

Early Years

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A GREAT START

September 2020

Gregory - Portland ISD

KID BITS

Steps toward independence

Identify parts of your child's morning routine that she could take over, like brushing her hair and pouring her cereal. Help her until she gets the hang of each task. She'll become more independent, and mornings will go more smoothly for everyone.

Above or below?

Build your youngster's spatial awareness—his understanding of where objects are in space—with this fun activity. Sit back-to-back, and take turns describing what to draw using position words like *above*, *under*, *beside*, and *between*. ("Draw a boy sitting *under* a tree.") Now turn around and compare your pictures.

DID YOU KNOW?

You're better able to care for your children if you take good care of yourself—especially during trying times. Try to carve out alone time to relax, maybe to do crossword puzzles or knit. Also, consider limiting how much news you watch or read. And get a better night's sleep by turning off screens at least one hour before bed.

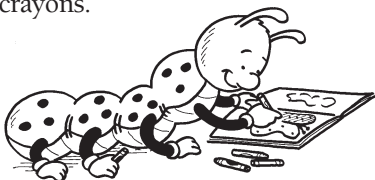
Worth quoting

"A problem is a chance for you to do your best." Duke Ellington

Just for fun

Q: Which hand is best for coloring?

A: Neither. It's better to color with crayons.



Settling in for a new year

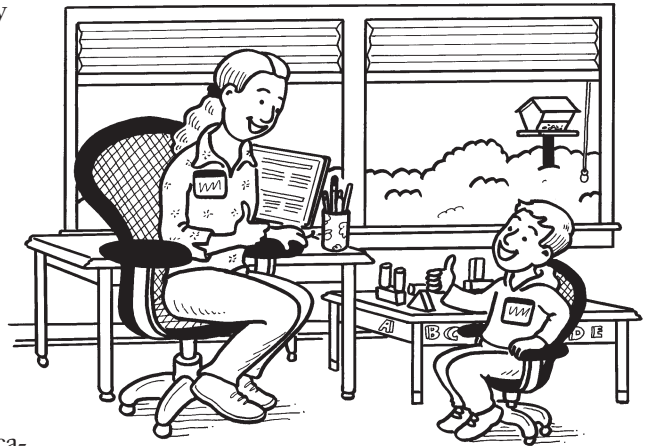
Parents and children may feel uncertain about how this school year will go because of COVID-19. Here's advice for helping your youngster learn and adjust to changes.

Q: How can I keep my child learning on days when he isn't in school?

A: Your youngster learns the most from what comes naturally to him—playing! Set out educational toys like magnetic letters, building blocks, and jigsaw puzzles. If you work from home, invite him to be your coworker. Let him make badges for the two of you to wear, and give him "jobs" (sort office supplies, decorate your work area).

Q: My son struggles with social distancing. What's the best way to explain it?

A: "Social distancing" is a tough phrase for little ones, since learning to socialize is an important part of their development. So try using different language. ("We need extra personal space because



there are extra germs going around.") Or encourage him to picture himself in an imaginary bubble. Gently say "Bubble" to remind him to keep his distance.

Q: My child misses his grandparents. What should I do?

A: This is a good opportunity to help your child learn about compassion and empathy. Explain that staying away from Grandma and Grandpa is a kind thing to do right now, because older people may get very sick from COVID-19. Encourage him to call his grandparents often, and, if possible, plan online chats so he can "see" them.♥

School success checklist

Is your little one ready for the school year? Help her master the skills on this checklist to start the year right.

☐ **I can follow directions:** Give your youngster one- and two-step instructions. "Hop to your bedroom, and put your shoes away." When she masters following two steps, add a third.

☐ **I'm a good listener:** Ask your youngster to close her eyes while you make three sounds (clap your hands, tap a spoon against a glass, crumple a piece of paper). Can she name the sounds in order?

