

REAL-WORLD LEARNING

Learning comes alive for children when they make connections between classroom work and what happens in the real world. These activities can guide you in showing your middle grader that what she studies in school really matters!



COMPARE PLANS

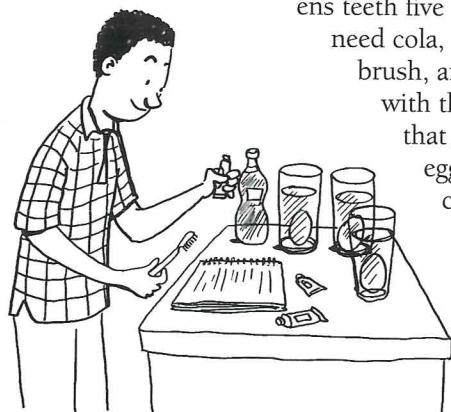
Are you getting the best deal on your TV or cell phone service? Your tween can practice math while she finds out. Using your monthly bill, have her compare your current cost with the rates of at least two other providers. (Prices are available online, in brochures from retailers, or from ads that come in the mail.) Ask her to create a chart or spreadsheet that shows prices, features, and terms.

If your youngster finds a good deal, consider switching. It will be a real boost to her confidence if her work leads to a decision to change plans. Plus, she might even benefit from a package that adds a new sports channel or increases your phone data plan.

CHOOSE TOOTHPASTE

Suggest that your middle schooler try this experiment at home to find out which kind of toothpaste works best. He'll see how science is important in everyday life. First, let him pick out three trial-sized toothpastes. He could get one regular and two that promise different degrees of whitening ("Removes stains twice as fast as the leading brand" or "Whitens teeth five shades"). He'll also need cola, 3 glasses, a toothbrush, and 3 hard-boiled eggs with the shells on. (Explain that tooth enamel and eggshells both contain calcium, so they'll react similarly to toothpaste.)

Have your child submerge each egg in a



glass of cola and soak overnight. In the morning, he should remove them from the cola, gently brush each one with a different toothpaste for 10 seconds, and rinse. Which one did the best job of removing the cola stain? This is the one that will most likely work best on his teeth, too.

MAP YOUR PRODUCE

Some fruits and vegetables are grown locally, while others travel long distances to your table. Encourage your tween to explore geography and economics with this activity.

Ask her to start by listing fruits and vegetables that your family eats, such as apples, oranges, tomatoes, and carrots. Then, go shopping so she can find out where your grocery store gets each one and write the locations on her list. Perhaps she'll see tomatoes from Florida and South Carolina, as well as from a local farm. (Signs in the produce section or stickers on the produce often have this information.)

At home, your youngster could use a map to find out how far each one travels from the farm to your table. For instance, if you live in New York City and buy tomatoes from Florida, they are shipped about 1,200 miles. Talk about the benefits of buying food locally (saves on gas used by delivery trucks, supports local farmers). She can use what she learns to help your family pick out produce during future shopping trips.



WRITE AN AD

Is there something your middle grader has been asking for? Perhaps he would like a later bedtime or a bigger allowance. Have him practice persuasive writing and stretch his creativity by making a case for what he wants.

He might design a print ad like those in magazines, put together a PowerPoint presentation, or write a script for a commercial and perform or videotape it for you. Suggest that he use words and phrases that will appeal to his audience (you). It will also help if he creates an eye-catching design or a clever gimmick. *Idea:* He can browse magazine ads or watch YouTube commercials for inspiration.



DESIGN AN APP

Apps can help you do almost anything these days, from identifying an unfamiliar song on the radio to helping you find your lost phone. If your child invented her own app, what would it do?

Encourage her to think about a need she wants to fill and come up with an idea. She could design an app that helps users find a pizza place or keep track of basketball stats, for instance.

Once she has decided, she can download free app-development software at developer.apple.com/devcenter/ios/index.action or do an online app development tutorial at developer.android.com/training/basics/firstapp/index.html. Have her follow the steps to design, test, and submit her app—and then help her spread the word so friends and relatives can try it!

PAINT YOUR ROOM

Does your tween want to get rid of the sand castles or jungle animals on her bedroom walls? Let her update her room by painting it her favorite color—if she does the math to figure out how much

paint she will need and what it will cost.

Tell your child to measure the width and height of one wall and multiply the numbers to determine the square footage. She'll need to do this for each wall and add up the total. Then, head to the paint store together. She

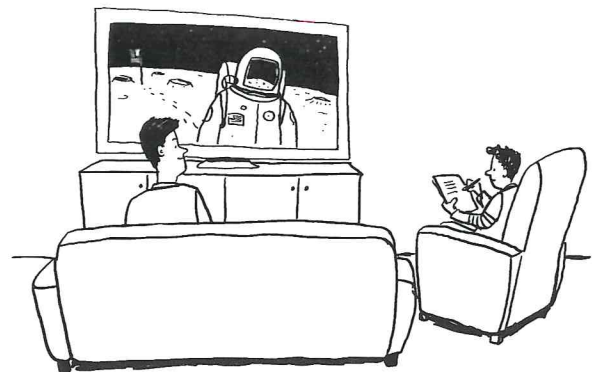


should find out how many square feet a gallon will cover and calculate how much to buy based on how many coats of paint she needs. *Note:* Remind her to factor in the cost of brushes, rollers, and other painting supplies.

BE A FILM CRITIC

Let your middle grader play film critic. He'll practice writing and doing research as he learns about history. First, ask him to pick a movie based on an event or a person from the past. It could be about a space mission, a king or president, or a famous athlete or team, for instance. (*Note:* Read the rating and reviews to see if the movie is appropriate for your tween.)

Then, watch it together, and suggest that he research the history behind it. He can get library books on the topic or visit a website like history.com. It will be interesting for him to see which parts of the film were historically accurate and which were made up or changed in some way. Why does he think the filmmakers decided to fictionalize the parts that they did?



PREPARE FOR EXTREME WEATHER

Ask your youngster to research the extreme weather that is possible in your area. His goal is to find out why your city or town is prone to tornadoes or floods, for example. Then, have him write a family emergency plan for each type of weather. *Hint:* He can find tips on sites such as fema.gov and redcross.org.

He might list supplies to keep on hand, important phone numbers to know, and procedures to follow. Let your middle schooler brief your family on the plan and help implement the recommendations (assembling an emergency kit, for instance). Finally, he should find a spot to post his instructions so they are handy.

Middle Years