

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

December 2005

Book Picks

■ *An American Plague*

In 1793, a brand-new America defeated the British but soon faced another enemy—yellow fever. Jim Murphy tells the true story of the epidemic that struck the city of Philadelphia.

Includes reprints of actual news stories and photos.



■ *The Paper Doorway:*

Funny Verse and Nothing Worse

Get ready to giggle your way through this collection of hilarious poems that make reading fun with playful rhymes. Author Dean Koontz delights with poems like “A Cure for Ugly” and “The Monstrous Broccoli Excuse.” Contains humorous black-and-white drawings.



■ *Call It Courage*

Mafatu’s name means Stout Heart, but he’s afraid of the ocean that took his mother away from him in a storm. If Mafatu is to become a great chief like his father, he must overcome his fear. A Newbery Medal winner by Armstrong Sperry. (Also available in Spanish.)



■ *Never Mind! A Twin Novel*

Edward and Meg may be twins, but they are totally different seventh-graders. In this book by Avi and Rachel Vail, the twins take turns telling the sometimes wacky tale of Meg’s plot to be popular in her new middle school.

Fun with newspapers

Looking for a quick and easy tool to strengthen your child’s reading, writing, thinking, and research skills? Use a newspaper! Here are several activities to try.

Main ideas

Cut out several stories, and remove the headlines. Mix up the stories and headlines, and place them on a table. See how many stories your child can match with the correct headlines. Identifying the main idea is an important reading comprehension skill.

Fact find

Scan several newspaper articles and make up some questions. *Example:* How many people attended Saturday’s concert? Then, send your youngster on a scavenger hunt to read for the answers. Locating facts and details is a great way for your child to improve his research skills.

Beginning, middle, and end

Cut apart a comic strip, and ask your child to arrange the panels in the correct order. Sequencing—knowing what comes first, second, and last—can boost your youngster’s understanding of what he reads.



Young publishers

For fun writing practice, challenge your child to create his own newspaper. He’ll experience the whole writing process by brainstorming for story ideas, gathering information, and writing. Have him start by reading the local paper to help him write in “news style.” When his newspaper is finished, he can publish it instantly by passing it around to friends and family! 📰

I got it!

Using clues to learn in context

Your child can use written context clues to figure out the meanings of new words. Suggest that she try these tips before turning to the dictionary:

- Sometimes a new word is defined in the sentence. *Example:* “The protagonist, or **main character** of the story, will always have to solve a problem.”
- Descriptions can hint at the meaning of a word. *Example:* “Tornadoes, **with high winds and great destructive power**, often occur in the springtime.”
- Lists may suggest a word’s meaning. *Example:* “Fairy tales, fables, and ghost stories are **types of fiction**, while history and biographies are not.” 📰



Good notes = Quick reviews

Stress-free study sessions begin with good note-taking skills. Share these tips to help your child take better notes and speed up study time:

1 Divide each sheet of notepaper into two columns. Use the left column for main ideas and the right for details. When a new topic is introduced, write the main ideas as questions on the left. List the answers in the right column.

2 The columns can be used in different ways for different subjects. For example, to remember what happened in stories read in English class, the left column might include the



question, “What surprised you?” If you’re learning about the New England colonies, a main idea question might be: “Who were the settlers?” In the detail column, list their characteristics (where they came from, why they moved there, what kinds of food they grew).

3 When you’re ready to review the material, cover the right column and answer the questions. Or cover the left column and create questions that relate to the answers on the right.

Note: For many kids, getting organized is half the battle. Provide your youngster with a loose-leaf binder or a spiral notebook for each subject. ■

Q&A A chance to volunteer

Q I’m a working parent, but I want to make time to be a bigger part of my daughter’s education. How can I help at her school?

A Volunteering at school can show your child that you care about her education and take learning seriously.

First, contact the school office. A volunteer coordinator may be able to match your schedule with a need in the school, like working in the library or reading with struggling students during your lunch break.

Even if you can’t volunteer regularly, there are many ways for you to be involved. For example, you could sign up to help out on field trips, speak at Career Day, work in the school’s writing lab, or be an after-school mentor. ■



Parent 2 Parent Sharing with older readers

My son Mike recently announced that he was “too old” for a nightly read-aloud. Although we have dropped the ritual, I’ve found several ways to continue reading to him.

Throughout the day, I try to share reading when I run across a topic Mike is interested in. I read aloud articles about football or soccer, his favorite sports. Also, I read reviews of books or movies he might like.

Whenever we’re in the car, I always take along one of Mike’s favorite books on tape. Even though I’m not the person who’s reading, my son and I are enjoying a reading experience by listening to the stories.

By taking advantage of everyday opportunities, I’m still able to read aloud to my son. An added bonus is that we get to spend valuable time together. ■



Other Picks

MAGAZINES

■ Potluck Children’s Literary Magazine

Readers will find stories, poems, book reviews, and artwork by kids. The “Editor’s Notebook” column offers tips about topics of interest to budding writers. 847-948-1139, www.potluckmagazine.org

■ New Moon

Much of this magazine is written and edited by girls, for girls, ages 8 to 14. Each monthly issue is based on a theme, like music, technology and nature, or inner beauty. Includes fiction, poetry, and interviews. 800-381-4743, www.newmoon.org



WEB SITES

■ Exploratorium

Enjoy a virtual visit to a hands-on science museum. Read about the weather in space, watch the dissection of a cow’s eye, or browse 500 science experiments. Part of the San Francisco Palace of Fine Arts. www.exploratorium.edu



■ Candlelight Stories

Adventure stories, fables, classics, mini-movies, and games at this site encourage your child to read while online. Contains picture books and chapter books. And with a low-cost membership, you can download MP3 stories for an exciting listening experience. www.candlelightstories.com

OUR PURPOSE

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

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