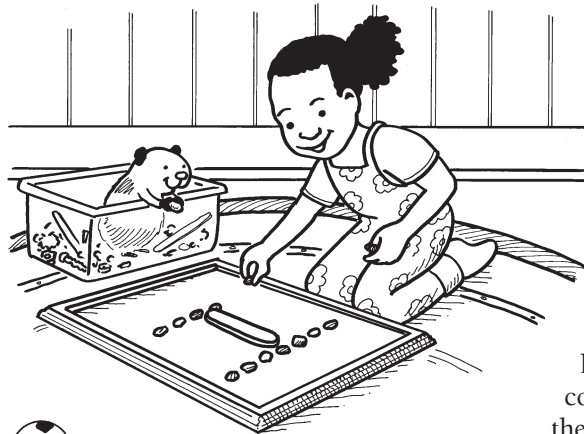
☐ **I take turns:** Encourage your child to spot examples of turn taking, perhaps when your family passes food around at dinner or plays a board game.♥



Play and learn with loose parts

Nuts and bolts, bottle caps, marbles, and other “loose parts” you have around the house can inspire your child to think creatively and flexibly. Fill a box with loose parts, and try these ideas.

Frame a picture. Place a frame (glass removed) on the table, and let your youngster arrange loose parts inside it to create pictures. She



might make a random design, or maybe she'll form letters, numbers, or shapes. For example, she could use pebbles and craft sticks to make the first letter of her name inside the frame. Now she can clear the frame and make a new picture.

Find the similarities. Hand your child a loose part (say, a pom-pom). How many other objects in her box match it in some way? Ask her to tell you what they have in common. She may notice a marble is the same shape (round), a block is the same color (red), and a sponge has a similar texture (squishy). Then, put the item back in the box, and let her choose something for you to match up.♥

PARENT TO PARENT

Make life more predictable

With all the disruptions to our lives this spring and summer, my son Diego became clingy and whiny. My aunt, who raised five children, pointed out that a predictable routine could help him feel more secure.

So together, Diego and I made a picture schedule that showed what we would do each day. We listed items like “Eat breakfast after getting dressed for school,” “Play outside before dinner,” and “Read a bedtime story.”

Diego drew a picture beside each one—a bowl of cereal for eating breakfast, a soccer ball for playing outside, and a book for story time.

We hung the schedule on our bathroom mirror, so Diego sees it first thing in the morning and knows what to expect that day. Life may still be stressful, but having a routine has made things feel a little more normal.♥



ACTIVITY CORNER

Get up, get moving

Young children need up to three hours of active play each day to build healthy bodies and minds. Use these activities to get your little one moving.

Gallop like a horse

Let your child pretend to be a horse. He can roll a die and gallop forward that number of times. Then, he should roll again. How many gallops does it take for him to get from one end of the room to the other? How about through your whole house?

Dance with a balloon

Turn on music, and have your youngster bat a blown-up balloon straight up into the air. Now everyone dances like crazy until the balloon touches the ground. When it lands, dancers freeze in place for a count of five. Launch the balloon, and dance again.♥



Q & A Introducing ... me!

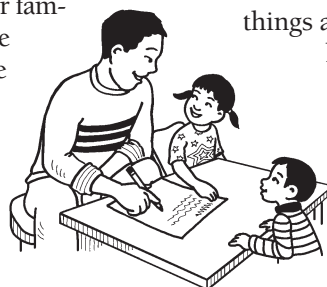
Q: How can I work with the teacher to help my daughter do her best this year?

A: Start by writing an email or a note to the teacher. Ask your daughter what she would like you to include—perhaps information about your family or about her favorite things. Examples: “Ellie has a baby brother” and “Her favorite color is green.”

Then, add information to help the teacher understand

your daughter's needs. Examples: “She goes to her dad's house every other weekend.” “Ellie might not always speak up when something is hard for her.”

Be sure to touch base with the teacher throughout the year. From time to time, send an email or a note—both when things are going great and when you have a question or concern. The teacher will be happy to hear that your child enjoyed a book she read to the class, and the regular communication will make it easier to work as a team if a problem arises.♥



OUR PURPOSE

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

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www.rfeonline.com
ISSN 1540-5567

Home & School

Working Together for School Success

CONNECTION®

September 2020

Gregory - Portland ISD

SHORT NOTES



My handwashing poster

Ask your child to design a poster that reminds family members to frequently wash their hands. She could include a clever slogan ("Wanted: Clean hands!") and write and illustrate instructions for washing properly. *Examples:* "Scrub for at least 20 seconds." "Wash fronts and backs of hands, between fingers, and under nails."

Natural rewards

Show your youngster that good behavior has its own rewards. For instance, point out that there's time to play a board game because he put away his toys the first time you asked. He'll be more apt to repeat the behavior next time.

