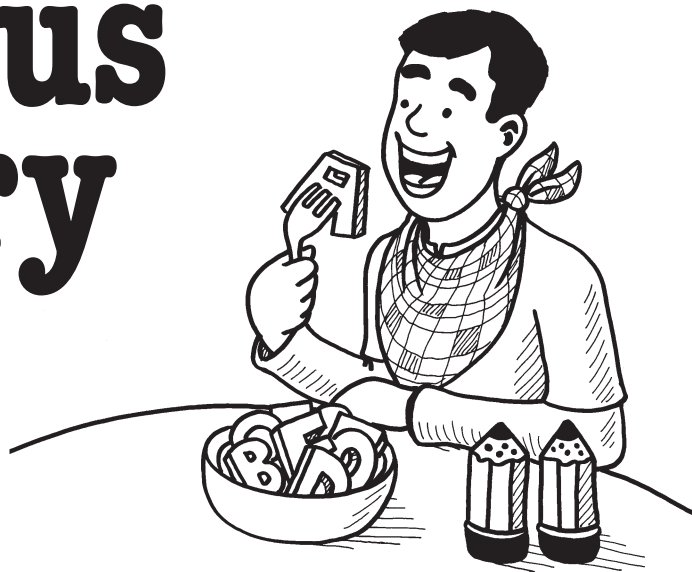


A Voracious Vocabulary

Use entertaining activities to foster an appetite for words, and your child will gobble them up. The result will be a strong vocabulary that he can use in—and out of—school. Here are ways to play with words together.



ACCUMULATION

(noun): a collection gathered little by little

Pass time in a waiting room by creating an *accumulation* of related words. Your youngster will have to think about each word's meaning to decide whether it fits into his collection.



Take turns choosing a category, such as travel, sports, or food. Then, each of you should pick up a magazine and race to see how many words you can find in 5 minutes that fit the category. If you're looking for words related to travel, your child might find *altitude*, *currency*, and *urban*, for example. Write your words on your paper. When time is up, read them aloud, and cross off any that the other person also chose.

The person with the most words that no one else got selects the next category.

RECOLLECT

(verb): to remember

Your child needs a sharp memory to *recollect* where each pair of antonyms (words with opposite meanings) is hidden in this game. And learning a word's antonym gives him another way to understand and remember what the first word means.

Together, use a thesaurus to find pairs of antonyms like *gigantic* and *miniature* or *concave* and *convex*. Write each word on a separate index card along with its definition.



Mix up the cards, and place them facedown in rows. Take turns turning over two cards. If you find a pair of antonyms, keep it, and turn over two more cards. If the words aren't opposites, put the cards back, and it's the next player's turn. Collect the most pairs to win.

My words

Want to motivate your child to investigate and remember new words? Have her create a personal dictionary to use during word games.

In a notebook, she can add an entry each time she learns a new word. Suggest that she include the word, its definition, and any drawings, synonyms, or notes that will help her remember it.

Words are everywhere! Here is a list of ways she might find them.

1. Notice words that opponents play during games.



- 2.** Look up the answers to crossword clues she doesn't know.
- 3.** Get a word-a-day calendar or visit a website like wordcentral.com/buzzword/buzzword.php.
- 4.** Read books for pleasure.
- 5.** Use textbook glossaries to look up unfamiliar words.
- 6.** Listen for new words during class discussions and dinner conversations.

continued

ATTRIBUTES

(noun): characteristics or features



When your youngster makes this word poster, she might list *creative* among her best attributes.

First, she should write a dozen or more words that describe her (*funny, upbeat, musical*). Then, she can look up each word in a thesaurus for a synonym that she likes better. She could

replace *funny* with *humorous* and *upbeat* with *optimistic*.
 Tip: If there are no synonyms, or if she prefers her original choice, she may keep the word she started with.

Next, your child should write her name in big fancy letters in the center of a sheet of paper or poster board and fill the space around it with the words from her list. Encourage her to decorate each word, too. For example, she could draw musical notes around *melodious*. Let your youngster hang the completed poster on her bedroom door to introduce exactly who she is!

