

Early Years

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A GREAT START

January 2021

Gregory - Portland ISD

KID BITS

Generosity feels good

Inspire your child to give to others by pointing out what happens when she is generous. If she gives her cousin a coat she has outgrown, you might say, "This coat will keep Molly nice and warm this winter." Soon she'll begin to notice the results on her own. ("My little brother is so happy I gave him my toy!")

Hear the rhyme

Classic nursery rhymes boost your youngster's literacy skills by calling his attention to sounds in words. Read some to him from a library book or website, then reread—this time replacing a word with a different rhyming word. *Example:* "Jack and Jill went up the *spill* to fetch a pail of water." Can he catch and fix your "mistake"?

"Will you play with me?"

Your little bundle of energy wants to play, but you're tired after a long day. Now what? You might pretend to order pizza from her restaurant—she can make it out of play dough and deliver it to you. Or offer to be her audience while she puts on a show.

Worth quoting

"Today a reader, tomorrow a leader."
Margaret Fuller

Just for fun

Q: What's black, white, and green?

A: A seasick penguin.



Number of the day

"I have 8 grapes on my plate."
"Look—it's 8 o'clock!" Have your youngster pick a number to explore each day. Then, use it to help him develop number sense—the ability to understand and use numbers.

Spot it

Ask your child to point out his number of the day wherever he sees it. For instance, if today's number is 2, he might notice 2 on a license plate (LSJ492). Suggest that he carry a small notebook and pencil and make a tally mark each time he spots the number. At the end of the day, he can count the tally marks to see how many times he saw his number.

Count groups

When your youngster counts, he is learning that each number stands for a specific amount. Have him count people or objects that equal the number of the day. If the number is 5, he could count 5 ants crawling on the ground, 5



people around your dinner table, or 5 bushes in your yard.

Play

Fit the number of the day into your child's playtime. If he's drawing, and the number is 7, you might ask him to give his monster 7 eyes. Or when he plays with his railroad track, tell him to show you 7 trains. *Idea:* Have him separate the 7 trains into groups to see what numbers make up 7 (for instance, 5 trains + 2 trains or 3 trains + 4 trains).♥

Healthy meals fuel learning

Helping you plan nutritious meals, shop for ingredients, and cook teaches your child about healthy eating. Here's how to involve her in each step.

1. Plan. Together, discuss healthy meals you will cook this week. Your youngster can draw the foods for each day's menu on a sheet of paper to post on the fridge.

2. Shop. Use your child's menus to make a shopping list together. Let her add the items to your grocery cart (even an online cart!) and check them off your list.

3. Cook. Give your youngster jobs like finding and measuring ingredients, tearing lettuce for a salad, and spreading sauce on pizza dough.♥



Go, team!

Family projects let you bond with your child while teaching her to be part of a team. Try these activities.

Paint a mural. Making art can be even more rewarding when your family uses teamwork. Tape together several sheets of poster board or construction paper to create a large canvas. Agree on a topic for your mural—will you draw a fairy tale kingdom, a rain forest scene, or an undersea world? Now each person can decide what to add. You



and your youngster might work on a castle while her little brother paints rolling green hills in the background.

Create a hideaway. Your child will see that she can make a bigger fort if everyone works together. Gather sheets and blankets, and brainstorm ideas. Your youngster may suggest using the back of the couch to hold up one side. And you might propose draping a blanket over a card table to make a “tunnel” between sections. As you build, communicate with each other: “I’ll hold this side of the sheet while you get heavy books to put on it.” Celebrate your teamwork by hanging out in your fort.♥



Q & A

Little ones and current events

Q: We try to shield our daughter from all the scary stuff in the news these days, but she overhears things sometimes. What should we do?

A: You’re right to be careful about what your child hears and sees. Little ones can be frightened by scary images or words on the radio or TV—without understanding exactly what’s going on.



Try to watch and discuss the news when your daughter isn’t home or is asleep. Or listen in the car when she’s not with you, or just read the news silently.

If your child asks questions about the pandemic or another worrisome topic, offer a calm, simple explanation. You might say, “Yes, Grandma and Grandpa are still staying home to be healthy,” and then remind her of steps you take to keep *her* safe.♥

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ACTIVITY CORNER

I’m an author

Creating these mini homemade books will give your youngster early writing practice and help him see himself as an author.