Sort the foods

Sorting items into categories boosts your child's thinking skills. After you make a grocery list, have her rewrite it in a way that will help you shop more efficiently. She could organize items by the aisle where they're located (produce, frozen foods). Then, she could think of other ways to sort for fun, maybe by color or food group.

Worth quoting

"Use your smile to change the world; don't let the world change your smile." *Chinese proverb*

JUST FOR FUN

Q: You can see me in water, but I never get wet. What am I?



A: A reflection.

Confident about school

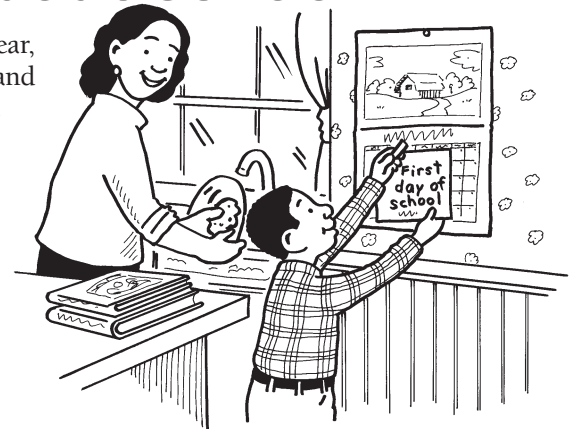
School may look different this year, but one thing is the same: Parents and teachers want to keep children safe and help them learn. Here are answers to questions you may have as the new school year gets underway.

Q: My child thinks school will be too hard this year since he hasn't been in class for so long. What can I do?

A: Many students had a longer-than-normal summer break, and teachers are ready to help them catch up. So let your youngster know he's not alone. If you discover he is struggling (say, stumbling over sight words or math facts he knew last year), contact his teacher so you can work as a team to get him on track.

Q: With all the changes COVID-19 has brought, my son seems anxious. Any ideas for making him feel better?

A: Youngsters feel less anxious when they know what to expect. If he's adjusting to a new school schedule, post it on the refrigerator. At home, try to keep



things as much the same as possible. Eat meals together regularly, and plan weekend activities he can look forward to like hiking or playing backyard games.

Q: When my child works online, how much should I be involved?

A: Your youngster's work is his responsibility, but you can offer support. To help him stay on task, make sure he has a quiet place to learn and the materials he needs. You might sit nearby and do your own work, or simply be available in case he has a question or a technical problem (like a dropped internet connection). Consider keeping a notepad handy so he can write his questions if you're busy.♥

Get to know teachers

Now's the time to open the lines of communication with your youngster's teachers and set the stage for a successful year. Consider this advice:

- Attend events like back-to-school night and PTA or PTO meetings, whether they're held virtually or in person. Introduce yourself to your child's teacher, and try to meet specialists, too. The librarian, school counselor, and art, music, and PE teachers all play important roles in your youngster's education.
- Send a note or an email to find out how teachers prefer to be contacted. Also, include a personal detail or two about your child, perhaps how she's coping with the pandemic or a hobby she enjoys. You might also ask the teacher how he's been doing during this time—he'll appreciate your recognizing that it has been hard on everyone.♥



Reading adds up

Did you know that children who read for pleasure at least 20 minutes each day do better in school? Use these tips to fit more reading into your youngster's day.

Keep it front and center.

Your child will be more likely to read during her free time if materials are easily available. Stash kid-friendly magazines in the living room, and leave comics



on the breakfast table. When you know you might need to wait, such as at the dentist or vet, take books along or download e-books from the library to your phone or tablet.

Add it to other activities.

Bedtime is a natural opportunity to read. But so is playtime—and even chore time. If your youngster wants to pitch a tent in the backyard, suggest that she fill it with books and magazines to read while she hangs out inside. Also, audiobooks can

make reading hands-free, so you could listen to a story together while you do yard work or fold laundry.♥

ACTIVITY CORNER

Create a family yearbook

Encourage your child to preserve family memories, and practice writing, by starting this fun project he can work on all year long.

Together, look through old school yearbooks—his and yours—to find out what they contain. Your youngster will see individual and group portraits as well as pages dedicated to activities and special events. What will his homemade book include? He might create a binder with sections for birthdays, holidays, and accomplishments, for example.