HORSEFEATHERS

(noun): nonsense words

Is that a real definition, or is it *horsefeathers*? Players must get each other to believe fake definitions to win this game.

Have your youngster list 20 vocabulary words from his science or social studies book. To play, he selects a word and writes two definitions for it—one that's real and one that he made



up. Remind him to make his false definition as realistic as possible! For instance, his definitions for *velocity* might be “how fast something travels” (the real definition) and “extreme speed” (the false one). It's your job to figure out which is the actual definition. If you do, you score a point. If not, your child calls, “Horsefeathers!” and he scores a point.

Then, it's your turn to pick a word and give definitions. High score wins.

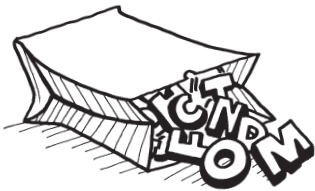
SCRUTINIZE

(verb): to look over carefully

You and your child will have to *scrutinize* letters to make words in this activity.

Have your youngster divide a set of magnetic letters into two bags, vowels in one bag and consonants in another. Then, each of you draws 1 vowel and 4 consonants so that you have 10 letters total to work with. Place all 10 letters on the table between you.

Ask your child to think of a word she can make using the letters and to give you a clue. She might say, “I see a six-letter word that means *graceful* and starts with N.” You have one minute to find her word: “Is it *nimble*?” If you do, you score a point. If not, she tells you the word and gets the point. Next, you find a word and give her a clue. Take turns until no more words can be found.

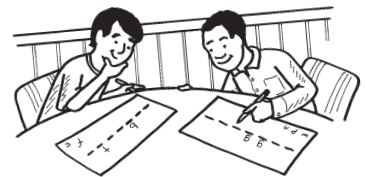


Return the letters to the bag, mix them up, and draw again. Play three rounds, and see who can score the most points.

DEDUCE

(verb): to reach an answer using evidence

The object of this two-player game is to *deduce* your opponent's mystery word—before he discovers yours!



To start, have your youngster pick a number between 4 and 10. Each person should secretly think of a word with that number of letters (say, 8) and draw a blank line for each letter on his paper. Then, take turns guessing a letter that you think might be in the other player's word. If you're correct, he writes the letter where it goes. If not, he writes it on the side (to keep track of letters that have been guessed). For example, if your word is *diameter* and he guesses *e*, fill in the blanks like this: e .

The first one to figure out the other person's word wins. Write new words, and play again.

The Reading-Writing Link



How can your youngster become a strong, well-rounded writer? By being a strong, well-rounded reader! Experts agree: kids who read frequently—and enjoy a wide variety of materials—are better writers. Try these ideas for helping your child make the important connection between reading and writing.

Letters to the editor

This activity encourages your youngster to read magazine articles and write an opinion piece.

First, have him read a few letters to the editor to see what they include (the writer's views, facts from the article). Then, your child could write a response to an article that interests him. Adding supporting facts from the story will make his letter stronger. *Example:* "Your article stated that the average American drinks 21 gallons of bottled water per year. I think that more people should drink water from reusable bottles to help the environment."

When he's finished, he can proofread his letter for errors and send it off to the address listed in the magazine.



Fan fiction

Trending now: fans writing stories inspired by their favorite books. Is there a book your youngster loves? She could write a story with the same theme—but put her own twist on it.

For example, many books written for kids this age deal with growing up, relationships with parents and friends, or going to school. Her main character may be struggling with middle school friendships like the characters in the book she read, but perhaps she'll set her story in New York City instead of Alaska. Or if the main character is an only child, she can make the girl in her story a twin instead.

