

La Mesa Junior High School
Mr. Pete Fries, Principal

Book Picks

■ *Bird Lake Moon*

Twelve-year-old Mitch visits his grandparents for the summer because his parents are getting a divorce. There he meets Spencer, a boy his age whose family also knows hardship, and the two become friends. Kevin Henkes tells the story from each boy's point of view in alternating chapters.



■ *The Billionaire's Curse*

Gerald Wilkins has just inherited billions of dollars—and a mystery—from his aunt. To keep his fortune, he has to solve her murder and crack the case of a stolen diamond. An action-packed mystery from the Archer Legacy series by Richard Newsome.

■ *Puppet Mania!*

In this how-to book, professional puppeteer John Kennedy shares secrets for creating puppets. The text provides step-by-step instructions for 13 puppets, such as a "bottle bug" and a "spoon chicken." Youngsters will also find ideas for making their puppets move and talk.



■ *Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism*

Molly is an orphan who is unpopular with other kids and constantly in trouble with adults. Then, she discovers her talent for hypnotizing people into doing what she wants! The first book in Georgia Byng's Molly Moon series. (Also available in Spanish.)



Winter reading traditions

Short days and chilly weather make reading a great indoor winter activity. Use these ideas to encourage your child to snuggle up with a few good books.

Hold a family pajama party.

On a Friday or Saturday night, put pillows and sleeping bags in the living room and share a book of short stories. Pass the book around and take turns reading to each other by flashlight or candlelight. *Idea:* Try *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More* (by Roald Dahl) or *Birthday Surprises* (edited by Johanna Hurwitz).



Plan a game night. Suggest that your child invent games that involve reading. For example, she might have each family member write down a tongue twister ("She sells seashells down by the seashore"). Trade papers and take turns seeing who can read the tongue twister the most times correctly in one minute. Or one person could pick a poem from a book and give everyone three minutes to

memorize it. Then, close the book and have each person try to recite the poem from memory. The family member who comes closest to the original chooses the next poem.

Pair reading with activities. Add books to winter pastimes. Ask your youngster to read the steps of a cookie or muffin recipe as you bake together. Another idea is to read aloud from a wintry novel while you warm up with hot chocolate after sledding or ice-skating. (Consider *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George or *The Winter Pony* by Iain Lawrence.)

Answer and summarize

When your youngster needs to summarize stories for class, having a list of questions can help. Share these—if he answers them all, he'll have a summary!

1. How would you describe the main character? ("Despereaux Tilling is a mouse who doesn't fit in.")
2. What does the character want? ("He loves Princess Pea, a human, and wants to be her friend.")
3. What obstacle does he need to overcome? ("Princess Pea's father, the king, doesn't like rodents.")
4. How does he solve the problem? ("When the princess is kidnapped, Despereaux proves mice aren't bad by rescuing her.")
5. What happens in the end? ("The king allows Despereaux and Princess Pea to be friends.")

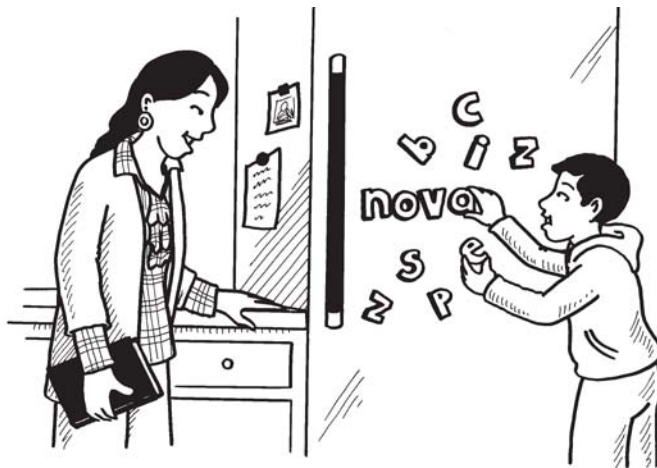


Games for listening

Whether your child is participating in a class discussion or his teacher is explaining an assignment, he needs good listening skills. These two silly games can help.

Unusual instructions

The object of the game is to spell a word using your directions. Secretly choose a word,



such as *novel*. While your youngster listens, give him tricky instructions for spelling the word. For example, “Start with *nova*. Then, change the *a* to an *e* and add an *l*.” When he gets the right word, it’s his turn to think of a word and give you directions.

Forbidden letter

Ask your child to choose a letter of the alphabet (*m*). Then, challenge each other to

go all day without saying any words that start with *m*. Remind your child to listen carefully so he can catch you! The first person caught using the “forbidden letter” loses, and the winner picks a new letter. *Variation:* Play using a whole word. ■

Habits of good readers

A good reader doesn’t necessarily know every word or immediately understand everything she reads. But she does know strategies for figuring out unfamiliar words and understanding tough material. Encourage your child to work these habits into her reading routine:

- Before I read, I skim the book cover, inside flap, table of contents, or chapter subheads so I know what to expect (and look for) when reading.



- I pause while I’m reading to visualize a story event or jot down information. This helps me understand and remember what I read.

- I slow down when a book gets confusing so I don’t miss anything important. If necessary, I go back and slowly reread difficult material.

- When I get stuck, I mark the page with a sticky note. After I finish reading, I look up a word in the dictionary or glossary or ask someone to help me understand a passage or an idea. ■



Parent 2 Parent

Convince me!

Now that my daughter Christina is getting older, she has started asking for more privileges, like a later bedtime or a bigger allowance. One day when I was emailing my boss to ask if I could work from home one day a week, I had an idea. If Christina wanted something, I would suggest that she try to persuade me by using facts that she writes in a letter to me.

When she asked to go hiking with friends, I gave the idea a try. The results surprised me. Her letter included convincing points like, “Hiking is good exercise” and “Amy’s mom is going along.” She got to go hiking, and I was satisfied that she’d be safe.

Since then, my daughter has become an expert at persuasive writing. I don’t always say yes, but I’m glad that she is thinking through her arguments. And she’s getting good practice in making her case in writing—a skill she is likely to need in the workplace someday. ■



Fun with Words

Treasure hunt

Your youngster might think he’s too old for hide-and-seek, but treasure hunts are fun for all ages. And figuring out the clues will help him learn to infer, or read between the lines.

First, hide a treasure (new book, healthy snack). Then, hide a set of clues that will lead your child to it.

The first clue should give instructions for finding the second clue, which should

lead to the third, and so on, until your youngster discovers the treasure.

Try to come up with clues that give hints—but make your youngster think. For example, if you want him to look under his bed, you might write, “Find the next clue in a place socks like to

hide.” Or get him to open an end-table drawer with, “Look under the lamp and coasters.”

Once your child tracks down the treasure, have him create a treasure hunt for you or a sibling. ■



OUR PURPOSE

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

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