

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

A plan for final exams



Final exams may cover more material than your tween is used to studying for at one time. So encourage him to start early and stick to a schedule. He might set aside 30 minutes each night to review. Devoting time each weekend to studying older notes and earlier textbook chapters can refresh his memory, too.

Start a "just ours" tradition

Stepsiblings might bring different traditions to a blended family. While it's important to keep those, creating shared rituals can be a nice way to bond. Maybe you'll have pajamas-and-pizza night on Wednesdays or Saturday afternoon tennis. *Idea:* Start a last-day-of-school tradition to wrap up the year.

A letter to myself

As your tween finishes this school year, ask her to imagine she's starting it all over again. What advice would she give her past self? What's she proud of, and what does she wish she'd done differently? Suggest writing a letter to herself about what she's learned. She can use her insights when she faces obstacles in the future.

Worth quoting

"You will never win if you never begin." *Helen Rowland*

Just for fun

Q: What do you get if you cross a skunk with a boomerang?



A: A terrible smell you can't get rid of.

Keep learning all summer

What does your tween get when she combines reading, writing, and math with summer vacation? A ticket to a successful upcoming school year! Here's how she can retain what she learned this year—and learn even more.

Issue reading challenges

Have your child put together a summer reading adventure with cool challenges to check off. Examples might include reading under the stars, reading to a pet, checking out a book from a section of the library she has never visited, or reading books set on each continent. *Add math:* Assign a point value to each challenge (include fractions), and have her keep a running total.

Get inspired to write

Books can be jumping-off points for creative writing projects. Your middle grader might turn a novel into a picture book for a younger sibling. Or she could create a comic strip or a board game based on a book. *Add math:* Encourage



her to write "\$2 book summaries" (pronouns = 5 cents, nouns = 8 cents, verbs = 10 cents, adjectives = 13 cents, adverbs = 15 cents). Can she sum up a book in exactly \$2 worth of words?

Pitch a tent

Let your tween set up a tent in the yard or basement. She can stock it with books, magazines, paper, pencils and other writing tools, pillows, and healthy snacks. *Add math:* Fill the tent with math-related novels, nonfiction books, and puzzle books (ask a librarian for ideas). 👍

"You can count on me!"

When your tween makes a commitment and keeps it, people learn they can depend on him. Help him be more reliable with these tips.

■ **Be sure it's possible.** Before your child agrees to something, like helping a friend rehearse for a play, he should think realistically about whether he can follow through. If he's not sure, it's better to say no than to let his friend down.

■ **Make commitments a priority.** Promises take priority over opportunities that crop up later. If your teen said he'd wash your car on Saturday afternoon, then gets invited to play basketball, he'll need to finish the car before his game. 👍



Understanding your ever-changing tween

The “in-between” years, when your child is no longer a little kid but not quite a teenager, can be challenging for you and your middle schooler. Try these strategies for navigating them.

Don't take it personally. Your tween is going through big physical and emotional changes, and he's facing different social situations. That's a hormone-fueled recipe for unpredictable behavior. So try not to overreact if he rolls his



eyes when you ask if he wants to work on a puzzle with you. Instead, just start on the puzzle yourself. He may change his mind later. *Tip:* Let him know you're there to answer questions about changes he's going through.

Give him space. After years of bedtime snuggles and chats, your child's closed bedroom door and whispered chats with friends can be upsetting. But testing his independence is a natural part of growing up. Try knocking on his door. Some days, he'll want to talk! *Tip:* Stand firm on rules about health and safety. But aim to give him more freedom about things like fashion and friendships. 👍

Parent to Parent A back-to-school plan



Summer always seems to fly by! Before I know it, my son Owen and I are scrambling to get ready for the new school year.

