Early Years

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A GREAT START

February 2021

Gregory - Portland ISD

KID BITS

"Read" social cues

This activity helps your child use expressions, gestures, and tone to pick up on social cues. Choose a phrase ("I'm a little teapot"), and take turns saying it in different ways (excited, tired, bored). Your youngster might yawn and rub his eyes to be a *tired* little teapot. Or to show excitement, you could jump up and down as you say the words.

Just say yes!

When you're tempted to say no to your child, consider whether there's a way to say yes instead. If she jumps in a puddle in her nice shoes, you could say, "Let's put on your rain boots so you can splash!" She'll be more positive and cheerful, and when you do need to say no for safety reasons, it will have more meaning.

Ready for homework

Whether or not your youngster has real homework yet, you can start building good homework habits now. Consider setting aside 10–15 minutes each day for him to sit at the kitchen table and work on art projects or do jigsaw puzzles. You'll set the stage for success as he gets older.

Worth quoting

"Some people look for a beautiful place. Others make a place beautiful." *Hazrat Inayat Khan*

Just for fun

Cashier: Would you like your milk in a bag?

Shopper: No, you can leave it in the carton.

Developing fine motor skills

Little fingers need to be strong and coordinated to accomplish all the jobs they do, from writing and drawing to zipping and buttoning. These playful activities will give your child's fingers a workout.

Paint-n-peel

Have your little one make a design on paper by crisscrossing strips of removable tape (like painter's tape) on the page. When she's finished, she can paint over the whole page. Wait for it to dry, then have her peel off the tape to reveal the design left behind.

Pipe cleaner creatures

Invite your child to twist pipe cleaners together to create people and animal figures. Then, she can thread beads on the ends to make heads, hands, and feet. Show her how to bend the ends of the pipe cleaners around the beads to keep them in place.

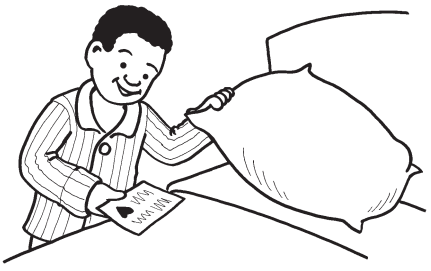
Gator grab

Let your youngster pretend a pair of tongs is an alligator and use it to fish small toys one at a time out of a bin or bucket. How many toys can she pick up without dropping any?

Smiley face race

Start with a blank sheet of paper and give each player a different-colored crayon. Take turns adding a smiley face to the page. Faces can be any size, but they can't overlap another smiley. Keep adding until the paper is full. The last person to fit a smiley on the page wins.♥

I love you THIS much!



Share a little love and affection with your youngster each day. You'll boost his confidence, make him feel secure, and build stronger parent-child bonds. Try these ideas:

- Sing songs that express your love for him, such as "You Are My Sunshine."
- Share favorite memories of your child. For instance, you might tell about the day he was born or where he took his first steps.
- Take turns adding a fun ending to "I love you ___." *Examples:* "to infinity and beyond," "no matter what."
- Leave little love notes for your youngster, perhaps on the bathroom mirror, under his pillow, or beside his place setting on the table.♥

Steps toward responsibility

Giving your child responsibilities while he's little helps him grow into a responsible person. Get started with these tips.

Put him in charge. Together find a few "big kid jobs" that your youngster can do, and make them his responsibility. It could be his job to pick out his pajamas and towel for his bath and then put away his bath toys afterward, for example. Add some simple daily chores, too. He might be responsible for wiping down the table after dinner and feeding the family goldfish.

Help him keep track. Part of being responsible is remembering to do things you're supposed to do. Together, create a reminder board to lay on his nightstand. Take a photo of him doing each job (brushing his teeth, tidying his room). He can glue the pictures in rows on a sheet of paper. As he completes a task each day, let him cover the photo with a checker or bottle cap. He'll be able to see what he has done and what remains. At the end of the day, he could clear the board so he can start fresh tomorrow.♥

Q & A Ahh ... a good night's sleep

Q: *My child often has trouble falling asleep. Sometimes he even wakes and calls me in the night. What should I do?*

A: Nighttime struggles are common, but you can use simple strategies to overcome them.

