

February 2021

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Fair vs. equal

Your middle grader may think "fair" means

"equal." To help her understand the difference, try this: Ask her to imagine a class full of different kinds of animals. It would be equal to make a squirrel and a turtle take a tree-climbing test—but would it be fair?

Thanks for being my kid!

Want to boost your middle schooler's self-confidence? Mail him a thank-you card telling him how proud you are to be his parent. List all the things you want for him in the future. The note will remind him of your love—without embarrassing him.

Home STEM lab

Let your tween set aside a spot to do science experiments or engineering projects. She could stock her "lab" with supplies like cardboard tubes, plastic cups, duct tape, scissors, a ruler, and a magnifying glass. When she's ready to work, she'll save time by having many of the items she needs in one spot.

Worth quoting

"You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have."

Maya Angelou

Just for fun

Q: When you're trying to find something, why is it always in the last place you look?

A: Because when you find it, you stop looking!



Rethink thinking

One of the most important skills your middle grader can develop is how to think critically about issues and decisions. Sharpen his thinking with these activities.

Explain it to an alien

Take turns thinking of something that's common on Earth (sports, books) and explaining it to family members as if they're aliens. ("People cheer when their favorite team wins.") Let the "aliens" ask questions. ("Why aren't Earthlings happy for whoever wins?") Your child will learn to recognize his own assumptions (team loyalty is important) and realize that not everyone necessarily shares them.

Look for middle ground

Say your tween's homework is to write an opinion piece on school uniforms. He might argue that uniforms make getting dressed easier because you don't have to decide what to wear, while choosing your own outfit shows your personality.



Maybe he could combine the pros and suggest that students be able to put together their own uniforms from a limited selection of styles.

Flip the script

Present family members with a choice like "Which ice cream is better, chocolate or vanilla?" Have your child argue *against* his own side. If he prefers chocolate, he might say, "Vanilla goes better with desserts like apple pie or chocolate cake." He'll practice considering other viewpoints. 👍

Scheduling strategies

Juggling obligations can be a challenge, especially if your family's schedule changes from day to day. Try these ideas to keep everyone on track.

Avoid conflicts. Hang up a calendar, and assign each person a different-color marker. Each family member uses her color to write her obligations. ("Conference call, 2:30 p.m.") Or create a shared electronic calendar with automatic reminders.

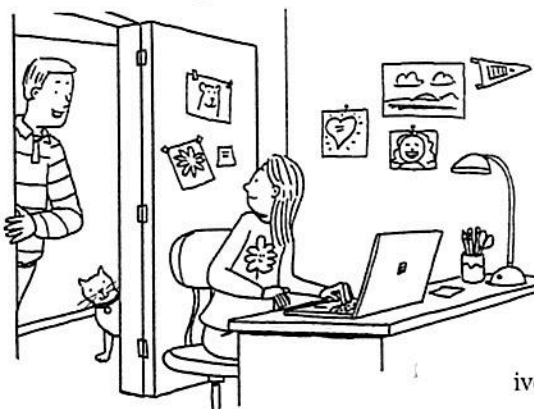
Be consistent. Encourage everyone to go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even if school or work hours vary. You'll feel more alert on early-start days. On other mornings, use the extra time to eat a leisurely breakfast together. 👍



Take a stand against cyberbullying

With tweens spending more time online this year, cyberbullying is a big concern. Use these steps to help your middle grader make things safer for herself and her classmates.

Know what's not okay. Spreading rumors, singling out people for their differences, and posting embarrassing photos are all examples of cyberbullying. Ask your tween to imagine that the person being targeted is sitting next to her. Would she say the same thing out



loud or hold up the photo in front of a crowd? If not, she shouldn't post it.

Reach out. Middle graders who witness bullying can feel stressed and sad. Let your child know there are safe ways to help. She could type something positive about the person being bullied in a group chat, change the topic, or send a supportive private message.

Steps toward a bright future

While a career might seem far off to your middle schooler, the schoolwork he does now will give him knowledge and skills he'll use in the future. Share these possibilities for him to consider.