Materials: scissors, paper, pencil, crayons or markers, stapler

Cut paper into fourths to make pages for his books. Together, brainstorm simple books he could write, and make a list of ideas. *Examples:* book of colors, alphabet book, counting book, animal “encyclopedia.”

Now your child can draw pictures on separate pages. Maybe he will draw something of a different color (red apple, yellow sun, green dragon) on every page. If he makes an animal encyclopedia, he might fill the pages with his favorite animals (dog, koala, dolphin). Help your youngster label each picture—he could say the words and write letters for the sounds he hears.

Finally, he can make a cover with a title and his name as the author. Staple the pages together, and invite him to read his book to the whole family and to himself at bedtime.♥



Teachers ♥ volunteers

Volunteering with your child’s school may look different this year, but his teacher will still appreciate your help. Consider these ideas.

1. Ask the teacher what she needs, and choose a job that’s a good fit for you.

If you’re tech-savvy, for instance, maybe you could work on the class website. Share your ideas, too. You might offer to do a curbside pickup at the public

library or send in cleaned recyclables for craft projects.

2. Recruit more volunteers. Many parents would be happy to help but don’t know where to start or think it’s not possible this year. Ask the teacher if she’d like you to email other parents and suggest ways they can volunteer if they are able. You’ll likely find parents with a variety of skills and interests that the teacher could use.♥



Home & School

CONNECTION®

Working Together for School Success

January 2021

Gregory - Portland ISD



SHORT NOTES

Think like a scientist

Does your child understand the difference between an *observation* (what she sees) and an *inference* (what she concludes from the evidence)? Help her by pointing out things you observe and what she can infer. ("There are footprints in the mud, so someone probably walked there after it rained.")

Car safety

Keep your youngster safe in the car by making sure his lap belt lies across his upper thighs and the shoulder belt fits across his chest. If his seat belt doesn't fit right, he still needs a booster seat. Most kids "graduate" from a booster when they're 4 feet 9 inches tall, typically between the ages of 8 and 12.

Dealing with swearing

Youngsters sometimes experiment with curse words to impress friends or express anger. Consider making a "nice language" rule that applies to children *and* adults, since your child will follow your example. And let her know what the consequence will be for swearing.

Worth quoting

"Reading is important, because if you can read, you can learn anything about everything and everything about anything." *Tomie dePaola*

JUST FOR FUN



Q: Why do you need a dictionary when you talk to giants?

A: They use big words!

Organized for a new year

It's no surprise that students who are organized tend to do better in school. Could your youngster use some help in this department? Share these strategies for overcoming common pitfalls and starting 2021 off on the right foot.

Problem: "I forgot to do my assignment."

Solution: Lists and calendars

Encourage your child to end each day by making a to-do list for tomorrow. He can add to it as he gets new assignments. He'll be less apt to forget anything, and he'll find it satisfying to cross out completed tasks. Also, he could keep a calendar for upcoming tests, presentations, and projects.

Problem: "I lost my homework."

Solution: A filing system

Suggest that your youngster keep his backpack nearby while he does homework. After he finishes each assignment, he can put it directly into his backpack. Learning online? Help him create a computer folder for each



subject—each with a subfolder just for homework. Also, have him back up files regularly to a thumb drive or a school-approved cloud app.

Problem: "My book is here ... somewhere."

Solution: The five-minute rule

Let your child in on a little secret: The time he spends staying organized will actually save him time in the long run. This is where the five-minute rule comes in. Before he begins working each day, have him set a timer for five minutes and organize supplies, papers, and books until the timer goes off. ♥

What did you learn today?

Expressing interest in school lets your child know her learning is important to you. Consider these tips:

- Ask your youngster to demonstrate something she did in school. She might teach you the steps in long division or a song she sang in music. If she's learning remotely, ask her to show you what apps she uses and how she submits assignments.

- Weave a conversation about school into your evening routine. For example, while you make dinner, invite your youngster to tell you all the cool facts she learned about ancient Egypt during today's history lesson. ♥



Mindfulness for kids

Mindfulness is the practice of slowing down and focusing on the moment as a way to relax. Suggest that your youngster try these strategies to reduce stress.

Five senses. Encourage your child to notice something different with each of her five senses. She might *see* snow falling, *hear* the dog snoring, *touch* her cozy sweatshirt, *smell* the fire burning in the fireplace, and *taste* an orange.