First, set aside at least 1 hour for winding down each night. Use the time for quiet, screen-free activities like reading or chatting. And try to end the night on a positive note—especially if it has been a challenging day—by pointing out good things that happened.

If your child calls to you in the night, keep your visit short and offer things he can use to comfort himself, like a night-light or a soft toy to snuggle. He'll have an easier time learning to get back to sleep on his own if you avoid sitting with him until he falls asleep.

Note: Consult his pediatrician if his sleep issues persist or are worrisome.♥

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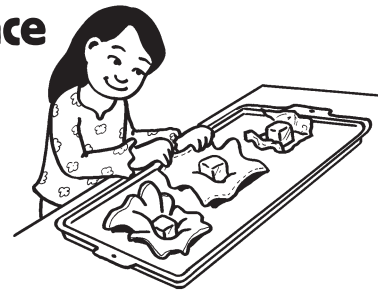
ACTIVITY CORNER Ice cube science



Can your youngster keep ice from melting? Help her try this experiment to see what material works best to protect ice cubes.

Let your child choose different materials (paper towel, washcloth, aluminum foil) that she thinks will help ice stay cold. She could lay the materials on a cookie sheet and wrap an ice cube in each one.

Now ask your youngster to predict which one will melt the least and the most. After 10 minutes, she can unwrap the cubes and compare them. Which one is biggest (melted the least)? Smallest (melted the most)? Were her predictions accurate?

Explain that some materials are better *insulators*. They help keep things the same temperature. For instance, a cooler helps food stay cold. Can she think of more examples?♥

Creative sparks

Nurture your child's creativity to help her develop critical thinking skills she'll use in every school subject. Here's how.

Where?

Find places where your youngster's imagination can flourish. Perhaps she could use a corner of the garage for messy projects or set up an "exploration station" in the backyard for discovering nature.

When?

Make sure each day has free time for "anything can happen" play. Let your little one turn on her imagination and create her very own games and activities. She might combine two favorite board games to invent a brand-new game.

What?

Provide unexpected "toys." Anyone who has ever watched a child pretend a stick is a light saber knows that many great playthings didn't start out as toys. Offer items like your old clothes for dress-up and empty containers (coffee canisters, plastic bottles) for playing store.♥

Home & School CONNECTION®

Working Together for School Success

February 2021

Gregory - Portland ISD

SHORT NOTES

"How-to" writing

Here's a fun way for your child to practice writing explanations. Ask him to list step-by-step instructions for creating something out of play dough—without telling you what the object is. Follow his directions exactly as written. Is your object the one he intended?

Apologies in action

When your youngster needs to apologize, explain that taking responsibility for her actions means more than just saying "I'm sorry." For instance, if she loses pieces to her brother's board game, she might use her own money to replace the game or offer to make homemade game pieces.

DID YOU KNOW?

People blink less than usual while staring at a computer screen. And that can lead to dry eyes and eyestrain. Encourage your child to take "blink breaks" when he's online. He might look away from the screen and blink several times while he waits for a program to open, for example.

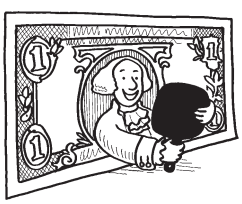
Worth quoting

"A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees."
Amelia Earhart

JUST FOR FUN

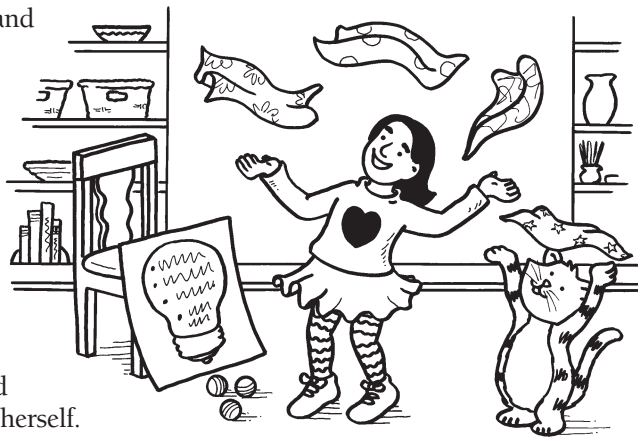
Q: What's the easiest way to double a dollar?

A: Put it in front of a mirror.



