

# Early Years

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A GREAT START

April 2021

Gregory - Portland ISD

## KID BITS



### Picture book character

When you read stories with your child, look for examples of good character. He might notice how brave a little giraffe is in a story about a talent show. Or you could point out a kind boy standing up for a classmate who is being made fun of.

### On-the-job training

Your little one might not be able to do all the steps of a chore, such as loading the dishwasher. Show her how anyway ("I'm putting the knives in with the sharp sides down") and let her do as much as possible ("Here, you load the spoons"). She'll gain confidence and be ready to tackle the job herself when she's older.

### Helmet safety

Keep your youngster safe by making sure he always wears a helmet when he rides a bike or scooter. It should fit snugly, have a liner that's at least 1 inch thick, and sit level on his head. *Idea:* Let him make a helmet for a stuffed animal. Then, he may be more excited about wearing his own.

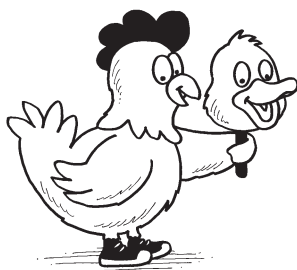
### Worth quoting

"There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly."  
*Buckminster Fuller*

### Just for fun

**Q:** Why did the chicken say, "Quack"?

**A:** It was learning to speak Duck.



## Going with the flow

Flexible thinking lets your child adapt to changing situations and look at things in multiple ways. Stretch her thinking and problem-solving skills with these activities.

### Two voices

Your youngster will need to shift gears to succeed in this twist on Simon Says. Give her instructions ("Touch your toes," "Spin around"), but switch back and forth between two silly voices (say, a robot and a pirate). The catch? Tell her to listen only to the robot. If she follows the pirate's instruction instead, her turn ends. Now she gets to choose two voices and give *you* directions.

### Mystery pictures

Can your child figure out what's in a picture even if she can't see the whole thing? Cut a 1-inch hole in a sheet of paper, and lay it on top of a book illustration. Now let her slide the paper around,



peek through the hole, and think about what it could be a picture of. Something that looks rough and brown might be a furry animal. Or is it a football or a tree trunk?

### What if?

This activity encourages your youngster to practice finding alternatives. Ask a "what if" question like "What if we didn't have syrup for pancakes?" Take turns naming possible solutions (use jelly or honey, eat them plain, make toast instead). Keep going until you run out of ideas. Then, ask a new "what if" question. ♥

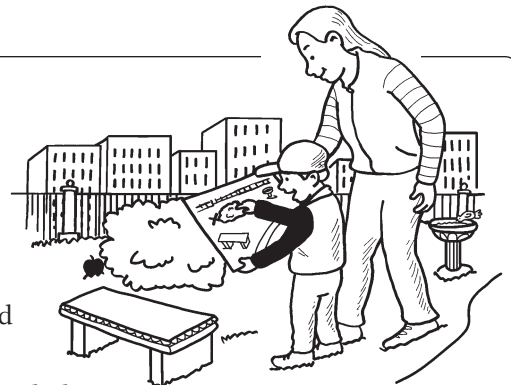
## Search for treasure

Finding hidden treasure is a fun way for your youngster to learn how maps show where things are located. An X marks the spot with this idea.

**1.** Help your child draw a map of a room or the park. Encourage him to include landmarks like doors and furniture or trees and fences.

**2.** Have him cover his eyes while you hide a "treasure," maybe a juicy apple, in the actual location. Put an X on the map where the treasure can be found.