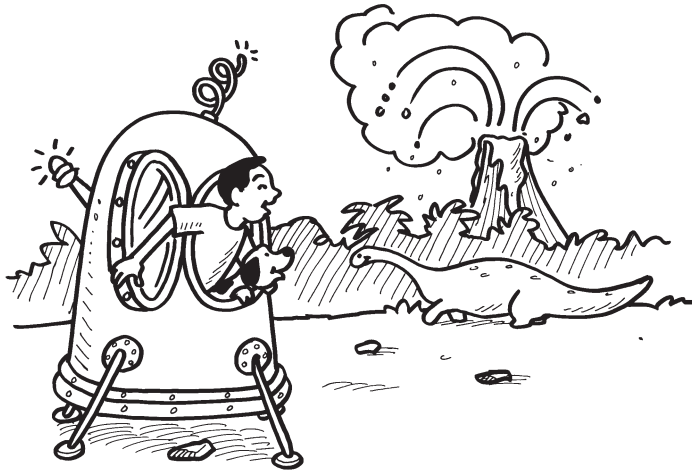


As she explores the original book and decides how to slant her version, her comprehension of the events will deepen. And she just might like her story better than the original one!

New genres

What kind of tales does your youngster usually write? Invite him to take a detour and try something different! For instance, if he normally writes realistic fiction, he could experiment with science fiction or mystery.

continued



To start, let him read a few books in the genre he chooses and think about what the plots have in common. Science fiction often revolves around futuristic science and technology, and it might be set in outer space or in another time. A mystery is centered around a puzzling event (often a crime) and a main character who spends most of the book solving the puzzle.

Once your child has figured out the key ingredients in a genre, he can outline a plot and try his hand at it. Exploring a new genre will give him more outlets for reading *and* writing.

Movie reviews

Reading and writing about movies can add to the enjoyment of watching them.

Suggest that your youngster read newspaper or online reviews of a movie she wants to watch. Encourage her to notice writing techniques like using an attention-grabbing introduction or including only certain details of the plot. Also, what adjectives does she see? Instead of saying a film was *good* or *bad*, the reviewer probably chooses more specific words like *memorable*, *realistic*, or *enthralling*.

Then, after seeing the movie, your child can write her own review. She may use the techniques she observed—or come up with her own. Finally, she could send her review to friends and relatives to help them decide whether to watch the movie.



Success with school papers

When your child has an essay or a report to write, he will first need to do research. Here are tips to help him read source material for the information he needs.

Read, then write. After reading a paragraph or section, have him close the book and write a summary. Using this method—instead of taking notes with the book open—can help him avoid copying word for word. Also, he will be more likely to understand his notes later if he uses his own words.

Stay on topic. Encourage your youngster to write the main idea of his report or essay in big letters on a piece of paper and keep it in sight as he does research. (*Example:* “There are pros and cons to the Electoral College.”) This will keep

him focused on information tied to his topic, since it’s easy to jump from link to link online and wind up in unrelated places. He should also check copyright dates in books and on websites to make sure the information is current.

Compare sources. Suggest that your child read several books or articles to cross-check information and write a factually accurate paper. He could write the “5 W” questions (who, what, when, where, why) down the left side of a sheet of paper and list his sources across the top. Then, he can draw a grid and fill in the boxes with the answers to the questions. Are the answers the same from multiple sources? If so, they’re more likely to be correct.



Building Reading Comprehension

How is a good reader like a meteorologist, a filmmaker, and a detective all wrapped up into one? He knows how to make predictions, visualize, and spot clues!

Stepping into fun roles like the ones in this guide can boost your youngster's comprehension and improve his reading skills. Suggest that he try them one at a time—or try a combination—depending on what he's reading and why he's reading it.



Read like a surveyor

Construction teams use surveyors to explore the land before they start a project. When your child has a textbook chapter to read, encourage him to get the “lay of the land” by skimming to preview what it's about.



Activity: To start, your youngster could write a checklist to refer to during his “survey.” Suggest that he put these entries on an over-

sized bookmark (cut from poster board) to remind him what to browse for:

- Chapter title
- Section headings
- Diagrams, photographs, maps, and other graphics
- Captions
- Boldface words
- End-of-chapter or end-of-section questions

Read like a meteorologist

A meteorologist gathers information from the atmosphere to predict the weather. Likewise, good readers collect information from a book to predict what might happen next. Making predictions helps your child monitor how well she understands what she's reading.

