell what clues tipped her off.

Crank up some karaoke

Help your youngster find song lyrics online, or use the liner notes from her favorite CDs. Then, put on music, and

read the words as you sing along together. *Note:* Your child will add words to her vocabulary by looking up unfamiliar ones in a dictionary.

Play reading games

Give your youngster practice at reading aloud accurately and with expression. You might hold a contest while reading from a book of tongue twisters. Or make up fill-in-the-blank stories (like *Mad Libs*), and try to read the results aloud without laughing! 📖

Speaking up in class

Participating in class discussions builds speaking and listening skills, which your child will use to communicate and collaborate with others throughout his school career and beyond. Try these three tips.

1. Suggest that he listen first, then piggy-back his thoughts onto what the last person said. ("I agree with Madison that Hollis Woods is protecting herself, and I think Hollis is protecting Josie, too.")
2. Let your youngster know that asking questions in class is just as important as answering them. What he asks may prompt others to share ideas, too.
3. Remind him that it's okay to disagree, but he needs to be polite and to explain his reasons. He could begin, "I hear what you're saying, but I think..." 📖



Back-to-school writing fun

Your youngster can get off to a good start this school year by putting his thoughts down on paper. Here's how.

Recipe for a great year. Show your child recipes in cookbooks, online, or in the newspaper so he sees how they're written. Then, let him write one that tells how to whip up a fabulous year. He could list ingredients (five science experiments, a dash of soccer). Next, he should add step-by-step instructions. ("Stir together reading,



writing, science, math, and social studies. Sprinkle in soccer games and piano lessons.")

Letter of introduction.

What does your youngster want the teacher to know about him? Here's his chance to share those things in a friendly letter. He should start with a salutation ("Dear Mr. Jones") and add a few paragraphs about himself. He might

write one paragraph about his likes and dislikes ("I love fall weather, but I don't like raking leaves") and another about his dreams ("I want to be a pilot when I grow up"). When he finishes, he can deliver the letter to his teacher. ■

Fun with Words Aha... palindromes!

"Was it a car or a cat I saw?" That's not just a question, it's a *palindrome*—a word or phrase that reads the same forward and backward. Enjoy playing with language, and build your child's thinking skills, with these ideas:

- See how many simple palindromes everyone can list. Short words that begin and end with the same letters make a good starting place (*mom, deed, Anna*). Next, branch out into phrases (*Noel sees Leon*).

- Brainstorm challenges to try. Who can write the longest palindrome? The funniest? The most names that are palindromes? Let your youngster pick a challenge, set a timer for 10 minutes, and get to work! When time is up, read your results aloud, and choose another challenge.

Tip: Begin a family palindrome collection. Keep a running list on the refrigerator, and add palindromes as you find or create them. ■



Parent 2 Parent Creative writing club

My daughter Phoebe participated in a children's writing workshop at our community center last spring. She was sad when it ended, so I suggested that she start her own writing club.

Phoebe got together with a few buddies from the workshop, and now they take turns hosting a weekly meeting. Since the workshop leader had provided "writing prompts" to inspire them, they decided that each week's host would bring a prompt. So far, the prompts have included a magazine picture, a list of 10 words to use in a poem, and Phoebe's favorite, a story that had to open with "I heard a bell ringing in the dark."

The kids spend the first part of every meeting writing. Then, they read their work aloud and give each other ideas to improve their stories. Phoebe is enjoying her club—and I'm glad to see her enjoying writing! ■



Q&A Stay on top of assigned reading

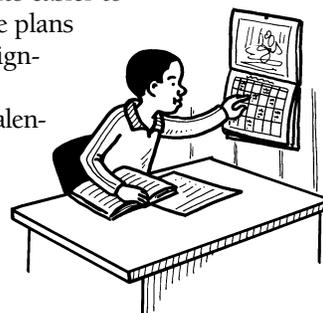
Q Last year, my son procrastinated on his reading assignments and fell behind. How can I help him do better this year?

A Your child will find it's easier to stay on top of things if he plans ahead and breaks his assignments into chunks.

Suggest that he use a calendar or student planner to record his assignments. Then, he should craft a plan and write each piece of it on the appropriate day. For example,

if he has four days to read 100 pages of *Bunnicula* (Deborah and James Howe) for a book report, he would write "Read 25 pages of *Bunnicula*" on each of the next four days in his planner. He can do the same for his other reading assignments as he gets them.