Software developer? Marine biologist? These careers are among many that focus on STEM skills. Doing well in math and science classes today can prepare your tween for the classes he'll need in high school and college. *Idea:* Encourage him to explore the educational requirements for his dream careers in the Occupational Outlook Handbook at bls.gov/oooh or on the free *CareerInfo* app.



Entrepreneur? Business executive? If your child wants to start a company or work for a major corporation someday, he could sign up for marketing or business electives. *Idea:* Suggest that he volunteer to help with a school fundraiser or look into joining (or starting) an entrepreneurship club. 👍

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Get help. Whether your tween is being bullied or notices someone else is, she should come to you right away. You could have her block the person who's bullying her. Or suggest that she urge a friend who's being bullied to talk to the school counselor. 👍

Q & A Midyear check-in

Q My middle grader's classes are online this year. How can I help him kick off his second semester on a high note?

A Start by checking in with your child to find out how he felt about the first semester. What was easier to do remotely? What was more difficult? He might say it was convenient to work in his own space all day, but hard to stay focused during online classes.

Then, consider what you hear from teachers or see on report cards. You could also email teachers to ask how your tween is doing. Is he giving his best effort? Does he participate in class?

Finally, ask teachers for advice in areas where your child could improve. If he sometimes has missing assignments, a teacher might suggest he create alerts to check his student portal daily. To boost concentration during class, he could set up his laptop so he can work standing up. 👍



Parent to Parent Reading aloud to middle schoolers

During a library story hour for my kindergartner, my tween whispered that she missed having me read to her. So I told her to go pick out a novel and we would have our own story time at home!

Kelly chose *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. After I read aloud, we had an interesting discussion about issues the book presented, like individuality and freedom. And my daughter

learned how to pronounce a few new words from listening to me read.

Now Kelly and I have regular story times after her little sister goes to bed. We take turns picking the book. When it's my turn, I ask the librarian for books my daughter might learn from, perhaps one set in another country or one that's slightly above her grade level. We're on our fourth novel now, and she'll often ask for "just one more chapter." 👍



Math+Science Connection

Intermediate Edition

Building Understanding and Excitement for Children

February 2021

Middle Country School District

Title I - Parental Involvement



INFO BITS

Spatial reasoning

Don't throw away that cereal box! Your child can use it to build spatial reasoning, which includes visualizing shapes and how they fit together. Let him cut an empty box into separate panels, mix up the pieces, and put it back together with tape. *Idea:* Suggest that he build his own boxes using construction paper.



Science in the news

Encourage your youngster to see the science going on around us every day. Together, look through newspapers, magazines, or news websites, and point out articles about topics like extreme weather, new medicines, or robots. She could save interesting articles and keep them in a binder. They just may provide inspiration for a future career!

Book picks

📖 *Can You Count to a Googol?* (Robert E. Wells) illustrates big numbers like millions and billions and teaches children that numbers go on forever.

📖 *Mistakes That Worked: 40 Familiar Inventions & How They Came to Be* (Charlotte Foltz Jones) reveals the accidental beginnings of x-rays, Silly Putty, chocolate chip cookies, and more.

Just for fun

Q: How do you make time fly?

A: Throw a clock out the window.



Divide and conquer

These are the years when your child tackles division. Use the following ideas to help her become as comfortable with dividing as she is with adding and subtracting.

Play games

Add and divide. On your turn, roll six dice at once, and add the numbers in your head. Then, roll one die, and divide your total by that number. *Example:* Roll 3, 1, 5, 3, 2, and 4 for a total of 18. Roll a 3, and score 6 ($18 \div 3 = 6$). After five rounds, the player with the low score wins.

Cut in half. Remove the face cards from a deck of cards. Turn over two cards at a time to make a 2-digit number, and divide by 2. *Example:* Draw a 7 and a 1, make 71, and your score is 35.5, because $71 \div 2 = 35.5$. Play until no cards are left. High score wins. *Variation:* For a bigger challenge, divide by 3, 4, or 5 instead of 2.