The nitty-gritty on grit

Children who have grit are able to overcome setbacks and stick with challenges. Nurture your youngster's persistence with these ideas.



Be independent

Let your child do as much as possible for herself. Maybe her smoothie is lumpy or the gift she wraps is messy, but resist the urge to fix them. You'll show her that you believe in her—and that will help her believe in herself.

Find "lightbulb" moments

A comic-strip artist might draw a lightbulb to show that a character has a "bright" idea. When your youngster struggles to learn something (say, how to juggle), suggest that she draw a lightbulb and fill it with steps to success. *Examples:* "Learn to juggle scarves first." "Juggle one ball at a time."

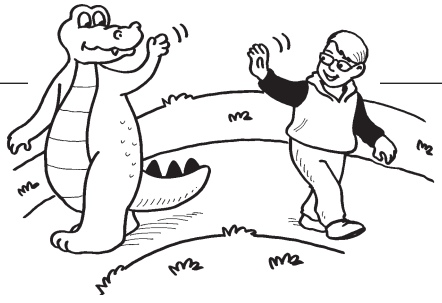
Declare a "do-over"

Remind your child that a setback simply means she needs more practice. For instance, if she's showing you how she can do a cartwheel but doesn't land on her feet, declare a "do-over." She'll learn that it's okay to try again and again.

Use self-motivation

Kids tend to stick with things they're interested in, and that teaches them the rewards of perseverance. Steer your youngster toward projects that fit her passions. If she wants to design video games someday, you might help her find a coding class or an online tutorial.♥

Attention, please!



These kid-friendly activities can stretch your child's attention span:

- Play "Spot the Difference." Draw two nearly identical pictures. Perhaps you'll sketch two pizzas with a pepperoni in a different spot or a different number of mushrooms. Tell your youngster how many differences there are. Can he find them all?
- "See you later, alligator." "After 'while, crocodile." With your child, take turns thinking of ways to say "goodbye"—each should rhyme and mention an animal. *Examples:* "Gotta go, armadillo." "In a few, kangaroo." How long can your youngster stay focused as you go back and forth?♥

Big project, big success

School projects give your child a chance to be creative as he shows what he has learned. Share these tips for successful projects from start to finish.

Make a connection. Your youngster will learn more—and be more motivated to work hard—if he picks a topic he cares about. Say he's asked to write a report on pioneer days. He might focus on daily life as a pioneer kid or on popular games from that time.

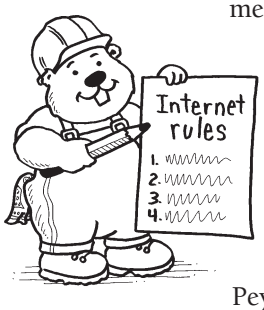
Break it down. Suggest that your child think of a big project as a series of smaller assignments. He can set a deadline for each step, including researching, writing, and revising. Remind him to leave some wiggle room in case a task takes longer than he anticipated.

Add flair. How could your youngster make his project stand out? Encourage him to include extras like models, posters, or audio or video clips. Maybe he'll make a cardboard model of a one-room schoolhouse like those many pioneer children attended. If his project includes a class presentation, he could demonstrate a game from the time period like jackstraws (similar to pickup sticks).♥

PARENT TO PARENT Online safety 101

My daughter Peyton does many things online these days—from going to school to hanging out with her friends. I was worried about her safety, so I found an online cyber safety course at *sos.fbi.gov/en/*, and we took it together.

We were both surprised by what we learned. For instance, online contests can be used to collect names and email addresses. And who knew that social media quizzes can trick you into sharing your birth month or pet's name to help hackers figure out your passwords?



After our class, Peyton made an illustrated list of rules to keep by the computer. Her rules include blocking sites that aren't kid friendly, not sharing passwords with friends, and asking my permission before downloading anything. Now, both of us are more careful when we work and play online.♥

Q & A Handling cheating

Q: *My son got caught giving his friend answers during a test and received a zero. How should I handle this at home?*

A: Start by asking your child why he cheated. If he says he just wanted to help his friend, explain that cheating is always wrong—regardless of the reason. Also, it doesn't actually help anyone. Your son got a zero on his test, and his friend didn't learn that studying is the right way to earn a good grade.