This year, we're going to start planning early. We hung up a wall calendar, and we're using it to keep track of school-related obligations. First, Owen put soccer tryout dates on the calendar. As soon as back-to-school information comes in the mail or is posted on the school website, I'll have him add important events like open house and schedule pickup. I also booked Owen's checkup already, since his doctor's schedule fills up fast, and wrote the date on our calendar.



Owen is excited to try out for soccer and to find out which friends will be in his classes next year. Thanks to our calendar, he knows exactly what to expect and when. 👍

Q & A Ease into social media

Q My daughter is old enough now to sign up for social media accounts. Should I let her?

A Children mature at different rates, so start by thinking about your child's offline behavior. Does she follow rules you've set for her? Is she considerate of others' feelings?

Ask your daughter which sites she's interested in using. Explore them together, and discuss dangers like cyberbullying. Also talk about ways to avoid problems, such as using the “Would I want Grandma to see this?” rule before posting anything.

If you let your tween open an account, help her adjust privacy settings. Then, create rules. She might have to “friend” you, only interact with family and certain friends, and limit her time on social media. Finally, keep checking in to ask how things are going. Making social media part of your everyday conversations can encourage her to come to you for guidance. 👍



Eggs-periment: Sink or swim?

Why is it easier to float in the salty ocean than in a swimming pool? It's all about density, or how tightly molecules are packed together. Share this eggs-cellent experiment with your tween.

Steps: Have your child measure 16 oz. water into a bowl and gently drop in a fresh egg. What happens? (It sinks.) Then, she should measure 16 oz. water into another bowl, add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup salt, and stir until completely dissolved. What happens when she drops an egg into that water? (It floats.)

The science: The egg sinks because its density is greater than that of plain water. Adding salt to the water increases the water's density. Since the water's density is now greater than the egg's density, the egg will float!

Extension: Have your tween experiment with the salt-to-water ratio. What's the minimum amount of salt needed for the egg to float? She could also try foods of different densities (apple, potato). 👍

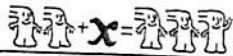


OUR PURPOSE

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INFO BITS



Fold to make shapes

Have your child fold a piece of paper several times in different directions, open it, and lay it flat. Ask her to color the shapes created by the fold lines. Which shapes did she make? Can she fold another piece of paper so all the shapes are triangles? Squares? She'll need to think logically about how shapes are related.



Patterns of motion

Encourage your youngster to look for patterns of motion everywhere he goes. At the playground, he could swing back and forth. On the beach, he might watch waves go in and out. Together, think of more patterns, like sunrise and sunset or a basketball bouncing up and down. Now have him draw what those patterns of motion look like.

Book picks

Your child will realize how important—and fun—math really is when she reads *The Great Number Rumble: A Story of Math in Surprising Places* (Cora Lee).

Mr. Ferris and His Wheel (Kathryn Gibbs Davis) tells the true story of the American engineer who invented the popular carnival ride.

Just for fun



Q: Which stars wear sunglasses?

A: Movie stars!

Summer math camp

Bring summer camp home with these cool ideas that will inspire your child to practice multiplication, division, and fractions.

Multiplication hikes

Let your youngster collect natural objects like rocks or shells—and see how they “multiply”! To display his treasures, he could arrange them in equal groups. He might make 5 groups of 6 shells each or 3 groups of 8 rocks each, then say the multiplication problems he sees ($5 \times 6 = 30$ or $6 \times 5 = 30$, $3 \times 8 = 24$ or $8 \times 3 = 24$).

Division tag

After dark, play this version of flashlight tag. Have your child number a dozen sheets of paper 1–12 and tape each to something in the yard (tree, chair). Now ask him to list 20 division problems, each with an answer between 1 and 12. One player calls out a problem while another runs to “tag” the answer with a flashlight. If he’s right, he gets another problem. If not, he gives a problem to the next player.

Discover plant parts

What’s in a salad? Leaves, roots, stems, seeds, flowers, and fruits! With this activity, your youngster can learn about the parts of plants she eats.