Activity: Give your youngster a small notebook for jotting down predictions as she reads. She should also note clues

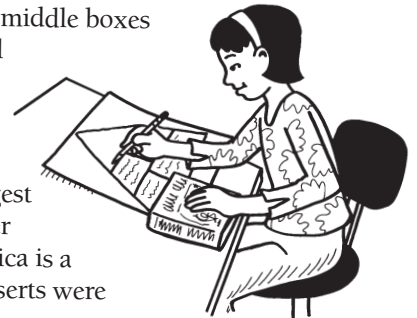
from the text that led to her forecast. For example, if she's reading *Where the Red Fern Grows* (Wilson Rawls), she might write, “I predict something bad will happen. Billy heard two screech owls, and that's a sign of bad luck.” Have her read on to find out if she's right. She can put a check beside each correct prediction.

continued

Think about it

Comprehension improves when readers spend time thinking about a book or chapter after they read it. Here's a simple way your child can reflect on her reading.

1. Have her draw a pyramid with five sections: three in the bottom row, two in the middle, and one at the top.
2. In each of the bottom three boxes, she should write a new fact she learned while reading. For instance, after reading about deserts, she might write, “One-fifth of the earth is covered in desert.”
3. She can fill the two middle boxes with questions she still has. (“How cold does it get in the desert at night?”)
4. In the top box, suggest that she write about her favorite part. (“Antarctica is a desert. I thought all deserts were hot during the day!”)



Read like a filmmaker

Before a movie is filmed, the filmmaker has to read the script and imagine what scenes will look like. As your child reads, suggest that he pause from time to time to visualize details and play a “movie” in his head. He will understand the book better and remember more of what he reads.

Activity: Have your youngster make a storyboard, or a series of drawings, based on a book. He should draw lines to divide several sheets of paper into four boxes each. As he reads, encourage him to draw a picture in each box. For instance, if he’s reading a science chapter about solar eclipses, he could draw each stage of an eclipse in a different box and write a caption describing it.



Read like an archaeologist

To uncover the past, an archaeologist works slowly and in stages—first with big shovels, then smaller ones, and finally with brushes. When your child reads closely, she should “dig” into the text multiple times and find new details to think about each time.

Activity: Suggest that your youngster read a textbook chapter in three stages. Say she’s reading a social studies chapter on the woman suffrage movement. For a first pass, she can simply read it all the way through.

On the next round, she should read one paragraph at a time and add a sticky note by it stating its purpose (introduces, describes, explains, compares). For instance, one paragraph might *introduce* Susan B. Anthony, and the next might *describe* her accomplishments. During the last read-through, she should add details to each note. (“Susan B. Anthony was a leader in the movement for women to vote.”)

Read like a detective

A detective combines new evidence with past experiences to solve a mystery. Similarly, readers can spot clues and make connections between what they read and what they already know. This helps them relate to—and takes the mystery out of—a book.

Activity: Listen to an audiobook together so your child can practice making connections out loud. When the story reminds her of something (a book she read previously, a place she has visited, a person she knows), she can pause to share her connection. *Example:* “This part about Percy Jackson visiting Olympus reminds me of when I saw ancient Greek statues at the museum.” How many connections can you both make to the story?



Make a long story short

When your youngster summarizes something he has read, watched, or experienced, he focuses on the most important ideas—a skill that can boost reading comprehension. Encourage him to practice with these ideas:

- Suggest that he keep a journal where he sums up each day as a newspaper headline. (“Boy defeats history exam with all-time high score!”)
- Play story charades. Take turns silently acting out key scenes from familiar tales for the other person to guess.
- Have your child use 20 words or fewer to describe a book for you to guess. (“A pig makes friends with a spider, and the spider saves the pig’s life.”) After you answer (*Charlotte’s Web*), give him a book to name.



Six Secrets of Writing Success

Creating a top-notch story or report is easier if your youngster knows how to tackle each part of the writing process. Share these six secrets to help him become a better writer.



1 Pick an interesting topic

If your child likes his subject, his enthusiasm will shine through. Here are suggestions he can use to come up with topics that he'll look forward to writing about.