Or if your youngster felt pressured to share the answer, help him plan what to do the next time someone asks him to cheat. He might simply say, "Sorry, I can't," and keep his eyes on his own paper. Later, he could suggest they study together for the next test.

Finally, let your child know what the consequences will be at home if he cheats again (say, losing electronics for a certain period of time).♥

ACTIVITY CORNER Math squares: A brain workout

Boost your youngster's spatial reasoning—an important part of success in geometry—with this fun brainteaser.

1. Have your child cut out five squares, all the same size, from construction paper.

2. Now she can position the squares to form different *pentominoes*: arrangements of five squares in which each square shares at least one side with another square. Can she find all 12 possible pentominoes? (If she gets stuck, help her search online for "pentominoes.")

3. After your youngster makes each pentomino, she can draw it on graph paper so she remembers which ones she has found.

Challenge: Ask your child to cut out the pentominoes she drew on graph paper. Now she can arrange all 12 into a big square with a square hole in the middle.♥

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Intermediate Edition

Math+Science Connection

Building Understanding and Excitement for Children

February 2021

Gregory - Portland ISD

INFO BITS

Spatial reasoning

Don't throw away that cereal box! Your child can use it to build spatial reasoning, which includes visualizing shapes and how they fit together. Let him cut an empty box into separate panels, mix up the pieces, and put it back together with tape. *Idea:* Suggest that he build his own boxes using construction paper.

Science in the news

Encourage your youngster to see the science going on around us every day. Together, look through newspapers, magazines, or news websites, and point out articles about topics like extreme weather, new medicines, or robots. She could save interesting articles and keep them in a binder. They just may provide inspiration for a future career!

Book picks

Can You Count to a Googol? (Robert E. Wells) illustrates big numbers like millions and billions and teaches children that numbers go on forever.

Mistakes That Worked: 40 Familiar Inventions & How They Came to Be (Charlotte Foltz Jones) reveals the accidental beginnings of x-rays, Silly Putty, chocolate chip cookies, and more.

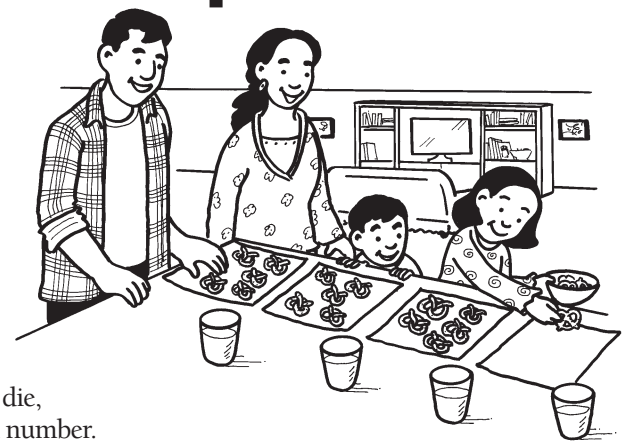
Just for fun

Q: How do you make time fly?

A: Throw a clock out the window.

Divide and conquer

These are the years when your child tackles division. Use the following ideas to help her become as comfortable with dividing as she is with adding and subtracting.



Play games

Add and divide. On your turn, roll six dice at once, and add the numbers in your head. Then, roll one die, and divide your total by that number. *Example:* Roll 3, 1, 5, 3, 2, and 4 for a total of 18. Roll a 3, and score 6 (18 ÷ 3 = 6). After five rounds, the player with the low score wins.

Cut in half. Remove the face cards from a deck of cards. Turn over two cards at a time to make a 2-digit number, and divide by 2. *Example:* Draw a 7 and a 1, make 71, and your score is 35.5, because 71 ÷ 2 = 35.5. Play until no cards are left. High score wins. *Variation:* For a bigger challenge, divide by 3, 4, or 5 instead of 2.

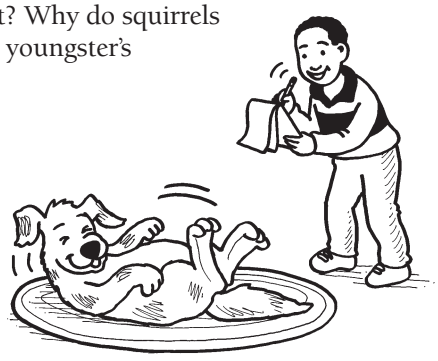
Use in real life

Figure out quantities. Let your youngster divvy up snacks for family members. If there are 20 pretzels and 4 people, for instance, each person would get 5 pretzels (20 ÷ 4 = 5).