Use in real life

Figure out quantities. Let your youngster divvy up snacks for family members. If there are 20 pretzels and 4 people, for instance, each person would get 5 pretzels ($20 \div 4 = 5$).

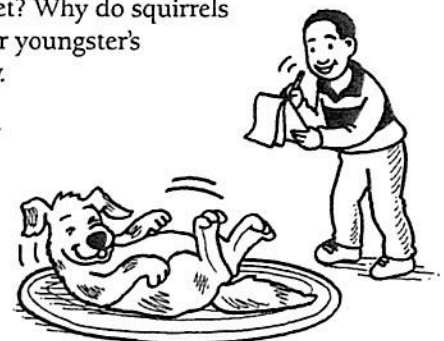
Calculate tips. Ask her to figure out restaurant or delivery tips. For 15 percent, she can divide the check (say, \$25) by 10 (\$2.50), divide that number by 2 (\$1.25), and add those numbers together ($\$2.50 + \$1.25 = \$3.75$ tip). For 20 percent, have her divide the tab by 10 and double that number ($\$25 \div 10 = \2.50 ; $\$2.50 \times 2 = \5 tip). 📦

Study animal behavior

Why do dogs roll around on the carpet? Why do squirrels stick their tails straight up? Harness your youngster's curiosity about animals with this activity.

Observe. Encourage your child to watch an animal closely and take notes on its movements and sounds. Then, he could write explanations for what the behaviors might mean. ("I think the dog is trying to scratch her back.")

Research. Together, read library books or websites to check his ideas. He may discover that dogs roll around to scratch or to mark a spot with their scent. And squirrels use their tails to balance. 📦

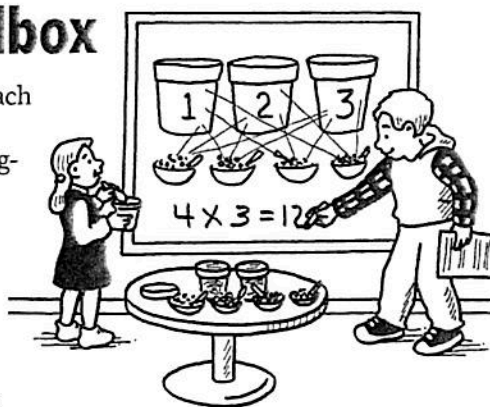


A word problem toolbox

Good problem solvers know how to approach word problems in different ways. Share these sample problems and strategies for your youngster to try.

Problem: A shop sells 3 flavors of ice cream and 4 kinds of toppings. If you could order 1 flavor and 1 topping, how many different combinations are there in all?

Strategy: Draw a picture. Your child could sketch 3 tubs of ice cream and 4 bowls of toppings. Then, he can draw lines to connect



each flavor to each topping. He'll see that each of the 3 flavors has 4 possible toppings (3 flavors \times 4 toppings = 12 combinations).

Problem: There are 17 animals on a farm with only horses and cows. There are 9 more horses than cows. How many cows are there?

Strategy: Work backward. Encourage your youngster to start by reading the question at the end of the problem. He'll know right away

what piece of information he is looking for (the number of cows). Next, he should reread the entire problem. Finally, he could use trial and error, plugging in various numbers to see which ones have a difference of 9 and a sum of 17. (Answer: 13 horses and 4 cows, because $13 + 4 = 17$ and $13 - 4 = 9$.)

SCIENCE LAB

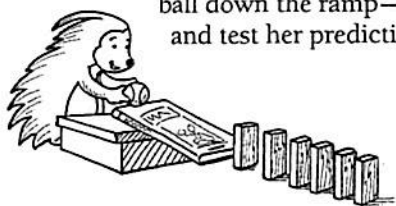


It's a chain reaction

With this experiment, your youngster will discover how energy transfers when objects collide during a chain reaction.

You'll need: shoebox, hardback book, rectangular building blocks, tennis ball

Here's how: Have your child place a shoebox in the center of a table and prop a book against it to make a ramp. Then, help her line up a row of same-size blocks on end, each about 1 inch apart, from the bottom of the ramp to the edge of the table. Ask her to predict what will happen when she rolls the ball down the ramp—and test her prediction.