When you bring home groceries, have her get a notebook and label a page for each of those plant parts. Then, she could look closely at fruits and vegetables to decide which part they are and list them on the correct page. Examples: spinach (leaves), carrots (roots), asparagus (stems), peas (seeds), broccoli (flowers), and apples (fruit).

Finally, let your child use the produce to make her own healthy salad. ☐



Poolside fractions

Help your youngster measure and cut a pool noodle into fractional pieces: one 12-inch, two 6-inch, three 4-inch, four 3-inch, and six 2-inch. Then, have him use a marker to write “1” on the biggest piece. He can figure out which fraction ($\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, or $\frac{1}{6}$) to label the others by comparing them to 1. Take turns stacking smaller pieces and adding the fractions. Example: $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} = \frac{3}{4}$. Check your answers against the “1” piece to see if you’re right. ☐



Liquid volume: Buckets of fun!

Water balloons and sandcastles say “summer.” Here’s how your child can use them to measure liquid volume.

Water balloons. Compete to create the largest water balloon. Take turns stretching a balloon around a faucet and turning on the water. The object is to get the balloon as big as possible without bursting it. Now each person should use a pin to carefully pop her balloon over a large measuring cup. On a



sheet of paper, your youngster could record each measurement—and announce the winner!

Sandcastle. Can your child discover the ideal “recipe” for building a sandcastle? Have her fill a bucket with sand, using a measuring cup to keep track of how much the bucket holds. Then, she should slowly pour in water from a measuring cup and record how much she adds before water pools on top of the sand. Finally, she can turn the bucket over and lift it up. Does her castle hold together? If not, she could repeat the activity, using more or less water. 📦

Q & A My math station

Q: With summer about to start, how can I keep my son excited about math and practicing the skills he’s learned this year?

A: Help your child set up a math station on a table or in a large cardboard box turned on its side. Together, stock it with tools and games that make math fun.



For instance, include a ruler, a calculator, pencils, regular paper and graph paper, and a protractor. He might make graphs to display, use the protractor to create abstract art with different angles, and create a “problem of the day” for family members to solve.

Also, get your son math- or logic-related games to put in his station. You can find these at yard sales and thrift stores, or ask for hand-me-downs from relatives. Examples include Yahtzee, Sequence, Set, Mancala, and Monopoly. 📦

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MATH CORNER

Sunken-ship algebra

This graph-paper version of Battleship introduces your youngster to algebra as she solves for x to sink your “ships.”

Set up: Have each player draw a 5×5 grid with columns labeled A–E and rows numbered 1–5. Set up a divider (perhaps a book standing up) so players can’t see each other’s boards. Now each person makes a “ship” by secretly shading in a line of three squares (vertical or horizontal). On separate index cards, let your child write six equations, each with a missing number (examples: $56 + x = 86$, $x - 12 = 10$), and stack them facedown.

Play: Take turns calling out coordinates. If your youngster says “A, 5,” and part of your ship is in column A, row 5, she gets an equation card. If she solves it correctly, she “sinks” that part of your ship, and you cross it out. If your ship isn’t in the coordinates she chose or she gets an equation wrong, her turn ends.

Win: Be the first to sink your opponent’s entire ship. 📦



SCIENCE LAB

“Why is the sky blue?”

Since your child was little, he has probably asked you why the sky is blue. This experiment will help him discover the reason on his own.

You’ll need: tall (clear) jar or glass, water, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. measure, milk, spoon, flashlight

Here’s how: Have your youngster fill the jar about $\frac{3}{4}$ full with water, add $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. milk, and stir. Then, as he shines the flashlight straight down into the liquid, he can look through the side of the jar and observe the color.

What happens? The water appears blue.