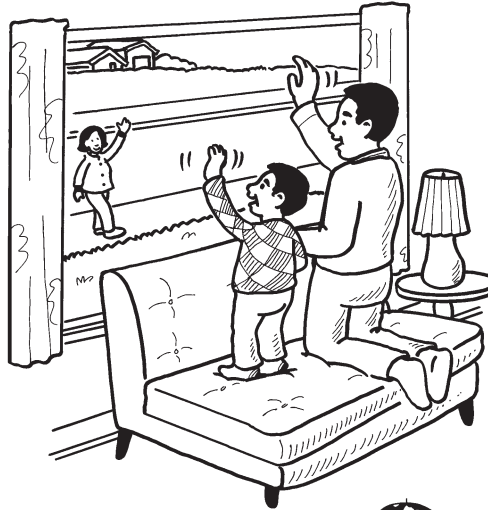
**3.** Challenge your youngster to use the map and find the treasure. When he locates it, let him erase your X, hide a treasure, and mark it on the map for you to find. ♥



## K is for kindness

Simple acts of kindness make the world a friendlier place—and give your youngster warm, fuzzy feelings. Here are ways to inspire him to be kind.

**Pretend to be a superhero.** Suggest that your child draw himself as a “kindness superhero.” He can make up a superhero name, maybe Captain Kindness. On his drawing, help him write what superpowers he has. (“Cares about others.” “Loves to help.”) Then, encourage him to step into the role and put his superpowers to work whenever he sees the



opportunity to be kind. Maybe Captain Kindness will help you look for your misplaced car keys or offer to take a photo of his big sister.

**Make a kindness calendar.** Together, think of a month’s worth of ways to show kindness, and write each one in a calendar square. *Examples:* Smile and wave at neighbors walking by. Compliment a family member. Make a card for a friend. (It’s okay to use ideas more than once!) Every day, read the tip on the calendar, and have your youngster do it. He can draw a heart on each one as he completes it.♥



## Q & A Storytelling at home

**Q:** My son’s kindergarten class is working on storytelling. How can we tell stories at home?

**A:** Start by asking your child to tell stories about pictures he draws. Listen to his tale, then ask questions that spark his imagination. If he draws people in a car, for instance, you could ask where they’re going. This is good practice for storytelling now—and creative writing later.

Also, take a few minutes before bed to let him tell the story of his day. He might describe a game he played and what he ate for lunch.

Encourage him to keep going by asking questions like “What happened after lunch?”



Share the story of your day, too, making sure to include lots of details. Listening to your story will help him learn to tell his own.♥

## ACTIVITY CORNER

### Splash and learn

April showers bring

May flowers—and lots of learning opportunities for your youngster! Sprinkle these activities into the next rainy day:

- Together, listen to the rain and think of words (real or made up) to describe the sound it makes when it hits the windows or pavement. *Examples:* tap, plop, plink. Then, put on slickers and rain boots, and let your child set different containers out in the rain. What words come to mind when she hears raindrops land in a plastic bucket, tin can, or glass jar?
- Help your youngster make aluminum foil boats and sail them on puddles. Which design floats best? Can she create a boat that will carry a small toy across a puddle? Have her use chalk to draw circles around puddles. Let her check back periodically and trace around the puddles again. She’ll notice they get smaller and eventually disappear (*evaporate*). Do bigger puddles last longer than smaller ones?♥



## PARENT TO PARENT

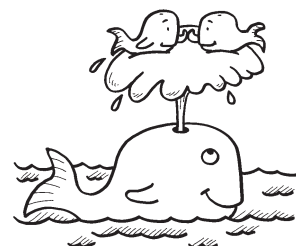
### Help siblings get along

It seemed like my daughters Kate and Brianna were always bickering. My nieces, on the other hand, get along pretty well, so I asked my brother for advice.

He assured me that his girls don’t always get along. But he’s noticed their relationship is better when he lets them work out minor disagreements rather than taking sides. Sometimes, he pointed out, they seem to argue just to get his attention.

Now when my girls argue, I tell them to work it out. If they’re still fighting after 15 minutes, I send them to separate rooms to cool down, as my brother recommended. Afterward, I have them try again to solve their disagreement.

Knowing I won’t jump in and referee has cut down on my daughters’ arguments—and I’m hearing fewer complaints of “You always take her side!” ♥



## OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote school readiness, parent involvement, and more effective parenting.