Calculate tips. Ask her to figure out restaurant or delivery tips. For 15 percent, she can divide the check (say, $25) by 10 ($2.50), divide that number by 2 ($1.25), and add those numbers together ($2.50 + $1.25 = $3.75 tip). For 20 percent, have her divide the tab by 10 and double that number ($25 ÷ 10 = $2.50; $2.50 x 2 = $5 tip).

Study animal behavior

Why do dogs roll around on the carpet? Why do squirrels stick their tails straight up? Harness your youngster's curiosity about animals with this activity.



Observe. Encourage your child to watch an animal closely and take notes on its movements and sounds. Then, he could write explanations for what the behaviors might mean. ("I think the dog is trying to scratch her back.")

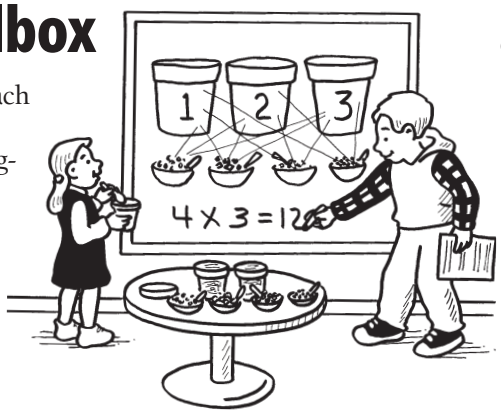
Research. Together, read library books or websites to check his ideas. He may discover that dogs roll around to scratch or to mark a spot with their scent. And squirrels use their tails to balance.

A word problem toolbox

Good problem solvers know how to approach word problems in different ways. Share these sample problems and strategies for your youngster to try.

Problem: *A shop sells 3 flavors of ice cream and 4 kinds of toppings. If you could order 1 flavor and 1 topping, how many different combinations are there in all?*

Strategy: Draw a picture. Your child could sketch 3 tubs of ice cream and 4 bowls of toppings. Then, he can draw lines to connect each flavor to each topping. He'll see that each of the 3 flavors has 4 possible toppings (3 flavors × 4 toppings = 12 combinations).



Problem: *There are 17 animals on a farm with only horses and cows. There are 9 more horses than cows. How many cows are there?*

Strategy: Work backward. Encourage your youngster to start by reading the question at the end of the problem. He'll know right away what piece of information he is looking for (the number of cows). Next, he should reread the entire problem. Finally, he could use trial and error, plugging in various numbers to see which ones have a difference of 9 and a sum of 17. (*Answer*: 13 horses and 4 cows, because 13 + 4 = 17 and 13 – 4 = 9.)

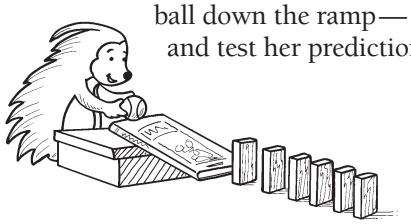
SCIENCE LAB

It's a chain reaction

With this experiment, your youngster will discover how energy transfers when objects collide during a chain reaction.

You'll need: shoebox, hardback book, rectangular building blocks, tennis ball

Here's how: Have your child place a shoebox in the center of a table and prop a book against it to make a ramp. Then, help her line up a row of same-size blocks on end, each about 1 inch apart, from the bottom of the ramp to the edge of the table. Ask her to predict what will happen when she rolls the ball down the ramp—and test her prediction.

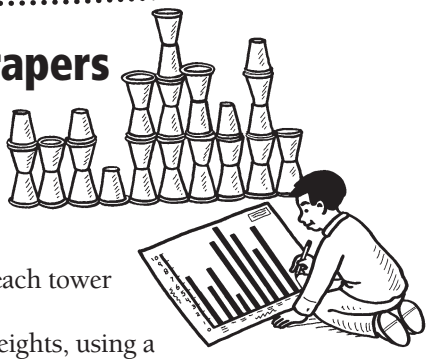


What happens? The ball knocks down the first block. That block knocks over the next one, and so on, until the last block falls off the table.