Thought balloons. Have your youngster sit quietly with her eyes closed. She should focus on breathing in slowly for a count of four and holding her breath for four seconds. Next, she can exhale all the air slowly, pretending she's blowing any worries into a giant balloon. Then, she could imagine the balloon—and her worries—floating away.

Limp noodles. Ask your child to lie on the floor and pretend she's an uncooked noodle by stiffening all her muscles. Now have her loosen her toes, feet, ankles, legs, and the rest of her body until she's a completely limp (and relaxed) noodle!♥

**PARENT
TO
PARENT**



At-home field trips

My son Carson loves school field trips, but he hasn't been able to go on any since the pandemic began. So we've been taking virtual field trips—and they're inspiring real-life learning!

This past fall, we “toured” national parks online to see fall foliage in different parts of the country. Then, we walked around our neighborhood, and Carson sketched the colorful trees he saw.



Another time, we “rode” roller coasters on theme-park websites. This led Carson to experiment with building a roller coaster for his toy cars out of cardboard tubes.

While our virtual trips aren't the same as going to real places, Carson is learning a lot from them, both online and with his projects afterward. And we're having fun exploring the world as a family—from home.

Find more virtual field trip ideas at rfeonline.com/FieldTrips.♥

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ACTIVITY CORNER

Paper engineering

Why do so many buildings have cylinder-shaped columns? Let your child experiment to find out.

Materials: three sheets of construction paper, tape, hardback books

Have your child make three paper columns like this:

1. Roll paper lengthwise into a cylinder, and secure with tape.
2. Fold paper into fourths lengthwise. Unfold, and shape into a rectangular column. Tape the edges together.
3. Fold paper into thirds lengthwise. Tape into a triangular column.

Now it's time to test the columns. Your youngster can stand them up and carefully stack books, one at a time, on top.

What happens? The cylinder supports multiple books, while a single book instantly crushes the other two columns. Can your child figure out why? (The cylinder's shape distributes weight evenly. The folds in the rectangular and triangular columns create points of weakness.)♥



Q & A

Talking about drugs

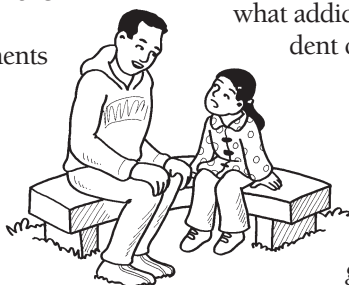
Q: My daughter is in third grade. Is it too soon to talk about drugs?

A: Actually, children are never too young to start learning about drugs. At this age, your daughter is more likely to be open about her questions and opinions—and to listen to yours.

Watch for teachable moments in everyday life. If her doctor prescribes medicine, you could use the opportunity to talk about why she's not allowed to take medicine that wasn't prescribed for her. If you give

her over-the-counter medicine, ask her to help you carefully read the label and double-check the dosage. Explain that it's dangerous to take more than the recommended amount. Or let a TV commercial about addiction spark a discussion about what addiction means (being dependent on drugs).

Note: Stay up to date on the latest information about children and drugs by visiting websites like drugabuse.gov or getsmartaboutdrugs.com.♥



Math+Science Connection

Intermediate Edition

Building Understanding and Excitement for Children

January 2021

Gregory - Portland ISD



INFO BITS

My favorite number

Suggest that your child survey family members about their favorite numbers (1–10) and see how her data compares to this fun fact: 7 is the most common favorite number. She can make a picture graph or bar



graph to show the results and share them with everyone. Was 7 the most popular number?

Center of mass

Have your youngster sit on a chair with his feet together, flat on the floor. Place your thumb on his forehead—can he stand up without pushing against your thumb? His center of mass (the point at which his weight is most concentrated) is over the seat. To stand, he must lean forward to shift his center of mass.

Book picks

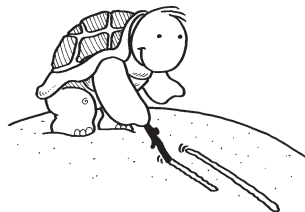
▣ Your child will enjoy the lift-the-flap fun of *Mesmerizing Math* (Jonathan Litton) with creative examples of decimals, prime numbers, and shapes.

▣ Discover how wildlife survives harsh climates and freezing temperatures in *Winter Bees & Other Poems of the Cold* (Joyce Sidman).

Just for fun

Q: How can you make a line longer without touching it?

A: Draw a shorter line next to it. Now the first one is longer.