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# Home & School

## Working Together for School Success

### CONNECTION®

April 2021

Gregory - Portland ISD



#### SHORT NOTES

##### Family show-and-tell

Show-and-tell builds your child's speaking and presentation skills—and it's not just for school! Schedule special time each week or month for everyone to share a belonging, talent, or memory. Your youngster could share the stuffed animal he got for his birthday or read a poem he wrote, for example.

##### The definition of me

How kids see themselves plays a big role in their self-esteem. Ask your youngster to write a dictionary-style definition of herself that includes things she's proud of. ("Ellie: a 9-year-old girl who is friendly, loves to read, and has a good sense of humor.") *Idea:* Suggest that she write positive definitions for other family members.

##### Current events

While it's important to become informed about current events, the news can be upsetting for children. Turn it off when you're not watching. If you'd like to let your youngster see the news, record it and watch together. That way, you can pause to discuss events, which will help him put them in context.

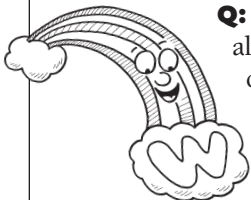
##### Worth quoting

"Happiness is a perfume you cannot pour on others without getting a few drops on yourself." *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

#### JUST FOR FUN

**Q:** What will you always find at the end of a rainbow?

**A:** The letter W.



## Get your child to listen—the first time

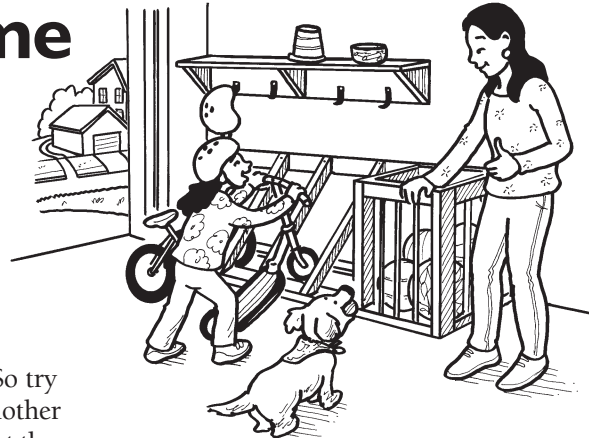
What you say and how you say it can make a world of difference when you need your child to listen. Consider these tips to curb nagging and encourage better listening.

##### Get close

Your youngster is more apt to listen when you're face-to-face. So try not to shout instructions from another room or across the yard—or to text them to her. It's also a good idea to get her attention before you start talking ("Hey, there's something you need to do ..."). Then, have her repeat your instructions ("I'm supposed to put my scooter in the garage") so you know she has heard and understood you.

##### Slow down

Too many instructions at once can overwhelm your child. Instead of rattling off a bunch of tasks (put away your laundry, do your homework, take out the trash), give her one at a time. Or



suggest that she write them down and check off each one as she completes it. She can come back and proudly show you her finished list.

##### Give options

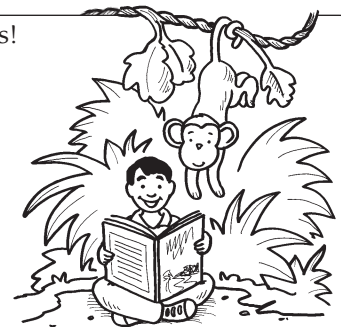
Say your youngster often procrastinates when you tell her to get dressed in the morning. Instead of nagging, you could ask, "Are you going to wear sweatpants or jeans today?" Or if you find yourself repeatedly telling her to eat her vegetables, you might try, "Do you want carrots or broccoli?" Giving her a say will make her more apt to listen and respond.♥

## A world of nonfiction

It's exciting to read about real people and places! Ask these questions to help your youngster pick out nonfiction books he'll want to read.