Inspiration poster

Have your youngster make a poster with pictures of things that interest him, such as skateboarding or cats. He can cut photos from old magazines or catalogs or print them from the Internet. Let him hang the poster near his desk.



When he needs a topic to write about, he'll have plenty of ideas to choose from. For example, he might write a story about inventing a new kind of skateboard. Or if he's assigned a report on an animal, he might write about different cat breeds.

Question journal

How does a touch screen work? Why do some people become vegetarians? The things that your child wonders about can make good writing topics. Encourage him to keep a list of his questions in a small notebook. When he has a writing assignment, one of the questions might provide an idea. He could write a report about smartphones or an essay on the pros and cons of eating meat, for instance.

2 Start with a plan

Strong writing flows smoothly from one idea to the next. Your youngster can do her best writing by organizing information before she gets started. Encourage her to try these tools.

Color-coded facts

Let your child use highlighters to group related ideas. First, have her brainstorm facts about her topic and write them on paper, in any order, as she thinks of them. Then, she can highlight each type of fact in a different color. For instance, if she's

doing a report on butterflies, she might use pink to mark information about diet and green to highlight facts about metamorphosis. As she writes her paper, the colors will make it easy for her to spot which ideas belong together in a paragraph or section.

Story organizer

Your youngster can use transition words, or words that connect ideas, to put story events in a logical order. Before she writes a story, have her list "first," "next," "then," and "finally" down the left side of a sheet of paper. She can ask herself "What happened first?" and "What happened next?" Then, she can write the answer beside each word. ("First, I left my hamster's cage open. Then, I noticed he was missing.")



3 Add variety

Just as it takes blocks of various shapes and sizes to build interesting towers, it takes different lengths and types of sentences to make good paragraphs. Your child can vary his sentences with these tips.

Different beginnings

When your youngster is writing a paper, suggest that he start sentences with different letters of the alphabet. This will help him avoid beginning every sentence with a common word like *the* or *I*. For instance, if he has already used *T* ("There are seven continents"), he wouldn't write, "There are five oceans." Instead, he might write, "Earth also has five oceans."

Statements, questions, and more

Remind your child that there are four kinds of sentences: statements ("I need a break."); commands ("Take a break."); questions ("Can I have a break?"); and exclamations ("Give

continued



me a break!”). A combination of sentence types will add variety to his work. Can he think of ways to include all four in a story?

4 Choose words carefully

When your youngster uses a specific word (balmy) instead of a general one (warm), she creates a clear picture for her reader. Suggest these ideas for making careful word choices.

Precise nouns

Building and *bug* are vague nouns—neither gives a reader much information. Is the building a cabin or a skyscraper? Is the bug an ant or a praying mantis? Have your child reread her draft and try to replace general nouns with more precise ones.

Lively verbs

Interesting verbs help a reader imagine the action. When your youngster finishes writing a story, encourage her to find and circle all the forms of the verb *to be* (*is, am, are, was, were, be, being, been*). Then, she can rewrite the sentences using livelier words. For example, she might turn “Jill *was* tall” into “Jill *towered over* the other kids.”

5 Find your voice



Your child’s writing should sound natural—and it should sound like him. Encourage him to develop a writing voice, or style, that lets his personality and creativity show.

Personalized phrases

A cliché is an overused phrase like “once in a blue

moon” or “bright and early.” Together, come up with a list of clichés. Then, have your youngster think of a substitute for each. He might replace “like finding a needle in a haystack” with “like finding a paper clip in a junk drawer.” He can use his replacements instead of clichés when he writes.

Dialogue

Using realistic dialogue is one way for your child to develop his writer’s voice. When he writes dialogue in a story, encourage him to read it aloud. He should ask himself if it sounds like something a person would really say.

6 Proofread

Misspelled words, missing punctuation . . . mistakes happen. Careful proofreading gives a writer a chance to find and fix them before turning in her work. These habits can help your youngster make sure her writing is error-free.