Why? When the flashlight beam bounces off the milk particles, blue is reflected. On Earth, sunlight shines through our atmosphere and bounces off particles of air and dust. Again, blue is the color most likely to be reflected and to scatter around—making our sky look blue. In outer space, there is no air and little dust to bounce off of, so it’s dark. 📦



Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

May 2021

Middle Country School District
Title I - Parental Involvement

Book Picks



■ *Gabby Garcia's Ultimate Playbook* (Iva-Marie Palmer)

Gabby is a star baseball player and a popular student at her middle school. When she suddenly has to move and change schools, she tries to stick to her "playbook" for success but realizes she might have to change her plans. The first book in the Gabby Garcia series.



■ *National Parks of the U.S.A.* (Kate Siber)

From Death Valley to Acadia, explore 21 national parks with one book. Readers will find beautiful illustrations and learn about the parks' diverse landscapes. Includes maps, facts about plants and wildlife, and information on how to protect our parks.



■ *Tap Dancing on the Roof: Sijo (Poems)* (Linda Sue Park)

Learn about sijo, a traditional type of poetry from Korea. Sijo usually has a funny twist at the end that makes readers think. This book has poems with topics ranging from breakfast to long division. After reading them, your youngster might be inspired to write a few sijo of his own.

■ *The World According to Humphrey* (Betty G. Birney)

Being the class pet is a big job for little Humphrey. The hamster helps a shy girl speak up, finds friends for a lonely janitor, and has his own notebook. Then the regular teacher returns, and she hates hamsters. Can Humphrey win her over? Book one of the Humphrey series. (Also available in Spanish.)



A summer full of books

"I'm going to read that book next!" If your child has a list of books she wants to try, she's more likely to read regularly this summer. Suggest these ideas to help her find books that appeal to her, and then she can check them out from the library.



Armchair travels

Your youngster might not tour the canals of Venice or go to an Antarctic research station this summer, but she could read her way through those places! Encourage her to choose books about locations she studied in school or wants to visit. She might read a novel set in Italy or a nonfiction book about the South Pole. She'll explore places, people, and events around the world.

Book trailers

Help your child find book trailers online—they're like movie trailers, but for books. She can type "book trailers for kids" into a search engine. She'll get a taste of what a book is about and decide whether to put it on her to-read list. *Idea:* She could make her own trailers for books she enjoys and share them with friends.

Showtime!

Let your youngster look for movies based on books. She can pick ones she'd like to watch and add the book titles to her summer reading list. After she reads the book and watches the movie, have her tell you how the two versions were similar and different. Which one did she like better, and why? ■

Track summer reading

Let your youngster see for himself how many books he can read while school is out. Share these clever ways for keeping track.

● **Make a quilt.** As he finishes a book, suggest that he draw a picture showing his favorite part. He can tape the pages together and hang his growing "quilt" on his bedroom wall.



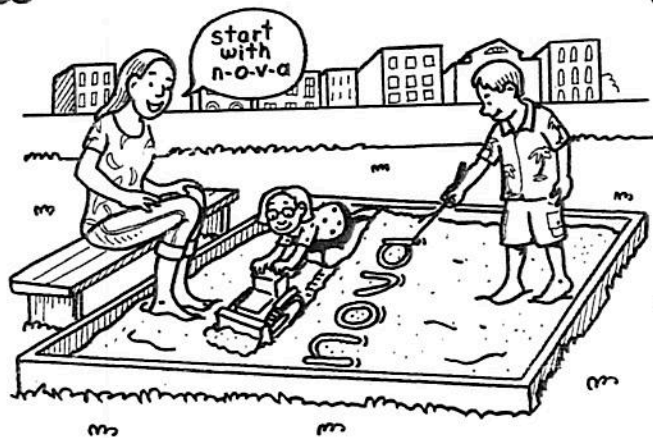
● **Create a passport.** Have your child use a small notebook as a reading passport. He could draw a "stamp" and write a short book review on each page.

● **Craft a paper chain.** Encourage him to write the title and author of each book on a strip of paper, loop the strips together, and snake the chain around his room. ■

Play listening games

Whether your child is participating in a class discussion or you're telling him how to do a chore at home, he needs good listening skills. Practice with these silly games.