**"Who would you like to meet?"** Your child might read biographies of people who intrigue him, like his favorite baseball player or an explorer he learned about in history class. How does "getting to know" these people influence his opinion of them?

**"Where do you want to go?"** Nonfiction can transport your youngster anywhere in the universe—and even back in time. Maybe he'll read about a tropical rain forest, the International Space Station, or medieval times. Encourage him to imagine himself in the place or time he reads about.♥





# Celebrate Earth Day

Show the Earth some love on April 22—and every day. Here are activities that will help the planet *and* boost your child's math and research skills.

**Calculate and conserve.** A typical showerhead sprays out 5 gallons of water per minute. Have your youngster time his next shower and multiply the number of minutes by 5. If his shower took 8 minutes, he used 40 gallons of water ( $8 \times 5 = 40$ ). Encourage family members



to time their showers, too. Then, ask everyone to trim 2 minutes off their showers, and let your child calculate how much water your family saved.

**Try plant-based foods.** Eating less meat is an eco-friendly habit that's also healthy for your youngster. Ask him to research plant-based alternatives to some of the meat-based foods your family eats. He might find recipes for black bean burgers, shiitake mushroom "bacon," and eggplant "steaks." Make and try them together. *Idea:* Consider committing to one meatless day per week. Your child can choose the recipe—or come up with his own. ♥

## ACTIVITY CORNER DIY stickers

What makes stickers ... well ... sticky? Your youngster can find out with this art project.

**1. Draw stickers.** Let her make lines to divide a sheet of white paper into 12 equal boxes. Encourage her to use colored pencils to draw a picture (taco, star, heart) in each box.

**2. Make glue.** In a bowl, have your child stir together 1 tbsp. cold water and 1 packet unflavored gelatin. Meanwhile, boil 3 tbsp. water. Pour it into the gelatin. Now she can add  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. sugar and stir until dissolved. She made glue! Help her use a paintbrush to coat the back of her paper with the glue.



**3. Stick.** When the glue dries, she can cut out her stickers along the lines. To use, she should moisten the backs with a damp sponge. Then, she could stick them on papers, binders, notebooks, and more. ♥

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## End-of-year volunteer

As the school year winds down, consider these ideas for helping your child's teachers.

### • Assist with projects.

Offer to bind student-made books or frame children's artwork. You might also put together a slide show of photos the teacher took during the year.

### • Participate in special events.

Ask the teacher how you can lend a hand during in-person or virtual events, such as end-of-year parties, awards ceremonies, or graduation.

### • Drop off boxes.

Find out if teachers need boxes to pack up their books and supplies. You could call grocery stores and dollar stores to see which ones donate boxes, then volunteer to pick them up and drop them off at the school. ♥



## Q & A Promote hopefulness

**Q:** I don't want the negative events of the past year to keep my son from being hopeful. What can I do?

**A:** Hope is contagious! Encourage your son to "catch" it from you. Share your plans for future good things. For instance, you might talk about fun things you hope to do this summer, like go camping or watch a fireworks display. Ask your son what he hopes for, too.

Taking action is another way for your

son to feel more hopeful. Whenever possible, let him do things to make a difference. For example, if he's worried about people needing food, the two of you might grow vegetables to donate to a food pantry.

Remember, you know your child best. If your son talks about feeling hopeless, or you are concerned that he might be suffering from depression, talk to his school counselor or doctor. ♥



# Math+Science Connection

Intermediate Edition

Building Understanding and Excitement for Children

April 2021

Gregory - Portland ISD



## INFO BITS

### A tall (math) tale

Encourage your child to write a silly story about a day without math. How would his grandmother's famous muffins taste if she couldn't measure the ingredients? What mayhem would occur at the post office if there were no numbers on the mail? Your youngster will realize just how important math is.

### Bird calls

Early in the morning, go outside with your child to listen to the birds. Ask her to repeat the bird calls she hears. Does she hear the same ones each morning? What about at different times of the day? Together, look up bird calls in a library book or online to identify the birds making the sounds.

