

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

December 2009



Book Picks

■ *The Capture*

Young owls are being snatched from their families in this animal fantasy by Kathryn Lasky. When Soren is captured, he teams up with a new friend and relies on lessons from owl legends to plot his escape. The first book in the *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* series. (Also available in Spanish.)



■ *Three Cups of Tea: Young Reader's Edition*



When an American mountain climber got lost in Pakistan, kind villagers took him in. After discovering they had no school for their children, he decided to raise money for one. His success eventually led him to help other villages. A true story from Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin.

■ *Confetti Girl*

In this book by Diana López, Lina and her father have been struggling since her mother died. Things change when she and her friend Vanessa play matchmaker with their single parents. But when the couple hits it off and Vanessa gets a boyfriend, Lina suddenly feels left out.

■ *Who Discovered America?*

Who visited America first? Christopher Columbus? The Vikings? Zheng He of China? This nonfiction book by Valerie Wyatt reviews the many possibilities that historians and scientists have explored. Drawings, photos, maps, and facts help bring history to life.



Road trip tales

Reading and writing in the car can keep your child's skills up to speed. Whether you're traveling across town or across states, these activities will make getting there half the fun this holiday season.

Read

Pack a bag with a variety of reading materials. Then, let everyone take turns reading aloud. This is a good opportunity for your youngster to practice reading smoothly, since he probably reads silently at home. Encourage him to read with expression as you pass around a travel guide, joke book, magazine, or collection of short stories.

Listen

Build your child's listening comprehension skills by playing and discussing audiobooks and podcasts. Before a trip, borrow audiobooks from your library or from friends. You might look for one related to your travels (try *A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray* by Ann Martin if you're visiting someone with



a dog). Or have your youngster download podcasts onto an MP3 player. He'll find fiction, biographies, poems, speeches, and more for free at <http://kids.learnoutloud.com/Kids-Free-Stuff>.

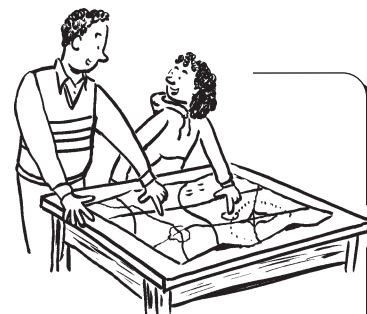
Write

Keep paper and pens in the car so your child can practice nonfiction writing. Each time you stop somewhere, have him write facts about your location. He might describe an interesting landmark, review a restaurant where you eat, or report on the weather. When you return home, he'll have a personal log about every place you visited. ■

Backseat navigator

"Are we there yet?" You'll be the one asking this question when your youngster is in charge of navigation. Teach her to read maps with these ideas:

1. Get a local map or have your child print a map and directions from www.mapquest.com or <http://maps.google.com>. Show her how to read the legend to figure out symbols (rest area, capital city).
2. As you drive, ask your youngster to read directions aloud. She'll need to watch for highway exits and read street signs. Suggest that she follow the map to highlight roads you've traveled and to cross out towns as you pass them. ■



Show, don't tell

A good writer chooses words that help readers picture what's happening in a story. Instead of *telling* how a character feels or what a setting looks like, encourage your youngster to try these techniques that *show*.



Pick words carefully. Your child can illustrate characters' feelings through their actions. Have her go through her story and find words she can replace with more interesting choices. *Examples:* "John stomped his feet and balled up his fists" instead of "John is angry." "Ann wiped away tears" rather than "Ann was sad."

Rely on dialogue. Explain that when characters speak for themselves, readers can see how they think and feel. For

instance, "I can't believe you threw me a party!" Lucy exclaimed," is more interesting than "Lucy was surprised."

Use descriptive language.

Suggest that your youngster close her eyes and imagine her story's setting. Then, she can paint a picture of it with words. Instead of writing, "The night sky was pretty," she could say, "Hundreds of stars twinkled in the night sky."

Make comparisons. Your child can compare one thing to another to help readers visualize it clearly. *Example:* "The queen's gown trailed behind her like a flowing river" rather than "The queen's gown was long." ■

Read and give

Turn gift-giving occasions into opportunities for your child to read. Here are some ideas:

- Book and movie reviews will help her choose novels and DVDs for others. She can look at library book lists or newspaper movie reviews. Encourage her to check for words and phrases such as "a must-read" or "action-packed."
- Suggest that she pick out a gift project. She might create finger puppets, a mosaic, or a bracelet. To find ideas, your youngster can read craft books (*The Best Craft Book Ever* by Jane Bull) or check online (www.craftsforkids.com).
- Young bakers can use cookbooks to prepare homemade treats like cookies and muffins. Let your child select recipes and write a grocery list. Then, remind her to carefully read recipes again before she starts her baking. ■



Other Picks

GAMES

■ **Coodju Lite**

Give your youngster's spelling skills a workout with this game. Players have to spell words forward, skip a letter, use just vowels, use consonants only, and say the word's first and last letters. Spell all five ways and win! *Anomaly Games*

■ **Last Word**

Quick! Say all the boys' names you can think of that start with D. In this fast-paced game, players take turns calling out items in a category and beginning with a selected letter. Get the last word before time runs out, and advance to the finish line. *Buffalo Games*



SOFTWARE

■ **Learn 9 Languages with Aesop's Fables**

Your child can read and listen to fables while learning about languages. Clicking on individual words lets him hear definitions. He can also record and play back his speech to improve pronunciation. Languages include Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and more. *SelectSoft Publishing*

■ **Brainiversity**

A friendly light bulb named Edison keeps your youngster company in this mind-sharpening game. She can choose from activities that improve memory, thinking skills, vocabulary, and math. The games become more challenging as she plays. *Brighter Minds*



Q&A

Challenging a good reader

Q My son reads above grade level. It seems that books are either too easy for him or the subjects are too mature. How can I help him stay challenged and motivated to read?

A Start by talking to his school librarian. She will be able to suggest books on your son's reading level that are appropriate for him.

Also, nonfiction may be a good choice. Your

youngster can look for books with advanced vocabulary that match his interests. Is he a shutterbug? He can check out photography books. Does he like science? He might enjoy books about how things work or biographies of scientists.

Keep in mind that it's okay if your son occasionally wants to read easy books or reread old favorites. Reading for fun is an activity that he can enjoy all his life. ■



OUR PURPOSE

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

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