Unusual instructions. The object of the game is to spell a word using specific directions. Secretly choose a word, such as *novel*. While your youngster listens closely, give him fun instructions for spelling the word. For example, "Start with *nova*. Then, change *a* to *e* and add *l* to the



end." When he gets the right word, it's his turn to think of a word and give you directions.

Forbidden word. In this game, family members must listen carefully to catch each other using a "forbidden word." Ask your child to choose a word that might be hard to avoid, such as *eat* or *play*. The first person caught using it has to attach a safety

pin to his shirt. If he catches someone else, he transfers the pin to that person. 📌

Parent 2 Parent TV writing

My daughter Jessie always wants to watch her favorite cartoon. One day when she'd had enough screen time, I suggested she try writing her own cartoon episode.

She considered several different story lines for the characters. After picking her favorite, Jessie started writing about a little platypus who went on a mission to save the world. Because she knows the show so well, it was easy for her to imagine how the characters would behave in a new situation.



To fill out her plot and add details, Jessie decided to make a storyboard. She drew each scene and glued them in order on poster board. She is proud of her original cartoon episode, and now she and her siblings are practicing a skit version to put on for us! 📺

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Thank-you notes for teachers

After the challenges of this school year, it's extra important to show appreciation for teachers. Help your child write a thank-you note with these three steps.

1. He can begin with an explanation of why he's writing: "Dear Mr. Redding, I want to thank you for all the help you gave me this school year."
2. Next, have your youngster write a few sentences telling why he is grateful. *Example:* "You made virtual learning interesting and made us feel like we were together in the classroom."
3. Finally, suggest that he sum up his thanks and wish his teacher a good summer: "Again, thank you for everything. I hope you have a nice summer." He could close with "Gratefully" or "Sincerely," followed by his signature. *Tip:* He can deliver his notes by mail or email. 📧



Fun with Words

Match the rhyming pairs

A "Hink Pink" is a two-word phrase that hints at a pair of rhyming words. For instance, "insect snuggle" can be a "bug hug." Use this fun activity to build your child's vocabulary.

Together, write a dozen Hink Pinks and answers on separate slips of paper. To come up with them, you might pick something in the room or out the car window (a cup), and think of a word that

rhymes with it (pup). Then, look in a dictionary or thesaurus to find a synonym for each word ("pup cup" = "canine chalice").

Mix up the pairs, and arrange them facedown in even rows and columns.

Take turns flipping over two slips and reading them aloud.

If they match ("big rig" and "enormous truck"), keep them. If not, turn them back over. The person who gets the most matches wins the game. 📌



Recipes for Success

Practical Activities to Help Your Child Succeed

MAY 2021

Middle Country School District

Title I - Parental Involvement

READING Stop for sight words

Your child will practice reading sight words while trying to avoid "stop signs" in this game.

Ingredients: pencil, 25 index cards, sight word list
Have your youngster write 22 sight words on separate index cards. (Use a list from school, or search online for "sight word list.") On three other cards, he should draw a stop sign. Shuffle and stack the cards facedown.

Take turns flipping over a card and reading the word. If you get it right, keep the card. If not, put it at the bottom of the pile. But watch out! Turn over a stop sign, and lose all your cards. Collect the most cards to win.

SOCIAL STUDIES News flash from the past

What's the biggest news from an era your youngster is studying in history? Designing the front page of a newspaper will help him dive more deeply into important events and summarize them.

Ingredients: construction paper, crayons or markers
Suggest that your child choose a place and time in history he's learning about, perhaps ancient Greece. Have him pretend to be a newspaper editor and pick topics for the front page. "Ancient Greeks create first democracy." Encourage him to do research in books or online. He can write headlines and short articles on the construction paper, then illustrate the page. Finally, let him display his front page on the refrigerator.