Remind your son to set aside a specific time every day for his assigned reading. He might schedule it at the beginning of homework time or before basketball practice, for instance. ■



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Book Picks



■ *Melonhead* (Katy Kelly)

Adam Melon, aka Melonhead, fancies

himself an inventor.

His school is entering an invention contest, and Melonhead thinks he has a chance at winning.

The only problem is that he can't seem to stay out of trouble. Follow his hilarious adventures in this first book of the Melonhead series.



■ *Edgar Allan Poe's Pie: Math Puzzlers in Classic Poems* (J. Patrick Lewis)

Poetry and math come together as brainteasers are woven into poems inspired by the works of famous poets. You'll also find short biographies of Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, and other poets.

■ *Unusual Chickens for the Exceptional Poultry Farmer*

(Kelly Jones)

Moving to the country is another jolt in Sophie Brown's life. She's already missing her *abuela*, who recently died.

To cope, Sophie writes letters to her grandmother and others, describing life on the farm, including the chickens with super-powers! A clever story told in letters, quizzes, to-do lists, and more.



■ *When the Beat Was Born*

(Laban Carrick Hill)

Clive Campbell came to the Bronx from Jamaica as a young teen and wanted to be a DJ for dance parties. This picture-book biography shows his passion for rhythm and rhyme that eventually helped give birth to hip-hop.



Vocabulary for every subject

Convection, *peninsula*, *addend*—your child needs to know specific words to understand lessons in science, social studies, and math. Try these ideas for helping him explore and use words from each subject area.



Picture the words

Visualizing a word's meaning can cement it in your youngster's mind.

Suggest that he look at photos and diagrams in books or online. Then, on index cards, have him write and illustrate the word. *Example:* For *refraction*, he might draw a straw "bent" in a glass of water.

Explain aloud

Encourage your child to delve deeper into definitions by teaching the words to you. If he's learning about *savannas*, he could describe their climate, tell you which animals live there, and point out a savanna on a map. He'll expand his

understanding of the term as he finds ways to explain it to you.

Play games

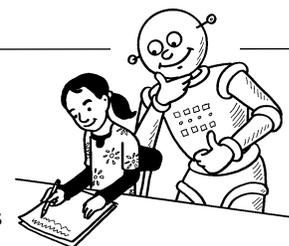
Do fun activities that will help your youngster use, recognize, and remember new words. For instance, play Jeopardy or charades with vocabulary words. Hold a contest to see who can find the most vocabulary words in newspapers or magazines. Start the day with a "vocabulary word of the day," and encourage family members to use it in conversation. ("Look—that sign is shaped like a *rhombus*.")

Strong starts and fine finishes

It takes practice to write an effective beginning and ending for an essay or a report. Share these tips with your youngster.

Introduction: The opening sentence is like the emcee—it welcomes your audience and hints at what's to come. Experiment with openings to find the most inviting one. You might pose a question ("When was the first robot built?"), present a fact ("The earliest known robot had wings"), or use a quote ("A scientist named Nolan Bushnell once said, 'I cannot imagine the future without robots'").

Conclusion: The last sentence offers a snapshot of the important ideas you presented. Reread your paper and ask, "What do I want my readers to remember?" Then, write a line with that in mind. ("Robots seem like new technology, but history shows they've been around for a long time.")

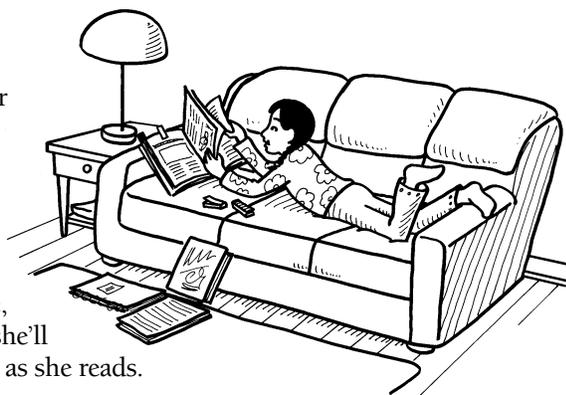


Previewing chapters

Taking a sneak peek at a textbook chapter before reading it will help your child focus on the information she needs to learn. Suggest these strategies.

Questions. Your youngster can look over the end-of-chapter questions and jot down details she wants to find. For example, if a question asks “What causes acid rain?” she’ll know she should look for “acid rain causes” as she reads.