Fractions make my day

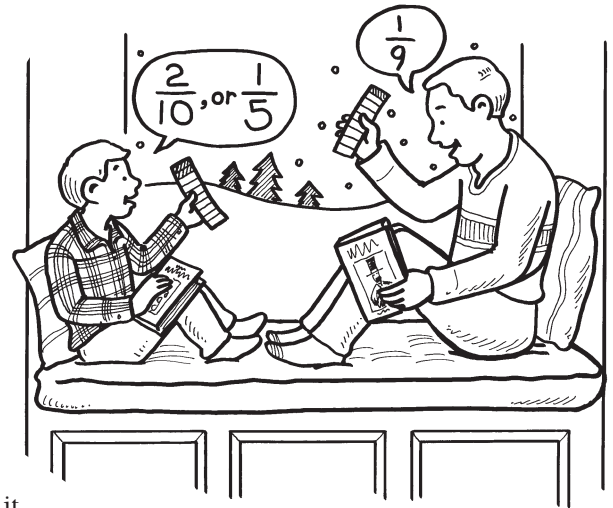
If your youngster reads for 2 hours, that's a fraction of his day ($\frac{2}{24}$, or $\frac{1}{12}$) well spent! Here's how to weave fractions into his whole day.

Reading time

Encourage your child to create a fraction bookmark. He can draw lines to divide a strip of cardboard into equal sections, one for each chapter in a book he plans to read. When he finishes a chapter, he gets to color one section of the bookmark before sticking it into his book. Can he tell you what fraction of the book he has read?

Snack time

Make fruit salad with your youngster. Before eating, have him count how many pieces of each type of fruit are in his bowl. *Example:* 7 grapes, 5 mandarin orange segments, 3 banana slices, 2 apple chunks. Now he could add to find the total number of pieces ($7 + 5 + 3 + 2 = 17$) and say what fraction of his serving each fruit makes up (grapes = $\frac{7}{17}$, oranges = $\frac{5}{17}$).



Game time

Invite fractions to family game night. Play Scrabble, assigning fractional values to letters. Ten-point letters like Z and Q could be worth more (maybe $2\frac{1}{2}$ points) and 1-point letters like A and S worth less (perhaps $\frac{1}{4}$ point). Your child will add fractions to calculate scores. Or play bingo with fractions instead of numbers. Equivalent fractions count—so if $\frac{4}{5}$ is called, a player could put a chip on $\frac{8}{10}$. ▣

What's in an ecosystem?

Let your child take an up-close look at an ecosystem—a community of living and nonliving things—with this activity.

In your backyard or at a park, help your youngster spread a blanket on the ground. She can lie down and examine the ground through a magnifying glass. Encourage her to draw and label what she observes, perhaps, rocks, grass, plants, soil, and insects.

Then, suggest that she think about how everything is related (insects eat plants, plants grow in soil). She could draw arrows from the insect to the plant and from the plant to the soil. ▣




Hands-on solid shapes

Help your youngster grasp 3-D, or solid shapes, and find real-life examples with this idea.

1. Collect. Have your child label a separate container for each of these 3-D geometric shapes: rectangular prism, cylinder, cone, cube. Each of you can choose a container and gather household objects in that 3-D shape. She might find a tissue box (rectangular prism), an oatmeal canister (cylinder), a



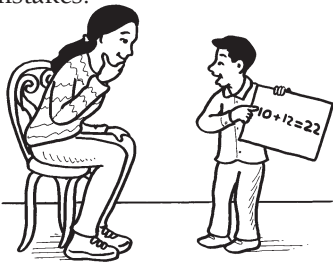
paperweight that's cone-shaped, and a die (cube).


2. Make. Encourage your youngster to build solid shapes out of 2-D shapes. She can look at a solid shape (perhaps a can of beans that's a cylinder), and think about which 2-D shapes it includes (1 rectangle, 2 circles). Then, she could cut the flat shapes from paper and cardboard and use duct tape to make a cylinder. She'll learn which 2-D shapes make up each 3-D one. 

Q & A Explain your math thinking

Q: On math assignments, my son has to explain how he gets the answers. He always says, "Because I know." Why does he need to explain?

A: Tell your son that his teacher wants to know what's going on inside his head when he does math! Reading his explanations tells the teacher whether your child understands the steps involved in getting the answer. Plus, explaining math thinking will often lead your youngster to correct his mistakes.