FINANCIAL LITERACY Sticking to a budget

Planning a family dinner is a good way for your youngster to learn about shopping on a budget while working on math skills.

Ingredients: grocery store ads, paper, pencil
Set a budget for your dinner, and have your child create a healthy menu based on items in the circular or on the store website. She can list each food and its price. Suggest that she round the numbers and keep a running total in her head to stay on target. Then, she should add up the actual prices to see how close her estimate was—and whether she's within budget. She may add or remove items until it comes out right. Now you could shop and cook together to make her menu. Bon appétit!

ADDITION

Let your youngster make spring "flowers" for addition practice. Have her cut circles from construction paper, write a number between 1 and 100 on each, and glue the circles to paper. She can add petals that show different ways to make each number. For 78, she might include petals with 70 + 8 and 50 + 28.

SAFETY

Talk with your child about ways to stay safe in the kitchen. Together, come up with rules ("Use the stove only with an adult," "Don't put aluminum foil in the microwave"). Suggest that he write and illustrate each rule on a sheet of paper and hang his signs near the appliances.

Refrigerator Poster
Just hang your Recipes poster on the refrigerator and sneak in an activity when you have a few minutes. These fun activities will help develop school success and positive behavior. Check off each box as you complete the "recipe."

Recipes for Success

Practical Activities to Help Your Child Succeed

MAY 2021

Character Corner

WRITING

Create a character

Making up a fictional character will spark your youngster's creativity and help her write an interesting story.

Ingredients: paper, pencil

Suggest that your child make columns for different facts about her character. She could label them with categories like name (Lima Bean the Dragon), favorite activities (eating ice cream, swimming in moats), problem (can't breathe fire), and personality traits (brave, determined).

Now, encourage your youngster to use the facts about her character to write a short story. It might include: "Lima Bean heard an ice cream truck approaching the castle. For once, she was happy she couldn't breathe fire. She wouldn't want to melt the ice cream!" Let her read her tale aloud to you.



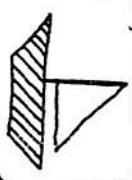
TIME

Although your child may be used to digital clocks, he still needs to be able to read an analog clock. Ask him to draw a clock face on one sheet of paper and cut out an hour hand and a minute hand from another sheet. Call out times (1:00, 2:30), and have him arrange the hands to match. **Tip:** Start with times to the hour and half-hour, then go to quarter hours and so on.



LISTENING

Challenge your child to draw an object based on your instructions—without telling her what she's drawing! For a boat, you might begin, "Draw a trapezoid with the long side on top." Can she identify the item? Now let her give you directions to draw an object.



ENGINEERING

What could your youngster construct using toothpicks and play dough? First, she can roll the dough into balls and connect them to make 3-D shapes (rectangular prisms, cubes, pyramids). Then, encourage her to build with the shapes to see which ones create the most stable structures.



GRATITUDE

Try this 24-hour challenge: Anytime a family member starts to complain, they should say something they're thankful for instead. Rather than saying, "I'm too tired to go to baseball practice," your youngster could try, "I'm thankful for my teammates."

DEPENDABILITY

Ask your child to name household items she depends on (sink, toaster). What would happen if they didn't work? (She couldn't wash her hands or make toast.) Now ask her to think of ways others rely on her. What would happen if she weren't dependable?



SELF-ESTEEM

Suggest that your youngster finish the sentence "I am good at ____." (Examples: "being a big brother," "making people laugh.") Now, have him stand in front of a mirror and read his list aloud. He'll remember what he likes about himself!

FITNESS

On a driveway or playground blacktop, let your child use chalk to draw 10 circles large enough to stand in. In each circle, he can write a physical activity ("Jump like a kangaroo," "Touch your toes"). Now have family members run from circle to circle and do each activity.



Congratulations!

We finished _____ activities together on this poster.

Signed (parent or adult family member)

Signed (child)