Now your child can write up yearbook entries and take photos to go along with them. Maybe he'll begin with a page about himself learning to play the guitar and another dedicated to his sister's fall art exhibit. Have him add each page to the matching section in his binder, and keep his work-in-progress on the coffee table for everyone to leaf through.♥

PARENT TO PARENT

We're a cleaning team

When I stepped up our household cleaning routine because of the pandemic, I decided to get my sons involved. I told Nate and Seth that we're in this together and that we need to share responsibility for keeping the house clean—and keeping germs at bay.

Our boys came up with a great idea. They decided to make a "chore spinner." They divided a paper plate into sections labeled with chores like sweeping, mopping, vacuuming, and dusting. I added emptying trash cans and wiping down surfaces we touch a lot, such as doorknobs, TV remotes, banisters, and counters.

Now when it's chore time, Nate and Seth spin the wheel to see who does what. They're showing more responsibility for their chores than before—and they've even started calling themselves "The Clean Team."♥



Q & A

Screen time: Find a balance

Q: My daughter has had more screen time than usual in recent months. How can I help her cut back?

A: For many children, technology has been a valuable tool for learning and for staying in touch with friends and loved ones lately. So the amount of time spent in front of a screen isn't necessarily a problem—what matters is how your daughter uses technology.

Have your daughter make a chart with three columns labeled "Screen-free time," "Quality screen time," and "Other screen time."

The first column can include things like family meals, physical activity, and playing with toys. In column two, she might list schoolwork, video-chats with relatives, and educational videos. And the last column is for purely fun screen time like (parent-approved) video games and apps.

Explain that the goal is to spend most of her time on activities in columns one and two. For column-three items, set a time limit that works for your family.♥



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Math+Science Connection

Intermediate Edition

Building Understanding and Excitement for Children

September 2020

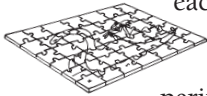
Gregory - Portland ISD



INFO BITS

Jigsaw geometry

Do a jigsaw puzzle together, then let your child find its perimeter and area. First, have her measure each side and add the four measurements to get the perimeter ($24 + 24 + 18 + 18 = 84$ inches). For the area, she should multiply length \times width ($24 \times 18 = 432$ square inches). Without checking the box or counting each piece, can she use math to say how many pieces are in the perimeter? The whole puzzle?



Family stargazing

Head outdoors on a clear night to observe the sky with your youngster. You could take along a library book or download a free app to identify stars, constellations, or planets. *Idea:* Encourage him to sketch the night sky and connect stars to create and name his own constellation.

Book picks

▣ The little girl in *Math Curse* (Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith) finds math everywhere. She adds words, subtracts shoes, and even puts math symbols in her art project.

▣ Your child can make glowing clothes, dancing bubbles, silly putty, and more with the help of *Real Chemistry Experiments: 40 Exciting STEAM Activities for Kids* (Edward P. Zovinka).

Just for fun

Q: Why was the equal sign so humble?

A: Because it knew it wasn't less than or greater than anything else.



Math in nature

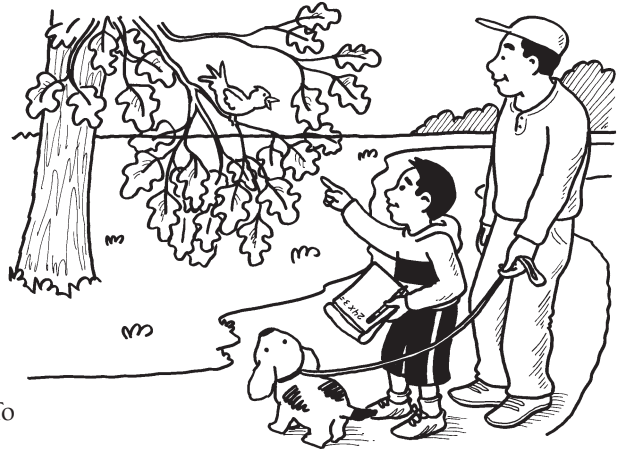
Right outside your door is a math "classroom" for your youngster. Try these ideas for practicing math while enjoying nature.

Estimate the leaves

How many leaves are on that tree? Your child could count the leaves on a small branch (say, 24) and the branches on a limb (3), and multiply ($24 \times 3 = 72$). To estimate the total number of leaves on the tree, he can estimate the number of limbs (maybe 22) and multiply by the number of leaves per limb ($22 \times 72 = 1,584$). He'll see how estimating and multiplying are helpful when he can't count things one by one.