Ask your son to pretend you don't know anything about math and he needs to teach you to solve the problem. His explanation might go something like this: "10 + 12 = 22 because 10 + 10 = 20, 12 is 2 more than 10, and 20 + 2 = 22." Then, encourage him to write down what he said. 

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MATH CORNER


Parentheses first

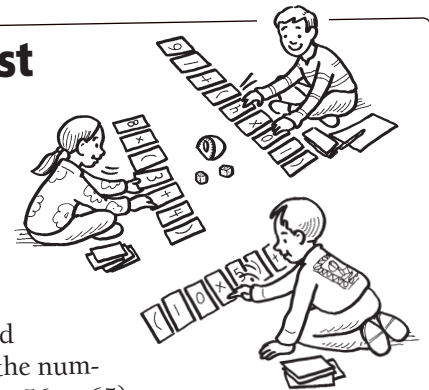
Play this game to help your child solve equations with parentheses.

Materials: index cards, pencils, paper, 2 dice, timer

Have each person make a set of index cards with the numbers 0–9, signs for the four operations (+, −, ×, ÷), and opening and closing parentheses. Roll the dice, and use the numbers rolled to create a two-digit number (say, 56 or 65).

Set a timer for 5 minutes. Each person arranges her cards to form equations equaling that number and lists the equations on her paper. Every equation must include parentheses and at least two different signs (remind your youngster that problems in parentheses are solved first). For 56, your child might make "8 × (3 + 4)" and "(10 × 5) + 6."

When time's up, trade papers, and check each other's math. Get the most correct equations to win the round and roll the dice for the next round. 



SCIENCE LAB

A frosty experiment


Your youngster can make frost with this indoor experiment that lets him explore the science of condensation.

You'll need: two metal bowls or empty soup cans (rinsed, labels removed), ice, water, measuring cup, salt, timer

Here's how: Have your child fill each bowl with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cold water and 6 ice cubes. He should add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup salt to one bowl and stir. Encourage him to observe the

outside of the bowls. What does he notice after 5 minutes? 10 minutes?

What happens? Water droplets collect on the bowl containing only water and ice. Frost forms on the bowl with ice and salt water.

Why? Salt makes ice melt faster and lowers water temperature, so the bowl containing salt is colder than the bowl with just water and ice. Water from the air formed condensation on the outside of both bowls, and on the colder bowl, the condensation froze—now it's frost! 



Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

January 2021

Gregory - Portland Independent School District

Book Picks

■ *Voyage of the Dogs* (Greg van Eekhout)

Lopside, Champion, Bug, and Daisy are barkonauts—dog astronauts. When their human crew abandons their spaceship, the pack must work together to figure out how to get back to Earth. Each dog brings a special strength and talent to the mission in this sci-fi adventure.



■ *Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook* (Anne Mazer and Ellen Potter)

This nonfiction guide is chock-full of tips and stories to inspire young writers. Written in a friendly question-and-answer format, the book includes advice about writing “ugly” first drafts, bringing characters to life, creating suspense, and keeping a journal.

■ *Cosmic Commandos* (Christopher Eliopoulos)

This exciting graphic novel tells the tale of identical twins Jeremy and Justin. When Jeremy finds a charm in a cereal box, his favorite video game comes to life! The twins may look alike, but they are total opposites, and they have to join forces to win the game.



■ *Smart About the Fifty States: A Class Report* (Jon Buller and others)

Discover facts about every state in the USA, from Alabama to Wyoming. Your child will learn state nicknames, capitals, historical facts, and much more. Each state's section contains an illustrated map that highlights important places. What will your child learn about your state?



Vocabulary games

A rich vocabulary can help your youngster get her point across during a conversation or find the right word when she's writing. Strengthen her word power with these fun games.

Dictionary charades

Take turns flipping to a random page in the dictionary and choosing one word to act out. If your child picks *mountainous*, for example, she might pretend to climb mountains. The first family member to identify the word gets to act out the next one.

Definition bingo

Together, choose 25 vocabulary words from a dictionary or your youngster's textbooks, write each definition on a separate slip of paper, and put the slips in a bowl. Each player draws a bingo board and writes the words randomly in the squares. Now a caller reads the definitions, and players put a penny on the

matching word. Cover five in a row to call “Bingo!” *Tip:* Have the winner read out the words and check the definitions.