Read and reread

Your child will catch more mistakes if she reads her draft several times, focusing on a different type of error each time. The first time through, she might look for missing words. Then, she can check for incomplete sentences on the second pass and incorrect verb tenses on the third.

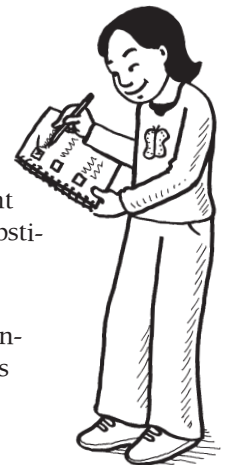
Start at the end

Reading a paper or story backward is a good way to spot spelling and punctuation errors. Have your youngster start at the last word and read until she gets to the first one. This will help her concentrate on one word at a time instead of getting distracted by what the story or report is about.

Use a checklist

Your child can make sure that she doesn’t forget anything with this handy list:

- Are the words spelled correctly? Use a dictionary to check. (When using a computer spell-checker, be sure to use the right word, because it might not catch substitutions such as *there* for *their*.)
- Do the subjects and verbs agree? Read the subject and verb of each sentence aloud. A singular subject needs a singular verb (Jane *scrubs*) while a plural subject needs a plural verb (Jane and Michael *scrub*).
- Is the punctuation correct? Scan to the end of each sentence to make sure there’s a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point. Also, check for correct use of commas, and make sure proper nouns are capitalized.



Keep Them Reading

Ben loved to read when he was in first and second grade. But he seemed to lose interest as he got older. Sports, music, computers, and friends all became more important.

Does this sound familiar? Don't worry—there are plenty of ways to keep your child interested in reading. Here are some ideas.



Look for a hook

Your youngster can enjoy her latest interests and read at the same time. Help her look for books and magazines about hobbies, movies, and more to find something she'll enjoy.

■ Connect reading with your child's activities. If she likes basketball, look for a nonfiction book like *Winning Basketball for Girls* by Faye Young Miller and Wayne Coffey, or a fictional story such as *The Basketball Mystery* by Gertrude Chandler Warner. By trying different genres, she's sure to find something that appeals to her tastes.

■ Comic books like *Scooby-Doo*, *Spiderman*, and *Batman* can be fun reading material for kids who enjoy humor, art, or adventure. You might also encourage your child to try graphic novels like *George's Secret Key to the Universe* by Lucy and Stephen Hawking or *Clan Apis* by Jay Hosler. *Tip:* Visit a comic book shop or newsstand to spark his interest.



■ Suggest that your youngster read the book of a movie she has seen and loved, such as Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* or Gail Carson Levine's *Ella Enchanted*. Then, introduce

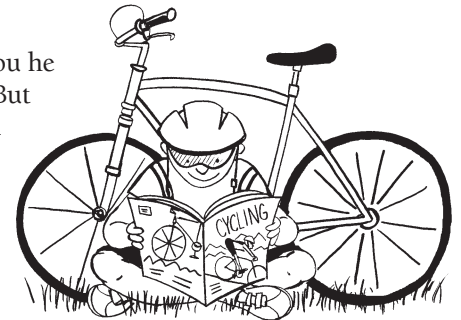
other books by the same author, such as Dahl's *Mathilda* or Levine's *The Princess Tales* series.

■ Subscribe to a kids' magazine—your youngster will love getting something with his name on it in the mailbox each month. Plus, magazines are fun and relaxing because they can

be read in bits and pieces. Does your youngster like to go bike riding? Try *Bicycling*. Have him see if his friends subscribe to a magazine, and they can swap when they finish. Or visit the library each month so he can read his favorite magazines.

Read with family

Your child may tell you he is too old to be read to. But you can keep reading an important part of your family's life by trying new ways to share books.



■ Have your child read to a younger sibling or cousin. The little one's enthusiasm for books might rub off on him. And he will remember how much he loved favorite childhood stories. Reading aloud will also improve his expression and fluency.