Subheads. These bold-faced headings act as signposts pointing the way to material in the chapter. Have your child scan the subheads and predict which ones will answer her questions. She might, for instance, expect the



“Dangerous precipitation” section to explain the causes of acid rain.

Graphics. Textbooks often use pictures, charts, and maps to explain ideas. Your youngster can look over the illustrations and captions before she reads. She’ll “pre-learn” some material, making details easier to grasp when she reads the text.

Idea: Your child may like previewing with sticky note “flags.” She could mark sections she thinks will be useful and even color-code them, putting yellow flags on facts, purple ones on examples, and so on. 📌



Create a story mural

Turn a family read-aloud into a family art project with this activity. You’ll enjoy a book together, and your youngster will build reading comprehension skills.



Choose a book, and read the first chapter aloud. Then, on a large sheet of paper, use crayons or markers to begin a mural illustrating the story. For example, if you’re reading *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (E. L. Konigsburg), you might draw a floor-plan of the museum. Each evening, read and illustrate another chapter, and tape the new panel to the previous one.

Tip: Draw a picture of each character on a separate slip of paper. Let your youngster move the characters from place to place on the mural to recap last night’s action before you read the next chapter. 📌

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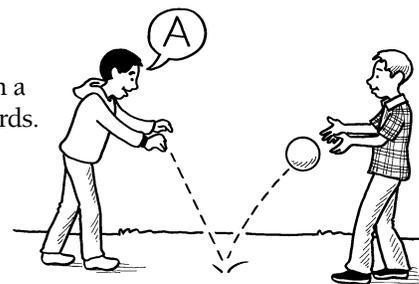
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Fun with Words Spell check

Let your child team up with a buddy to work on spelling words. Here are five fun ways.

1. Take turns choosing a spelling word and writing it crossword-style on graph paper, one letter per square. Try to connect all of the words.
2. Challenge each other to write a sentence using the most words from the list.
3. Time the other person as you call out words for him to write or type. Repeat any that he misspelled.
4. Spell a word while bouncing a ball back and forth, saying a letter for each bounce. Do it again, but spell the word backward.
5. Together, invent silly ways to remember words with tricky parts. For instance, “What’s a pirate’s favorite part of *calendar*? The AR at the end!” 📌



Q&A What’s your opinion?

Q When my daughter has to write opinion pieces for class, she has trouble backing up her viewpoint. Is there a good way to practice?

A Sure! Try giving her a notebook for recording opinions. On the first page, she can write a question that begins “Would you rather...” Any question, silly or serious, will work. *Examples:* “Would you rather be a cheetah or a chimpanzee?” “Would you rather cook a meal or clean up after one?”

Below it, have her write her answer and give three reasons—based on facts, just like she’ll need to do for school assignments. If she chooses a cheetah, she might say, “Cheetahs can run 70 miles per hour. It would be amazing to run that fast!”

Afterward, she could ask family and friends to add their opinions on her question. How would they back up their vote? Then, suggest that she add a new question to give—and collect—opinions about. 📌



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■ *The Honest Truth* (Dan Gemeinhart)

Twelve-year-old Mark refuses to allow cancer or his parents to keep him from his dream of climbing Mt. Rainier. He runs away from home with only his dog and a camera and puts his friend Jessie in a terrible spot. Should she keep his secret, or tell where he has gone?



■ *Mocha Dick: The Legend and Fury* (Brian Heinz)

Readers may be surprised to learn that *Moby-Dick* was based on a real animal.



This nonfiction book tells the story of the whale that inspired the novel. In 1810, a whaling crew from Chile's Mocha Island was attacked by a sperm whale that continued to destroy ships and terrify sailors for nearly 50 years.

■ *White House Kids* (Joe Rhatigan)

Being the child of a U.S. president has its ups and downs. This history book includes short biographies of "first kids," photos, and fact boxes. Readers will learn about the children's adventures, as well as what it's like to grow up surrounded by bodyguards and news reporters.

■ *Dancing Home* (Alma Flor Ada and Gabriel M. Zubizarreta)
Margie has always tried to downplay her Mexican heritage. So she's embarrassed when her cousin moves to America and is put in her class. Lupe doesn't speak English or dress like Margie. In alternating chapters, each girl tells what it is like to struggle to fit in—and to take pride in what makes you different. (Also available in Spanish.)



