

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

Holy Cross School



Book Picks

■ *The Summer of the Swans*

Sara sometimes resents her younger brother, who has a mental disability. One night Charlie disappears, and Sara must begin to search before it's too late. A Newbery medal winner by Betsy Byars.



■ *Jackie & Me*

Joe's baseball card collection has a magical twist. The cards let him travel back through time. When Joe travels to 1947, he meets Jackie Robinson, the first African American to play in the major leagues. A walk through history by Dan Gutman.

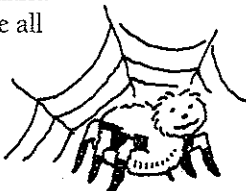


■ *White Fang*

Can a wolf-dog leave his wild life behind and learn to love a human? White Fang becomes an Indian sled dog and a fighting dog before he finds a home. See the world through the eyes of White Fang in this classic by Jack London. (Also available in Spanish.)

■ *Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great*

Is Sheila the funny, outgoing girl she seems to be? Or is she the one who's afraid of spiders, dogs, swimming, and the dark? Sheila must face all these fears in Judy Blume's hilarious story.



Reading aloud with older readers

It's never too late to read to your youngster, no matter what his age. Even for young adolescents, hearing books read aloud increases attention span and develops vocabulary. And reading together keeps parents and children close.

Here are some tips on making read-aloud time successful with your older reader.



Keep it short. Try 5 to 10 minutes at first, and then gradually increase the time. Short chapters that are full of action can help capture your child's attention. *Books to try:* *Captain Grey* by Avi; *Call It Courage* by Armstrong Sperry.

Offer a variety. Share an interesting magazine article, letter, or brochure. And don't forget about poems. *Books to try:* Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends*; *Sing a Song of Popcorn*; *Every Child's Book of Poems*, edited by Beatrice Schenk de Regniers.

Recycle favorites. Read-alouds are a perfect time to revisit old favorites from when your child was younger. *Books to try:* *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst; *Ramona the Pest* by Beverly Cleary.

Take turns. Let your youngster choose a book for you to read. You may learn more about your child's interests or have a chance to discuss important topics, like fitting in at school or handling a loss. ■

All this from a read-aloud?

Here are even more reasons that reading aloud is important:

- Reading aloud builds excitement about reading—motivating youngsters to read on their own.
- Children hear strong models of good English—improving their reading, speaking, and writing skills.
- Listening to stories helps develop youngsters' imaginations—boosting creativity and thinking skills.
- Kids can explore books, authors, and topics that are new to them—expanding their choices for books to read themselves. ■

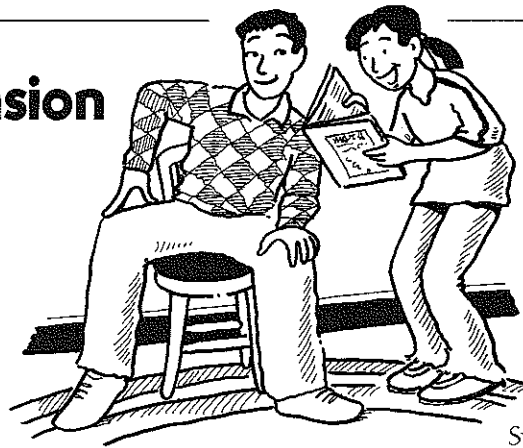


Improving comprehension

Preparing for standardized tests

Reading comprehension is a part of most standardized tests. How can you help your child improve her understanding of what she reads? Try a “paired reading” with your youngster.

1. First, you and your child silently read the same part of a story, an article, or a textbook. Try two or three paragraphs to start.
2. Next, listen while your youngster summarizes aloud what she has just read. She might say, “I learned that sedimentary



rocks are made from pressure.” After she’s finished summarizing, offer your corrections or additions to what she heard. *Example:* “We also learned that igneous rocks come from cooling lava.”

3. Then, each of you read another two or three paragraphs and changes roles. Switch back and forth until the whole story, article, or chapter is read.

Note: This activity is a good study aid for subjects like science or history—and it builds listening skills. ■

Parent ² Discussion Parent night

One night our son asked if we had heard about a frog that’s over a foot long. Well, neither of us had. But his question prompted the three of us to do some exploring and see what we could discover.



We looked in the newspaper, on the Internet, and in books. A week later, we shared everything we had found out about the frog. We learned so much together that our son came up with another topic to explore—how to take care of a pet frog!

Our conversations have turned into a regular event. And each of us has become an “expert” on one topic or another. My son is especially proud when he finds an interesting fact the two of us missed! ■

OUR PURPOSE

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

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Q&A Vocabulary practice

My daughter has a tough time with vocabulary quizzes. What can I do to help?