■ Make a reading date with your child. You can spend an evening at the bookstore or an afternoon at the library. Select books and sit in comfortable chairs to read alongside each other. Stop occasionally to share something funny, sad, or interesting, and encourage her to do the same. Even though you're each reading your own book, your youngster will enjoy the company, and you'll set a good example by showing how much you like reading.

■ Form a traveling book club. Borrow audiobooks from the library, and listen to them when you're in the car. You might

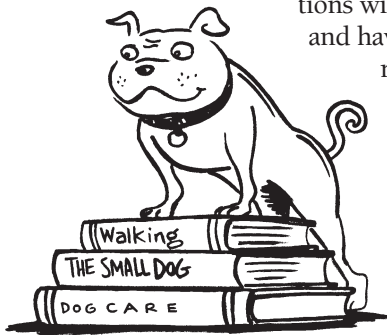


fit in one chapter on the way to piano lessons and another while driving to swim practice.

■ Host a story sleepover. As a family, camp out in the backyard and read by flashlight in a tent, or stretch out in sleeping bags on the family-room floor. You can also encourage your youngster to invite a friend over for a reading night. Her pal can bring a story, and they can take turns reading aloud to one another.

Make it practical

Can books help your child achieve goals, start conversations with friends, learn new things, and have fun? Of course! Choose reading materials carefully, and she'll find all sorts of new reasons to read.

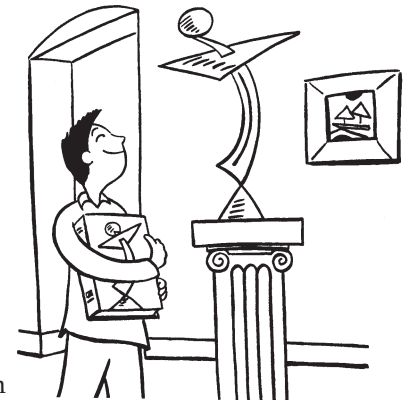


■ Show your youngster how reading can help her do something that's important to her. For example, perhaps she wants a pet, and you're considering the idea. Give her a book on pet care, such as *Everything Dog: What Kids Really Want to Know about Dogs* by Marty Crisp or *How to Speak Cat: A Guide to Decoding Cat Language* by Aline Alexander Newman and Gary Weitzman. Ask her to tell you what she learns and what responsibilities she would have in living with an animal.

■ Volumes of trivia can expand your child's knowledge, entertain him, and give him interesting things to discuss with others. Plus, the short snippets make it easy to fit reading in anytime. Keep a trivia book in the car or bathroom. Look for books with facts, sports details, or world records like *The Everything Kids' Presidents Book* by Brian Thornton or the *Sports Illustrated Kids: The Top 10 of Everything in Sports*. **Idea:** Help your youngster make a trivia game based on a book. Write questions and answers on index cards, and use a board game from your closet.

■ Starting a collection will open the door to books and other research materials. Say your child collects bugs. Show her books like *Small Wonders: Jean-Henri Fabre and His World of Insects* by Mathew Clark Smith and *Ultimate Bugopedia: The Most Complete Bug Reference Ever* by Darlyne Murawski and Nancy Honovich. Or perhaps she wants to collect snow globes. Then, she can search the Web to find out how to make her own snow globe with small toys, water, vegetable oil, and glitter in an empty baby food jar.

■ Take your youngster to an art museum. Before going, check out library books about an artist whose works you will see. For example, try the Famous Artists series (Barron's Educational Series) to read about Henri Matisse, Claude Monet, or Vincent Van Gogh. On the way to the gallery, you can get your child excited by talking with him about the artist's life story.



■ Let your youngster plan a theme party. Maybe she'll have a back-to-school party before summer ends, an "unbirthday" party, or a Hawaiian luau. She can choose a theme by reading a book like Amy Vangsgard's *Hit of the Party: The Complete Planner for Children's Theme Birthday Parties*. To come up with activities, she might check out game and craft books such as *The Everything Kids' Puzzle Book* by Jennifer A. Ericsson and *Creative Crafts for Kids* by Gill Dickinson and Cheryl Owen. And she can scan recipes in cookbooks to find the perfect food for her party.