### Book picks

▣ Your youngster can discover shapes and patterns of the natural world in *Mysterious Patterns: Finding Fractals in Nature* (Sarah C. Campbell).

▣ *Buzzing with Questions: The Inquisitive Mind of Charles Henry Turner* (Janice N. Harrington) tells the true story of a curious boy who became a zoologist famous for his insect research.

## Just for fun

**Teacher:** If you solve for  $x$ , you see that  $x = 3$ .

**Student:** Just a minute! Yesterday you said that  $x = 2$ !



## Spring into math

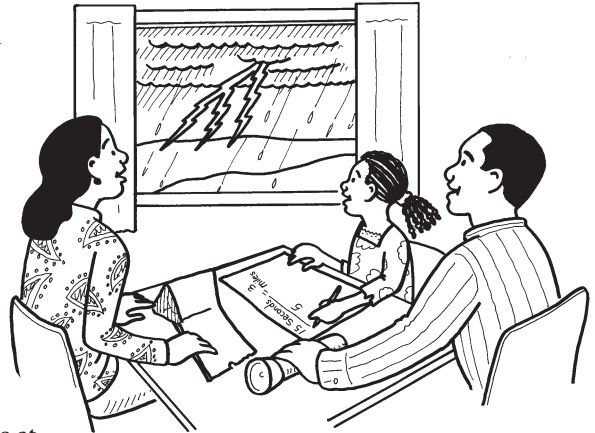
Spring is here! Let your child welcome the season with these fun math activities.

### Calculate daylight

There's a little more daylight every day—and that means more time to play outside! Encourage your youngster to calculate the hours and minutes of daylight. She can check sunrise and sunset times online, then find the difference. For example, if the sun rises at 7:38 a.m. and sets at 8:09 p.m., that's 12 hours and 31 minutes of daylight. How much does the amount change from day to day?

### Make symmetrical kites

Invite your youngster to decorate for spring—and explore symmetry—by drawing colorful kites. She can cut white paper into squares, fold each “kite” in half diagonally, and paint a design on one half. While the paint is wet, she should fold along the line, press down, and unfold. She'll see a symmetrical design—each half is a mirror image of the other.



### Track thunderstorms

During a storm, ask your child to count the seconds between lightning and thunder (say, 15). If she divides by 5, she can tell you how many miles away the storm is ( $15 \text{ seconds} \div 5 = 3 \text{ miles}$ ). Why? Lightning and thunder happen at the same time. But light travels faster than sound (about 186,000 miles per second for light vs. 1 mile every 5 seconds for sound). *Idea:* No thunderstorm? Create one for your child by flashing a light (lightning) and popping a paper bag (thunder). ▣

## Experiment with erosion

The Earth is constantly changing as wind and rain shape the land. Try this idea that shows your youngster how *erosion*, or the wearing away of land, works.



**1.** Have him put a layer of sand or sugar in a baking dish.

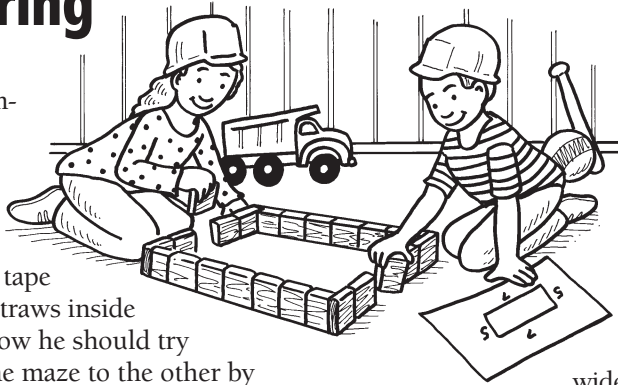
**2.** Let your child blow through a straw onto the sand to make a “valley.” This is wind erosion. Then, tilt the pan slightly, and have him pour water into the valley at the higher end. He'll see the sand move “downstream.” This is water erosion.