Why? A chain reaction occurs when the ball transfers its energy to the first block. That block transfers energy to the next, and the energy transfer continues down the line.

MATH CORNER

Graphing skyscrapers



If your youngster were to graph the actual heights of skyscrapers, he'd need a lot of paper! Unless, of course, he drew a *scaled* bar graph. Here's how.

Suggest that your child stack plastic cups into towers of different heights. Have him give each tower a name and measure and record its height.

Now your youngster can graph the towers' heights, using a scale so his graph will fit on paper (say, 1 cm on paper = 10 cm on towers). He could write numbers of centimeters up the left side and the towers' names along the bottom. He should also include his key: 1 cm = 10 cm.

Then, let your child draw a bar to show how tall each tower is. If his "Super Spire" tower is 72 cm tall, he would color in a bar 7.2 cm high. That's 1 cm on paper for every 10 cm of the actual tower (72 ÷ 10 = 7.2 cm).

PARENT TO PARENT

I ♥ math

"When will I ever use this math?" I had to smile when my daughter Emily asked me that question the other day—I used to ask my mother the same thing when I was her age! So I gave her the same idea my mother gave me. I had her write "I love math because" at the top of a sheet of paper and post it on the fridge for everyone to add to.

Emily was surprised when, after about a week, the page was almost full. She had listed things like "I can figure out how much snow we got by measuring it with a ruler" and "Multiplication helped me make a double batch of cookies." I added, "I save money by comparing prices on groceries." And Emily helped her little brother write, "I can count my stuffed animals."

Now when Emily asks how she'll use a particular type of math, like fractions or decimals, I encourage her to pay attention to her daily routines and see if she can find a real-life example. More often than not, she's able to add to her list.

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INTERMEDIATE EDITION

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

February 2021

Gregory - Portland Independent School District

Book Picks

■ ***Maker Lab: 28 Super Cool Projects*** *(Jack Challoner)*

Get your STEM on with this book of science and engineering projects. Using things found around the house, your child can create a DNA model, make monster marshmallows, build a soap-powered boat, and much more. (Also available in Spanish.)

■ ***Coo*** *(Kaela Noel)*
A unique 10-year-old girl named Coo was raised by pigeons, and a rooftop is the only home she's ever known. But now she must enter the human world to get help for her flock. Follow along as Coo learns about friendship and family in this heartwarming tale.

■ ***Noah Webster: Weaver of Words*** *(Pegi Deitz Shea)*
Noah Webster is most famous for his dictionary, but in this biography, readers will discover other ways he shaped our language. He wrote books teaching children to read and spell, and he influenced American English—changing British spellings like *colour* and *traveller* to *color* and *traveler*.

■ ***Poptropica: Mystery of the Map*** *(Jack Chabert)*
Three friends take a ride in a hot-air balloon that crashes on a mystery island, and their adventure begins! Welcome to Poptropica, filled with Vikings, extinct animals, and other surprising discoveries. The first book in the Poptropica graphic novel series.

What's it about?

Students who think about what they're reading tend to understand and remember the material. Encourage your youngster to put on his thinking cap when he reads with these tips.

Discuss

Talk with your child about books. For example, you could have him tell you why he thinks a book is interesting (the main character lives in Africa) or how it makes him feel (happy, curious). When he's finished reading, ask him if he would recommend the book to a friend. Why or why not? Discussing what he reads will help him understand the plot and characters better.

Visualize

Picturing the plot or a concept in a book can strengthen your youngster's comprehension. He may want to sketch a scene or character from a chapter book. If he's reading a textbook, he might draw a plant or an atom and label its parts. He'll learn to visualize when he reads, even if he doesn't draw every time.

Summarize

Suggest that your child write in response to books. He can practice summarizing a plot by writing a book review to share with the whole family. He could even submit it to a magazine like *Stone Soup* (*stonesoup.com*) or an online bookstore. Or he can show how he feels about a book by writing a poem about it.

A shortcut to reading fun

What kind of book has many plots and dozens of characters? A short-story collection! Consider these reasons for your child to try this type of fiction:

- Action usually moves quickly in short stories. A fast-paced tale can motivate a reluctant or struggling reader.
- Some collections allow children to sample different authors. After your youngster reads one, visit the library for titles by the writers she liked best.
- A book with various topics is bound to have something for everyone. If your child doesn't like one story, she might enjoy another.