Synonym sense

Each person secretly chooses a theme, such as winter, for the other players to figure out. Players jot down five words that fit their themes. Then, they each get one minute to browse through a thesaurus (or thesaurus.com) for synonyms. If your child's list includes *cold*, she might add *brisk* and *shivering*. Take turns reading the synonyms from your lists and trying to name each other's themes. ■



Think outside the book

The world is full of things to read. Share some with your youngster each day, and watch him become a well-rounded reader. Here are a few suggestions:

- Turn your refrigerator door into a reading center. Encourage everyone to post reviews of books, movies, restaurants, and gadgets. You could also hang up comics or fortune cookie slips.
- Email each other. You might send schedule reminders, news about your day, poems, or inspirational quotes.
- Share cards and letters that come in the mail. Use takeout menus and catalogs for reading practice, too—ask your child to find coupons or to tell you about foods or products that interest him. ■



“Just right” books

Most of the time, reading shouldn't be too easy or too hard for your youngster. Ask him to read aloud to you, and then help him find books he'll enjoy—and that stretch his reading ability—with these tips.

Too easy? Does your youngster read the book quickly? Can he recognize each word and easily understand the plot? The book may be too easy. Although it's perfectly fine for him to read books like that, more challenging material will offer new vocabulary and more complicated plots. And that will prepare him for the increasingly complex texts he'll read in school.



Too hard? Is your child's reading slow and choppy? Does he stumble over several unfamiliar words per page? Is he confused about what's happening? These are clues that a book is too difficult for now. Offer to read it aloud to him or read it together.

Note: If he struggles with assigned reading, talk to his teacher to see if he needs extra help.

Just right! Can your child read most of the text smoothly? Did he find a few new words? Can he understand what's going on with a little thought? His book sounds like a good fit—it provides enough of a challenge without frustrating him. ■

**Fun
with
Words**

Name that phrase!

Here's a word game that will stretch your child's thinking skills. All you need are pencil and paper.

First, show your youngster these examples of how arranging words in a particular way can turn a phrase into a brainteaser.

million

= one in a million

eiln pu

= line up in alphabetical order

**MIND
matter**

= mind over matter

Once your child has the idea, take turns making up brainteasers for one another to work out. *Hint:* To find phrases to use, suggest that she look for them when she's reading or listen for them during conversations. It helps to choose phrases that use prepositions, such as *in*, *on*, *over*, and *under*.

She can also find examples online by searching “frame games.” Or she could look in library books like *The Big Book of Frame Games* by Terry Stickels. ■

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Q&A

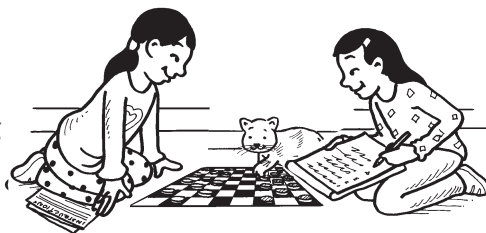
In my own words

Q My daughter knows she can't copy from sources when she's writing reports, but she says it's hard to think of new ways to say the same thing. Is there a way I can help her with this?

A Your daughter is right—copying others' words is known as plagiarism. Not only is it dishonest, but it can cause her to lose credit for an assignment. Help her practice paraphrasing, or putting material in her own words, with this activity.

Ask her to read a short item, such as board game rules or a recipe. Put it away, and have her rewrite it to be as different as possible from the original. Instead of “Checkers is a two-player strategy game,” she might write, “You need two people to play checkers. Use strategic thinking to win.”

Encourage her to use the same method when she does research for a school report. She can read a page or section, then look away and write about it in her own words. She should check her writing against the source to make sure it's not too similar. ■



Tips for writing dialogue

It's fun to make characters “talk”!

Inspire your youngster to write his own stories with dialogue for each character. He'll learn to develop a plot and show how his characters respond to various situations.

To start, suggest that he think about who the character is, what the situation is, and what his tone would be. For instance, a child would speak more formally to a teacher (“Good morning, how are you?”) than to a friend (“Hey, what's up?”).

When your youngster finishes his story, he should read it aloud. Does the dialogue sound realistic—like something a person would actually say? He may realize he should change “You cannot go in there” to “You can't go in there,” since people often use contractions when they speak.

Tip: Paying attention to dialogue in books, plays, and movies is a great way for your youngster to recognize how different characters speak. ■