Tell a story

Ask your youngster to make up and solve story problems based on what he sees outside, perhaps bees buzzing from flower to flower. *Example:* "One day, Miss Bee buzzed around collecting pollen. She visited 240 flowers in 2 hours and spent the same amount of time on



each flower. How many flowers did she visit per minute?" ($240 \text{ flowers} \div 120 \text{ minutes} = 2 \text{ flowers per minute}$)


Add it up

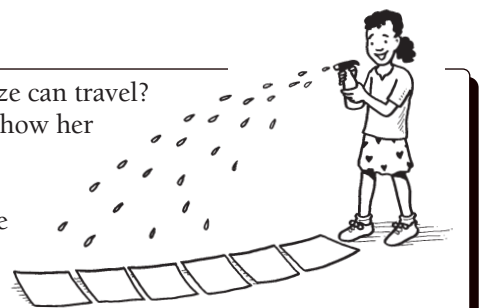
Help your child use natural materials as place value tools. He might find small pebbles ("ones"), medium-size rocks ("tens"), and large rocks ("hundreds"). Then, let him arrange them to form an addition problem like $132 + 259$. He can add them, trading tens for ones and hundreds for tens when necessary. He'll end up with 3 large rocks, 9 medium rocks, and 1 pebble—or 391. 

Cover your sneeze!

Does your child know how far a sneeze can travel? Easily 6 feet or more! This activity will show her why covering up a sneeze helps stop the spread of germs.

Have your youngster fill a spray bottle with water and line up six pieces of 9-inch by 12-inch construction paper on the floor, end to end. Now she can stand at one end of the 6-foot line of paper, spray the water, and see where droplets land. Are there wet spots on all the papers?

Let your child try again with fresh sheets of paper, this time covering the nozzle with her hand. The droplets don't go far at all. Now she'll see that she should cover her own sneezes with a tissue (or sneeze into her elbow if she doesn't have a tissue). 



Part of a whole, part of a group

A fraction can describe part of a whole (“I ate $\frac{1}{6}$ of the pizza”) or part of a group (“ $\frac{3}{10}$ of the beads are green”). These activities will help your youngster work with both types of fractions.

Play dough. Let your child make a play-dough pizza and cut it into equal slices. Then, she can use a toothpick to label each piece with a fraction that tells what part of the whole it is.



If her pizza has 8 slices, she would carve $\frac{1}{8}$ into each one. Now she can roll out the dough, divide it into a different number of slices, and write new fractions.

Beads. Have your youngster sort 20 beads by color. What fraction of the group is each color? She can find out by writing the number of each color (the numerator, or top number) over the number in the group (the denominator). Say she has 5 blue beads ($\frac{5}{20}$), 9 yellow beads ($\frac{9}{20}$), and 6 red beads ($\frac{6}{20}$). If she adds the three fractions, her answer will equal $\frac{20}{20}$, or 1—because all the parts together equal the group.

SCIENCE LAB

Musical science

To tune a violin or cello, a musician must loosen or tighten the strings. How does that affect the instruments' sounds? Let your child make his very own string instrument to find out!

You'll need: empty rectangular tissue box, four identical rubber bands



Here's how: Let your child stretch the rubber bands around the box crosswise. Have him play the instrument by

plucking the “strings” over the box opening, listening to the sound they make. Now he can remove the strings, stretch them lengthwise around the box, and pluck them again.

What happens? Plucking the looser strings (those stretched crosswise) creates a lower pitch than plucking the tighter ones (those that are stretched lengthwise).

Why? Plucking the strings causes vibrations that produce sound. Looser strings vibrate less frequently, while tighter ones vibrate more frequently. The more frequent the vibration, the higher the pitch.

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MATH CORNER

Multiplication is in the cards

Watch the fun multiply in this game that lets your youngster practice multiplication facts.



1. Remove the face cards from a deck of playing cards and shuffle the rest (ace = 1). Arrange them faceup to create an S-shaped game-board path.
2. Start at one end of the path. Take turns rolling two dice (say, 3 and 4) and moving a game token that number of cards (7).
3. Multiply the sum of the dice by the value of the card you land on for your score. If you land on a 5, you would say “ $7 \times 5 = 35$ ” and score 35 points.
4. Keep rolling, multiplying, and adding to your score until everyone reaches the end of the path (exact count not required). High score wins.

