

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

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Book Picks



■ *The Honest Truth* (Dan Gemeinhart)

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



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

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



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

■ *White House Kids* (Joe Rhatigan)

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

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



Inquiring readers want to know

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



"What would I do?"

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

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

"What will happen next?"

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

"What do I wonder?"

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

Listen closely

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

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

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

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



Bright, shiny descriptions

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

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

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



A sensational expedition.

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

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



Guess the word

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



Use interests to find nonfiction

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

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

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

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



Your child’s reading progress

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

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

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

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

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



OUR PURPOSE

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

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