**3.** Now suggest that your youngster smooth out the sand and repeat the activity—this time adding different arrangements of rocks, leaves, or grass. (The soil won't erode as much, which is why farmers and communities use trees and bushes to protect land.) ▣

# Math + engineering

By building marble mazes and block structures, your child can combine engineering and math. Suggest these playful challenges.

**A-maze-ing angles.** Designing a marble maze lets your youngster experiment with angles. Have him tape craft sticks, cardboard strips, and straws inside a large box lid at various angles. Now he should try to roll a marble from one side of the maze to the other by tilting the lid in different directions. Does the marble make it



all the way through? If not, he can change the angles of some of the sticks or straws and try again until he's successful.

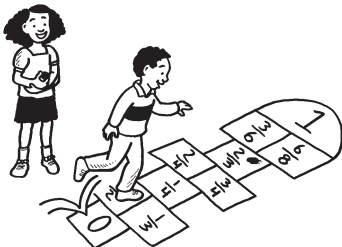
**Perimeter and area.** Your child will see the relationship between perimeter and area with this activity. Encourage him to make a one-story structure (no stacking) with 24 square blocks. He might make a square 6 blocks long and 6 blocks wide. Then, he should count the blocks to find the perimeter (24) and multiply to get the area ( $6 \times 6 = 36$ ). What happens if he makes an 8 by 4 building? (The perimeter is still 24, but the area is 32, because  $8 \times 4 = 32$ .) Have him try different possibilities (1 by 11, 2 by 10, 3 by 9). He'll see that the area changes, but the perimeter doesn't. 📦

## MATH CORNER

### Fraction hopscotch

Learning equivalent fractions is a hop, skip, and jump away for your child with this spin on a classic outdoor game.

**Set up:** Have your youngster draw a hopscotch path and label the first block "0" and the last "1." In each block in between, let him write one of these fractions:  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{2}{4}$ ,  $\frac{2}{3}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ ,  $\frac{3}{6}$ ,  $\frac{6}{8}$ . Give each player a token (beanbag, stone).



**Play:** Players start on 0 and take turns tossing their token into any block (except 1) and saying a fraction that's equivalent to the one it lands on. (If your child's token lands on  $\frac{2}{3}$ , he could say  $\frac{4}{6}$ .) If he's correct, he hops to the  $\frac{2}{3}$  block, picks up his token, and hops back to 0. (If he's incorrect, his turn ends.) Players should land their token on each fraction before trying to land it on 1.

**Win:** Be the first person to reach 1. 📦

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## SCIENCE LAB

### Make a periscope

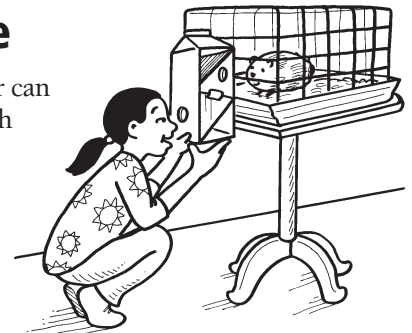
Ahoy, mate! Your youngster can build a simple periscope and learn about light with just a few items.

**You'll need:** empty milk or orange juice carton, scissors, tape, 2 small mirrors

**Here's how:** Help your child cut open one side of the carton. Let her tape one mirror at a 45° angle near the bottom, facing up, and the other at a 45° angle near the top, facing down. Have her cut a peephole in the carton opposite each mirror and tape the side closed. Now she can crouch by a table, holding the periscope with the bottom hole below the table and the top hole above it, and look through the bottom hole.

**What happens?** She'll see things overhead, just like submariners peer out of a periscope to see what's going on above them.