A Try sneaking in a little extra vocabulary practice. The more your youngster uses the words, the easier it will be for her to remember them.

▲ **Do puzzles.** You can turn vocabulary words and their definitions into simple crossword puzzles at www.puzzlemaker.com. Select “Criss-Cross” from the pull-down puzzle menu in the middle of the screen.

▲ **Hunt for treasure.** Encourage your child to find and circle vocabulary words in newspapers and magazines and to read the sentences aloud. Seeing the words used in context will help her learn their meanings.

▲ **Use synonyms.** List your youngster’s vocabulary words. Then, beside each one, have her write words with similar meanings. She can use a thesaurus from the library (try Scholastic’s *Children’s Thesaurus*, or search at www.wordsmyth.net). Hang the list on the refrigerator where she can review it. ■



Other Picks

WEB SITES

■ ArchKIDecture

Have a curious builder in your house? Steer her to

this Web site for information about different kinds of building materials and instructions for making a house of cards or a tiny toothpick structure. She can also find books about architecture and learn what it takes to become an architect. www.archkideature.org

■ Math Cats

Measurement, geometry, decimals, logic... kids can find almost anything they need to know about math here. This award-winning Web site helps children explore math through projects, quizzes, crafts, and contests. www.mathcats.com



MAGAZINES

■ Winner

Making decisions in life can be tough, especially with peer pressure. This magazine encourages kids to stay drug-free. Includes activities, cartoons that show how to deal with difficult choices, and true stories of kids becoming winners. 800-548-8700, www.winnermagazine.org

■ Cousteau Kids Online

This magazine, a publication of the Cousteau Society, is filled with stories about sea life. Your child can read about everything from sea otters to dolphins, as well as news from the Cousteau expeditions. 800-441-4395, www.cousteaukids.org



Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



Talk to teachers

Want your child to get the best education? Talk to her teachers. Research suggests that the stronger your relationship with your middle grader's teachers, the more she may learn. Regular communication shows your child that you and her teachers are a team.

Managing moodiness

If your middle grader is grumpy, try not to take it personally. Kids this age are often very moody. Consider giving him some space and respecting his privacy. He may not thank you, but he'll probably appreciate it.

DID YOU KNOW?

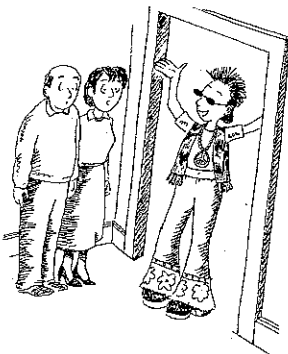
Middle graders can expect to spend up to two hours on homework each day, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Help your child keep up her studies by making sure she doesn't save her homework for the end of the night. Her brain—and her body—will be most tired then.

Worth quoting

"Joy is not in things; it is in us."
Benjamin Franklin

Just for fun

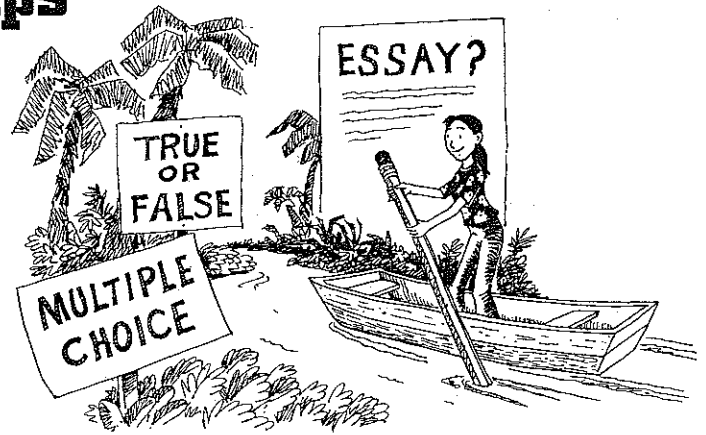
"How do I look?"



Testing tips

"Tests are easy," some middle graders say. "It's the questions that are hard." But test questions aren't so difficult if your child understands how to handle them.

Help your middle grader tackle tough questions by sharing these strategies.



True or false

As a general rule, a question should be answered false if any part of the statement is untrue. Suggest that your child look for words like *all*, *none*, and *always*. These may be clues that the answer is false. *Example:* "All the soldiers in the Revolutionary War were American." At the same time, words like *often* and *may* usually signal that a statement is true.

Multiple choice

With these questions, it's important that your middle grader read every choice before choosing an answer. This allows her to rule out answers she knows are wrong. Using this strategy, your child may have two options to pick from instead of five, which increases her chances of selecting the correct answer.