Memories of me

Inspire your youngster to enjoy writing nonfiction by focusing on a topic she's an expert on: herself! Here are suggestions to help her turn her memories into a memoir.

Narrow the focus. A memoir often zeroes in on one slice of the writer's life. For example, your child might write about the first thing she remembers clearly, such as making pierogies with Grandma when she was little. Or perhaps she wants to describe a turning point in her life, like becoming a big sister.

Choose a format. Memoirs can take different forms. If your youngster likes poetry, suggest that she write a series of poems. Or she could create a picture book memoir with text and drawings. Another idea is to tell her tale in graphic novel format.

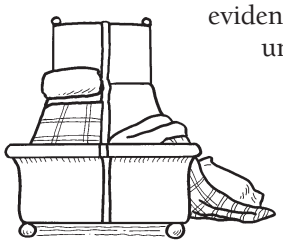
Dig deeper. An interesting memoir goes beyond simply stating what happened. As your child writes about an event ("We went strawberry picking on a beautiful spring day"), remind her to weave in her thoughts and feelings ("I was surprised that the strawberries grew so close to the ground").

Let's debate

With this family debate, you'll actually encourage your child to argue with you. She'll get better at making logical arguments and backing them up with evidence—skills she needs for school assignments.

1. Pick a topic. You might debate about whether people should make their beds every day or about which way to put toilet paper into the holder.

2. Prepare notes. Have each person jot down her opinion ("Making your bed seems pointless") and supporting evidence ("You just unmake it every night"). Family members should also write ways to rebut—or argue against—the opposite view. How will your youngster respond if someone says an unmade bed looks messy? *Example:* "Yes, but you can close your door so no one sees it."



3. Debate. Take turns making your cases and rebutting opposing arguments. Then, try to decide who made the most convincing case—whether you agree with that person or not.

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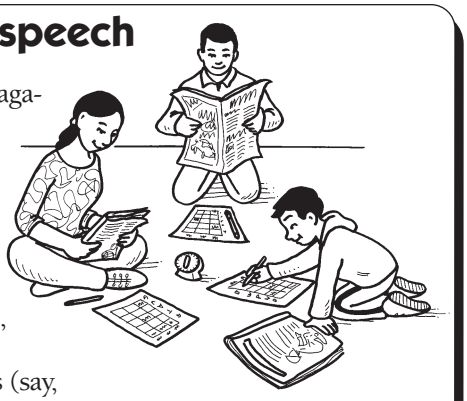
Fun with Words: Fill in the part of speech



Dive into a newspaper or magazine, and race to find parts of speech in this game.

Materials: *pencils, paper, newspaper or magazines, timer*

Have each player draw a 3 x 5 grid on his paper and write a part of speech (noun, verb, adjective) above each column. Then, let your youngster pick five random letters (say, *S*, *T*, *A*, *V*, and *G*), and write one to the left of each row. Give each person a section of the newspaper or a magazine, and set a timer for three minutes.

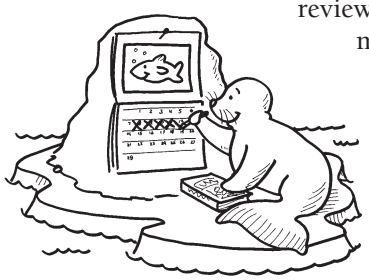
Players race to fill their grids with words from the newspaper or magazine. For example, your child might fill his *S* row with *sunshine* (noun), *sell* (verb), and *superior* (adjective).

When time is up, check the grids, and cross out any words that are in the wrong column (use a dictionary if you're not sure). The player with the most words remaining wins.

Parent 2 Parent: Manage reading assignments

My son Oliver likes to read, but only when he gets to choose the book. He has always struggled to finish assigned reading that he thinks is "boring."

I remembered having the same problem at his age. What helped was reading a few pages each day rather than leaving the whole assignment until the last minute. So I suggested that Oliver divide the number of assigned pages by the number of days. He writes each day's page numbers on his calendar and crosses them off as he finishes.



Also, I encouraged Oliver to learn as much as possible about a book before he opens it. He enjoys online reviews, and reading goes more smoothly once he has an idea of what a story is about. To his surprise, he has even discovered a few new favorites along the way!