**Why?** The light bounces off the top mirror to the bottom mirror, and then to her eye. This lets her view images visible through the top hole. 📦



## PARENT TO PARENT

### Check your work

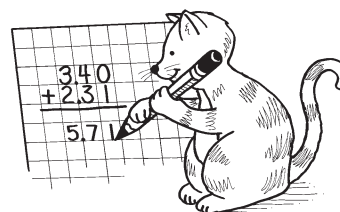
I noticed that the teacher had written "Remember to check your work" on several graded assignments my daughter Sarah brought home. When I asked Sarah about it, she said she sometimes has trouble lining up numbers and decimals in problems. So I shared a strategy I used when I was her age.

I had Sarah write the problems on a sheet of graph paper, with one number or

symbol per box. This made it a breeze to line up everything correctly.

Then, my daughter suggested that when she doesn't have graph paper on hand, she could pencil in zeroes in equations to help her line up the decimals. For  $3.4 + 2.31$ , she would write  $3.40 + 2.31$  and solve to get 5.71.

Now Sarah is making fewer mistakes—and getting better math grades. 📦





# Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

April 2021

Gregory - Portland Independent School District

## Book Picks

### ■ **Lost and Found** (Andrew Clements)

What happens when twins Ray and Jay Grayson pretend to be the same person at a new school? Things get a little out of hand! In the end, they learn a lesson: Trying to be someone else doesn't work, and people who care about us appreciate what makes us different.

### ■ **Eruption! Volcanoes and the Science of Saving Lives**

(Elizabeth Rusch)  
A sleeping volcano in Colombia suddenly erupted in 1985, killing 23,000 people. Were there clues that could have prevented this tragedy? This volume from the Scientists in the Field series describes how U.S. Geological Survey scientists work to uncover early warning signs of an eruption.

### ■ **Akissi: Tales of Mischief**

(Marguerite Abouet)

In book one of the Akissi graphic novel series, readers will meet a young girl from Ivory Coast. Akissi takes us along on her days filled with hilarious mishaps and silly adventures—like when she has to chase a cat up a tree for stealing her fish! Based on the author's own childhood in West Africa.

### ■ **The Crayon Man: The True Story of the Invention of Crayola Crayons**

(Natascha Biebow)  
This illustrated nonfiction book tells the story of Edwin Binney and how he invented the famous Crayola crayons. He started by creating a special kind of chalk and eventually brought the colorful crayons to life. Includes a section with photographs showing how crayons are made in factories today.

## 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 1 book = 2,500 miles, and have a race to see who will be the first to read his way "around the world." *Bonus:* Your youngster will practice math skills as he tallies his 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). Before revealing the solution, let each person make a prediction and tell what clues tipped him off.

### Crank up some karaoke

Help your youngster find song lyrics online. Then, play the song, and read

the words as you sing along together.

*Tip:* Encourage your child to add words to his vocabulary by looking up unfamiliar ones in a dictionary.

### Play reading games

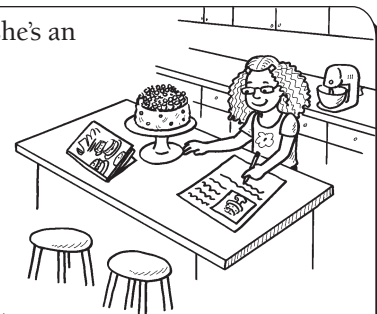
Give your youngster practice reading aloud. You might hold a contest by attempting to read correctly from a book of tongue twisters. Or make up fill-in-the-blank stories (like *Mad Libs*), and try to read the results without laughing! 📖



## Write about what you like

Encourage your child to write about a topic she's an expert on: herself! Suggest these three ways.