Essay

Most students find this kind of question to be the toughest. Encourage your child to read each question at least twice before answering. Then, with the question fresh in her mind, she might list a few thoughts she wants to include in her answer. Making notes keeps her from having to remember everything at once. Suggest that she look at the list if she gets stuck while writing. 👍

10 TV alternatives

Watching too much television can have a negative effect on your child's learning. That's why it's important to monitor what your middle grader does in his spare time.

The next time your child wants to turn on the TV, recommend some active things for him to do. He could:

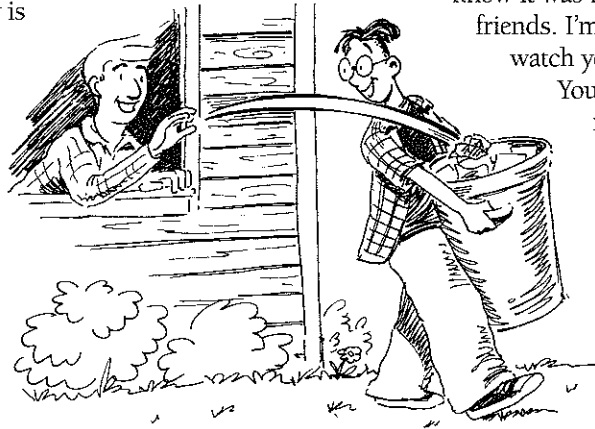
1. Ride his bike.
2. Read his favorite magazine.
3. Build a model car.
4. Draw a picture.
5. Walk the dog.
6. Listen to music.
7. Write a letter to a friend or relative.
8. Play a board game.
9. Shoot some hoops.
10. Help cook dinner. 👍



Catch them being good

Would you rather get a paycheck or a bill? Most people agree that receiving money is better than handing it over. Similarly, your child would rather be praised for good behaviors than punished for bad ones. Consider these positive approaches to better behavior.

The moment counts. Congratulate your middle grader as soon as you see him being responsible. *Example:* "Thanks for starting your homework without being reminded." Noticing his good deeds while the moment is fresh encourages more of the same.



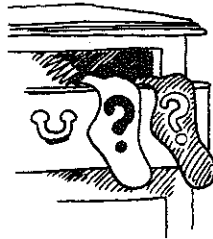
Specifics matter. Let your child know the "whys" behind your approval. If he makes a difficult choice, for instance, say, "I know it was hard not to go to the party with your friends. I'm glad you stayed home and helped watch your little brother like you promised."

Your middle grader will remember your reasons the next time he has a tough decision to make.

Styles differ. Find out how your child likes to be complimented. Some middle graders enjoy a hug or pat on the back. Others want to talk about what they're doing. Still others prefer a written note. See what your child responds to best. 👍

Math teaser!

Sock it to your family with this math challenge. It only seems simple!



Problem: Maria has 10 white socks and 10 black socks in a drawer. She pulls out a black sock. Without looking, she pulls out another sock. What is the chance (or probability) that the second sock is also black? Is it 50 percent, more than 50 percent, or less than 50 percent? (Most people will say 50 percent.)

Solution: Have your child think again. Before Maria pulls out the first sock, 10 of the 20 socks in the drawer—or 50 percent—are black. But when she pulls out the second one, there are only 9 black socks and 10 white ones. Since there are more white socks now, the chance of getting a black sock is less than 50 percent.

For more math puzzlers, visit Brain Teasers, www.eduplace.com/math/brain. 👍

Parent to Parent

Consequences that work



My daughter Kasey used to be so selfish. She spent most of her time either on the phone, in the bathroom, or lying on the couch with the TV remote. And she never helped with household chores.

Finally, I decided enough was enough. I sat her down and calmly explained how things were going to change. We started with phone limits. If she talked more than 30 minutes a night, she couldn't use the phone the next day. If she didn't help cook dinner, she had to do the dishes. If she didn't do either, she was responsible for cooking *and* cleaning the following night. I wasn't going to get angry, I said. I would simply point out her behavior and walk away.

Things aren't perfect, but they've gotten better. Now, at least Kasey helps out. And she knows what to expect if she doesn't. 👍

Q & A Family meals



Q Our family keeps such odd schedules, we barely spend any time together. What can we do?

A You're not alone. Many families today feel overwhelmed with outside activities.

Here's a solution. At least twice a week, try gathering for a meal. Meals are a great time for families to chat. And your child can improve language skills while you learn what's happening in his life.

Pick a meal when everyone is at home. Dinner usually works best, but some families prefer to share breakfast. Make sure the TV and radio are turned off so everyone can pay attention to the conversation.

Also, try to avoid talking about heated issues, such as discipline or grades. The point is to have positive chats with the people you love the most—your family. 👍



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To provide busy parents with practical ideas that promote school success, parent involvement, and more effective parenting.

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