

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

February 2012

La Mesa Junior High School
Mr. Pete Fries, Principal

Book Picks

■ *Happy Birthday, Josefina!*

Growing up in 19th-century New Mexico, Josefina wants to help sick people like her godmother does. But she isn't confident that she can do it. When her friend is bitten by a rattlesnake, Josefina will be put to the test. The fourth American Girl Josefina book by Valerie Tripp. (Also available in Spanish.)



■ *Science in Ancient Egypt*

Does your youngster know that ancient Egyptians used the sun to tell time, made paper from plants, and designed tools to lift and move heavy objects? This nonfiction book by Geraldine Woods explains many things we have learned from this long-ago civilization.

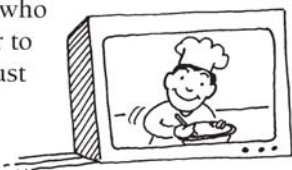


■ *Mick Harte Was Here*

Mick was just 10 months younger than his sister Phoebe. And although they fought occasionally, they were very close. Unfortunately, one of their arguments took place on the day Mick rode his bike without a helmet. A tale of grief and healing by Barbara Park.

■ *Close to Famous*

In Joan Bauer's story about overcoming obstacles, 12-year-old Foster McFee has a secret: she can't read. But that doesn't keep her from dreaming of her own cooking show. Thanks to her baking talent, and to a former movie star who teaches her to read, she just might pull it off.



Read, learn, and do!

When children use nonfiction books to explore interests or try new things, they practice many of the same comprehension skills that they need for reading textbooks. Boost your youngster's understanding of what he reads with these activities.



Create a quiz. Your child may like teaching your family unusual or surprising facts. Suggest that he write them down as he reads a nonfiction book. Then, he can turn his notes into a quiz. ("Which animal is the smartest?: (a) a rat, (b) a dog, (c) a chimpanzee, (d) a raven.") Have him read the questions aloud like a quiz-show host, and let family members race to the answer (c). This is a fun way to work on spotting important information in a textbook.

from nonfiction. For example, he might read about food groups and then plan a balanced menu. He'll discover everyday ways to use what he reads. *Tip:* Suggest that he look up unfamiliar words and phrases ("carbohydrates," "body mass index") in the glossary.

Make a difference. Encourage your youngster to find a book that will help him reach a goal. Taking care of the environment, getting fit, and learning about new foods are just a few ways he can use what he learns

Learn a skill. Ask your child to read about new hobbies that your family might enjoy. He could get a book that teaches magic tricks or origami, for instance. When he finishes reading, he can show the rest of the family what to do. The experience will help him follow step-by-step directions like those found in math and science textbooks. ■

Spelling made fun

It can be easier for your youngster to learn her weekly spelling words if she practices them in a variety of ways. Share these ideas:

- With a partner, take turns choosing a word and writing it one letter at a time. Try to guess the word and finish spelling it before all the letters are given.
- Write a story that includes as many spelling words as possible. Or use them to make up several short riddles.
- Turn spelling words into giant works of art on the driveway. *Example:* Write "illuminate" in yellow chalk and decorate it with suns.
- Spell words crossword-style using letter tiles from a game (Scrabble, Bananagrams). ■



Character lessons

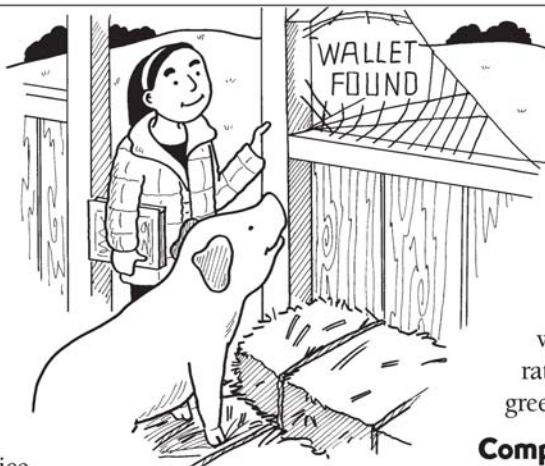
Likable book characters make reading a pleasure. They can also serve as role models for your child. Try these ideas for helping her learn real-life lessons from characters in books.

Name that character

This game will encourage your youngster to pay attention to characters' values. Name a trait (honesty, responsibility, friendliness), and take turns thinking of a book character who demonstrates it. If you say "courage," she might pick Tao the cat in Sheila Burnford's *The Incredible Journey*. Ask her to explain her choice ("Tao and the dogs risked their lives to return to their family").

Play a role

When your child is in a situation that calls for good character (say, she finds a wallet on the street), have her consider how



a favorite character would react. She might tell you that in E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, Charlotte the spider would display honesty by advertising the lost wallet in her web. But Templeton the rat would probably be greedy and keep the money.

Compare the consequences

Encourage your youngster to write a new ending for a story. She can show what would happen if a character made a different choice. For instance, how would *Holes* (Louis Sachar) change if Zero admitted to stealing the shoes instead of letting Stanley take the blame? ("Stanley would have been released from Camp Green Lake.")

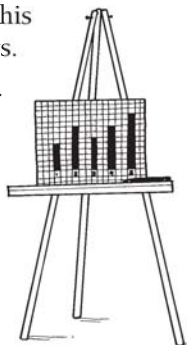


How many words?

Good writers vary the lengths of their sentences so the writing is more interesting and flows well. By making a simple graph, your youngster can see how his sentences stack up.

1. Have him choose two or three paragraphs from one of his stories, reports, or essays.

2. Let your child draw a bar graph showing the length of each sentence. If the first sentence has five words, for example, he would draw a bar that is five squares tall.



3. Help your youngster compare the bars on his graph. If they're all about the same height, suggest that he edit his paragraph. He might use *conjunctions* ("and," "but," "or") to combine two short sentences. Or he could break a long sentence into two shorter ones.

4. He can graph his revised paragraphs to see the difference.



Keys to good note taking

Q: My son is supposed to take notes when his teacher talks, but he says he doesn't know what to write down. Any suggestions?

A: A little organization makes taking notes easier. Before class starts, suggest that your son divide his paper into two columns.

Then, in the first column, he can jot down key information, such as dates, names of important people, and definitions of vocabulary words, as his teacher talks. He should listen carefully for these items. Remind him to write down information that the teacher puts on the board as well as anything she repeats.

In the second column, your child can write down questions that come to mind while he's taking notes. When the teacher is finished talking, he can raise his hand to ask any questions that haven't been answered.



More than news

Newspapers are packed with entertaining ways your child can build reading, writing, and vocabulary skills. Here are a few:

● Give each person a newspaper section. Race to find 25 verbs (*capsize, spill, elect*), 25 adjectives (*torrential, festive, scenic*), or 25 proper nouns (*London, Smith, Central Park*).

● Let your youngster cut words out of headlines and arrange them to make haikus. (A haiku is a three-line poem with five syllables in the first and third lines and seven in the middle line.)

● Ask your child to read everyone's horoscope aloud. Then, have her write a new one for each family member based on individual personalities and interests.

● Suggest that your youngster write a classified advertisement to sell an imaginary invention or an unwanted item.

Remind her that the newspaper charges are based on the length of the ad, so she should make every word count.



OUR PURPOSE

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

Resources for Educators,
a division of CCH Incorporated
128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630
540-636-4280 • rfeustomer@wolterskluwer.com
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