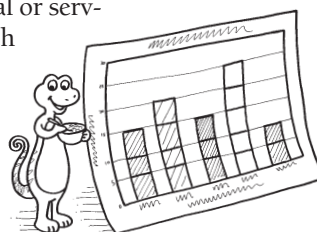
Variation: For a bigger challenge, include jacks (11) and queens (12).

Q & A What can I graph?

Q: My son always enjoys making graphs in school. Any suggestions for creating graphs at home?

A: Your child can turn almost anything your family does into a graph! For one month, suggest that he track the foods everyone eats for breakfast or the kinds of exercises they do. He could make a tally mark for each bowl of cereal or serving of eggs eaten, or for each time someone runs or rides a bike.

As he collects data, he can put it into a bar graph. He should divide a sheet of paper



into rows and columns and write breakfast foods or exercises across the bottom. Next, he'll need to decide what the scale will be (say, 1 square = 5 servings of a food) and write numbers (0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30) up the left side.

From time to time, ask your son questions like “Which kind of breakfast food have we eaten the most of so far?” or “How many more times did we run than ride bikes this week?” He'll see what's most common—and help you know what to buy at the grocery store.

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

September 2020

Gregory - Portland Independent School District



Book Picks

■ **Crazy About Cats** (Owen Davey)

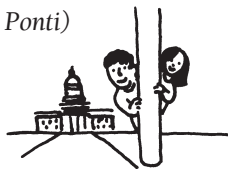
From wild cats like ocelots and pumas to house cats, this nonfiction book from the About Animals series teaches readers all about cats. Your child will discover where cats live, what they eat, and the special features they have.



(Also available in Spanish.)

■ **Framed!** (James Ponti)

Twelve-year-old Florian Bates is no ordinary middle schooler. When his family moves to Washington, DC, he starts his own spy agency with the help of his new friend Margaret. Follow along in this spy adventure as the young sleuths help the FBI solve a big case.



■ **The House That Lou Built** (Mae Respicio)

Lou loves her woodshop class, and for a school project, she's planning to build her own tiny house on a piece of land she's inherited. But she quickly realizes that building a new structure isn't as simple as it seems. Determined, Lou finds creative solutions to the many roadblocks she faces along the way.



■ **Go Figure! Big Questions About Numbers** (Johnny Ball)

Your youngster can learn about ancient numbers, explore "magic" numbers, and imagine a newspaper with no numbers in this nonfiction book. He'll also see how numbers are used in all aspects of life. Includes quiz questions and answers.

Strategies for a new year

As your youngster reads more complex stories and textbooks, she'll need new strategies for understanding and remembering new material. Help her start the year off right with these activities.

Fill a "thinking cap"

When your child needs to tackle a challenging chapter, have her get a baseball cap. Each time she finds a new fact or unfamiliar word, she can write it on a slip of paper and put the slip in the hat. After she finishes reading, she should reread everything in her thinking cap and look up definitions of words she doesn't know. Writing and reviewing the information will help her learn it.

Draw a comic strip

Suggest that your youngster create a comic strip about what she's studying (stick figures are okay!). Say she's reading about the water cycle in her science book. She could draw one panel with a character boiling a pot of water and explaining evaporation, and another panel with someone walking in the rain



and talking about precipitation. This is a fun way for her to visualize the material.

Take a "commercial break"

Your child can pretend there's a commercial break at the end of each chapter in a novel she's reading. Her job is to write a "teaser"—a question to encourage the audience to stay tuned. If she's reading *Bunnicula* (Deborah and James Howe), she might write, "Will Bunnicula get caught in the vegetable garden?" Then, have her predict the answer. Asking questions and checking predictions let her monitor how well she understands a story. ■

Fact or opinion?