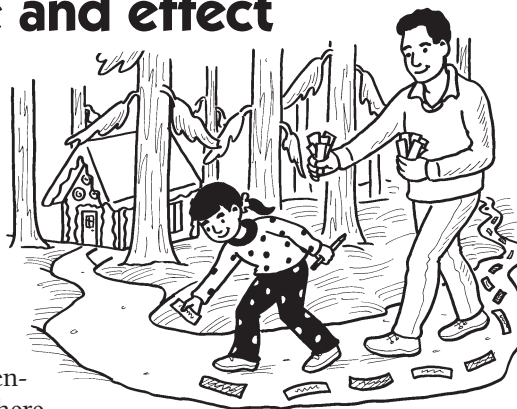
1. Perhaps your youngster enjoys painting pottery or decorating cakes. She can write descriptions of her finished products. Encourage her to be specific (for example, describe materials or colors) so she'll learn to use details in her writing.
2. Suggest that your child create a monthly newsletter for family and friends about her favorite sports teams. She can practice summarizing by writing a few sentences after each game she watches.
3. A youngster who loves hiking might keep a trail journal. She'll learn to record observations as she keeps track of different trails you hike together. ("The Red Trail at the park can be really muddy after the rain.") 📖



# Understanding cause and effect

The ability to recognize cause and effect boosts your child's reading comprehension whether she's reading fiction or nonfiction. These fun ideas will give her practice.

**Mix and match.** Together, write sentences involving cause and effect. (Hint: Cause-and-effect sentences use "signal words" like *if*, *then*, *because*, *since*, *so*, *consequently*, *as a result*, and *the reason for*.) First, brainstorm 10 "real" cause-and-effect sentences, such as "Because Mars has no atmosphere, nothing lives there," or "The kids were bored, so Sam invented a game." Then, pair each cause with a different effect to make



illogical—and funny—combinations. "Because Mars has no atmosphere, Sam invented a game."

**Show a chain reaction.** Suggest that your youngster make a paper trail to track the causes and effects in a story she reads. She could write each cause on one color of paper and each effect on another color. Cause: "Hansel and Gretel are left in the woods." Effect: "As a result, Hansel and Gretel become lost." Cause: "They have

no food." Effect: "They're hungry, so they eat the gingerbread house." As your child lays down her paper trail, she will see how cause and effect drive the plot. ■



## Q&A In a reading rut

**Q** My son keeps starting books and not finishing them. He can't seem to find one he likes. Do you have any advice?

**A** Suggest that your son give books a fair chance before abandoning them. Depending on their length and his reading ability, he might want to read at least 25–50 pages of a book to decide whether he likes it. He may discover that it gets better as he reads.

Also, it's possible your son is tired of the kinds of books he normally selects. Encourage him to browse the library for something different. If he usually reads mysteries, he could try fantasy or short stories, for instance.

Finally, encourage him to get recommendations from people who share his interests. Ideas from friends or relatives just might supply the spark he needs. ■



## Fun with Words

### Comma quest

Play this game to help your youngster remember the sometimes tricky rules about when and where to use commas.

**Materials:** index cards, pencil, books, magazines, newspapers

1. On separate index cards, have your child write rules for using commas. He might find the rules in a textbook, in class notes, or online. *Examples:* Use a comma after introductory phrases ("In the morning, we broke camp"). Use a comma before a conjunction when it joins two independent clauses ("He wanted to read, but he had no books").
2. Shuffle the cards and spread them out facedown. Take turns flipping one over. Then, race each other to find an example of the rule in one of the books, magazines, or newspapers.
3. The winner reads the sentence and the rule aloud and claims the card. The person with the most cards at the end is the comma champ! ■



## Parent 2 Parent

### Expressive read-alouds

My daughter doesn't use much expression when she reads aloud. Her teacher suggested that I could help Melissa improve by doing this activity together.

On separate sticky notes, Melissa drew faces showing different emotions, such as happy, sad, mad, excited, and surprised. Then, she read a book aloud to me, and I used the sticky notes to help with expression. For instance, after she used a flat voice to read

"He couldn't believe it when he finally won a race," I held up the surprised note. She laughed and repeated the sentence in an enthusiastic voice.

Melissa has started keeping her sticky notes nearby to refer to when she reads aloud at home. She won't always need them, but for now, they're a good reminder for her to adjust her tone to match how characters are feeling. ■



## OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote their children's reading, writing, and language skills.

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