Inquiring readers want to know

Strong readers ask themselves questions—and answer them—while they read. Bring out your child's inquisitive side and boost her comprehension with these questions that will encourage her to think deeply about books.



"What would I do?"

Your youngster can connect with the story by comparing herself to the characters. Say the main character decides to follow a unicorn into a forest. Your child might consider if she would have done the same thing and why or why not. This strategy will help her better understand characters' motives.

"What will happen next?"

It's fun to predict the next plot twist or turn. Suggest that your youngster pay attention to details that hint about what's to come. She could write her predictions on sticky notes and add check marks to

the ones that come true. *Note:* If her predictions are way off base, she can look back to see if she missed a detail or was confused by a section—or if the author just threw in a surprise!

"What do I wonder?"

When your child finishes a book, have her list questions that it raised for her. She may wonder whether a fictional invention could work in real life or if the characters really loved each other. Then, she could use her answers to write a prequel or sequel. ■

Listen closely

Teacher instructions, class presentations, book discussions—a lot of information comes to your youngster through his ears. Share these tips for listening so he learns as much as possible.

● **Make eye contact.** Your child will catch more of what is said if he looks at the person talking. Watching the speaker makes it easier to pay attention to the words rather than to other things in the room.

● **Listen with a goal.** If your youngster is listening to a classmate's report on George Washington, for example, his goal could be to listen for three facts he doesn't already know.

● **Avoid interrupting.** Good listeners wait for the speaker to finish before sharing their thoughts. ■



Bright, shiny descriptions

Vivid writing paints a picture for the reader. Encourage your youngster to practice making up detailed descriptions with these fun ideas.

Imaginary creatures. Have your child invent a character and use similes (comparisons that include the word *like* or *as*) to describe him or her in a story.

Example: “A *tomaterpillar* is as red as a tomato. Its body is as furry as a caterpillar.” Your youngster could draw his creature to use as inspiration and write a story about its adventures.



A sensational expedition.

Uh-oh! Your child is suddenly two inches tall. Have him write about a journey from one side of the room to the other.

Suggest that he get down on the floor and crawl along, noticing things he would see if he were two inches tall. (“A pair of dirty socks formed a mountain blocking my path. I wrinkled my nose at the sweaty smell and decided to hike around them.”) Looking at the world from this vantage point can help him include details he might not ordinarily notice. ■



Guess the word

“Lightning. Cloudburst. What’s my word?”

With this game, your youngster will take a close look at words and their meanings as she uses clues to name the word in play (*thunderstorm*).

1. Let your child pick a category — perhaps three-syllable words, careers, adjectives, or food.

2. On separate slips of paper, have each player write three words fitting the category. Put the slips in a bowl, and divide into two teams.



3. A player from the first team draws one slip. She rolls the die and gives that number of clues to her team. No part of the word can be used as a clue. If she draws *cheeseburger* and rolls a 2, she could say *beef* and *sandwich* but not *cheese* or *burger*.

4. If her team guesses the word, they keep the slip. If not, return it to the bowl.

5. Continue taking turns. When all the slips are claimed, the team with the most is the winner. ■



Use interests to find nonfiction

This year, my fiction-loving daughter has to read a lot more nonfiction. In fact, about half of the books in her monthly reading log need to be nonfiction.

To get ideas for nonfiction she would like, Claire and I went to the library. The librarian had a simple suggestion: She told Claire to list her three favorite things and look for nonfiction books on those topics.

Claire named playing the flute, sea creatures, and ancient Egypt, and it wasn’t hard for her to find interesting books for each. She ended up checking out a biography of a famous composer, a how-to guide on setting up a home aquarium, and a book describing what archaeologists have found in Egyptian pyramids.

My daughter still loves to read fiction, but it’s nice to see her finding nonfiction that she enjoys, too! ■



Your child’s reading progress

Q Recently, my son has been saying his reading assignments are too hard, and I’m afraid he’s falling behind. What should I do?

A Start by asking your son what he finds hard about the assignments. Are too many words unfamiliar? Is it hard to follow the plot? Then, get in touch with his teacher, and let her know how your child feels.

The teacher might offer strategies or activities for your son to try at home. For

instance, she may recommend reading an easier book on the same topic as a book he has trouble understanding. He’ll build vocabulary and background knowledge that could help him read the more challenging material. Or she might suggest that he read tough chapters aloud to you.

Stay in touch with the teacher to monitor your youngster’s progress, and together, you’re likely to see improvement. ■



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