"It's the best toothpaste for your family!" When your child reads a sentence like this in an advertisement, does he understand that it's an opinion? Distinguishing fact from opinion is an important reading skill. Suggest that he ask himself these questions to tell the difference:

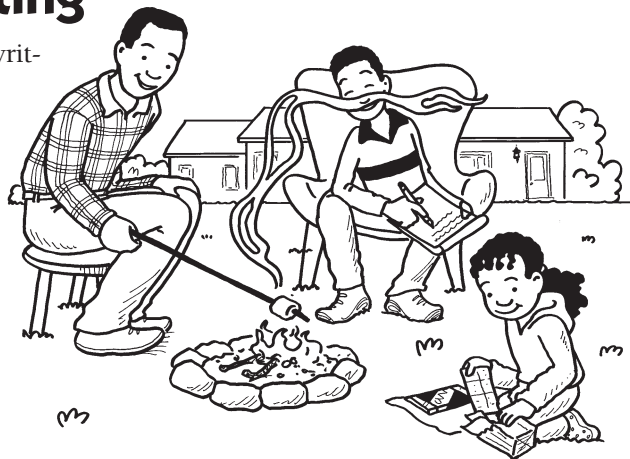
- "Would most people agree?" A fact is true regardless of who wrote it ("Trees are plants"), while an opinion reflects the writer's feelings or beliefs ("Trees shouldn't be cut down").
- "Does it rely on adjectives?" Descriptive words ("Apple pie with ice cream is the perfect dessert") frequently indicate opinions, while facts are more likely to stand alone ("Apples are harvested in autumn"). ■



Add details to writing

Vivid details make your youngster's writing come alive. And getting a firsthand look at something he's describing can help him be more specific. Share these ideas to use when he writes stories.

Specific verbs. Suggest that your child think of active verbs that illustrate what he sees rather than using bland verbs like *was* or *went*. When he's outside, he might notice how a tractor moves along a road. Later, he can incorporate the details



into a story about a boy living on a farm: "The tractor crept slowly along the dirt road" (instead of "The tractor went down the road").

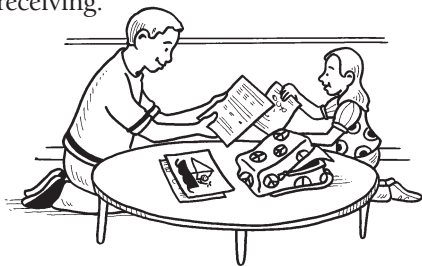
My five senses. Have your youngster use at least one of his senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch) in his description. If he's writing about making s'mores, you could toast marshmallows together so he can notice how

they smell and look. That may lead him to write, "A sweet, toasty scent filled the air as my marshmallow turned golden brown." ■

Q&A Is my child on track?

Q As the school year gets underway, how can I tell if my daughter is on track with reading and writing or if she needs help?

A The best way is to stay involved with what your child is doing in school. Go through her backpack with her daily, and look over her work. Review the teacher's comments on her assignments or tests, and monitor the grades she's receiving.



Also, notice what she's reading for pleasure—or if she's reading for pleasure. Take turns reading aloud to each other, and when it's her turn, listen for whether she reads smoothly or seems to stumble over words.

If you're concerned, contact your daughter's teacher. He can let you know if your child is on track, and if she's not, he'll work with you to provide help. ■



Better listening = better learning

Good listening skills help your child learn information from lessons, class presentations, and videos. Encourage him to become a better listener with these challenges.

● **What's different?** Read a paragraph from a newspaper or magazine to your youngster. Then read it again, but switch a few details. For example, you might change the name of a person or a city. It's your child's job to listen closely and tell you what's different the second time around.

● **Listen and answer.** Together, listen to a podcast or an audiobook for five minutes. Each of you can jot down a question the other person should be able to answer—if you listened carefully. Then trade questions, and answer them. Replay the audio to check if you heard right. ■



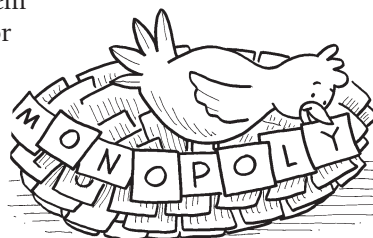
Build a word

The word-making possibilities are almost endless in this vocabulary game.

Have your youngster write each letter, A–Z, on separate slips of paper and scatter them in a bowl. For each round, draw three letters, lay them faceup, and set a timer for three minutes. Each person writes words that contain all three letters in any order. The goal is for players to come up with

the most words that no one else thought of *and* the longest possible word they can define. For M, L, and P, a player might write *monopoly* or *planetarium*.

When time's up, read your words aloud to each other. Earn one point for every word that no one else wrote—and a bonus point for giving the correct definition of your longest word. *Tip:* Keep a dictionary on hand to check answers. ■



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