What happens? The ball knocks down the first block. That block knocks over the next one, and so on, until the last block falls off the table.

Why? A chain reaction occurs when the ball transfers its energy to the first block. That block transfers energy to the next, and the energy transfer continues down the line.

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MATH CORNER

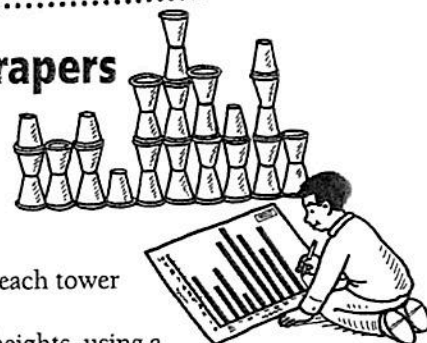
Graphing skyscrapers

If your youngster were to graph the actual heights of skyscrapers, he'd need a lot of paper! Unless, of course, he drew a *scaled* bar graph. Here's how.

Suggest that your child stack plastic cups into towers of different heights. Have him give each tower a name and measure and record its height.

Now your youngster can graph the towers' heights, using a scale so his graph will fit on paper (say, 1 cm on paper = 10 cm on towers). He could write numbers of centimeters up the left side and the towers' names along the bottom. He should also include his key: 1 cm = 10 cm.

Then, let your child draw a bar to show how tall each tower is. If his "Super Spire" tower is 72 cm tall, he would color in a bar 7.2 cm high. That's 1 cm on paper for every 10 cm of the actual tower ($72 \div 10 = 7.2$ cm).



PARENT TO PARENT

I ♥ math

"When will I ever use this math?" I had to smile when my daughter Emily asked me that question the other day—I used to ask my mother the same thing when I was her age! So I gave her the same idea my mother gave me. I had her write "I love math because" at the top of a sheet of paper and post it on the fridge for everyone to add to.

Emily was surprised when, after about a week, the page was almost full. She had listed things like "I can figure out how much snow we got by

measuring it with a ruler" and "Multiplication helped me make a double batch of cookies." I added, "I save money by comparing prices on groceries." And Emily helped her little brother write, "I can count my stuffed animals."

Now when Emily asks how she'll use a particular type of math, like fractions or decimals, I encourage her to pay attention to her daily routines and see if she can find a real-life example. More often than not, she's able to add to her list.



Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

February 2021

Middle Country School District

Title I - Parental Involvement

Book Picks

■ **Maker Lab: 28 Super Cool Projects** (Jack Challoner)

Get your STEM on with this book of science and engineering projects. Using things found around the house, your child can create a DNA model, make monster marshmallows, build a soap-powered boat, and much more. (Also available in Spanish.)



■ **Coo** (Kaela Noel)
A unique 10-year-old girl named Coo was raised by pigeons, and a rooftop is the only home she's ever known. But now she must enter the human world to get help for her flock. Follow along as Coo learns about friendship and family in this heartwarming tale.

■ **Noah Webster: Weaver of Words** (Pegi Deitz Shea)

Noah Webster is most famous for his dictionary, but in this biography, readers will discover other ways he shaped our language. He wrote books teaching children to read and spell, and he influenced American English—changing British spellings like *colour* and *traveler* to *color* and *traveler*.

■ **Poptropica: Mystery of the Map** (Jack Chabert)

Three friends take a ride in a hot-air balloon that crashes on a mystery island, and their adventure begins! Welcome to Poptropica, filled with Vikings, extinct animals, and other surprising discoveries. The first book in the Poptropica graphic novel series.



What's it about?

Students who think about what they're reading tend to understand and remember the material. Encourage your youngster to put on his thinking cap when he reads with these tips.



Discuss

Talk with your child about books. For example, you could have him tell you why he thinks a book is interesting (the main character lives in Africa) or how it makes him feel (happy, curious). When he's finished reading, ask him if he would recommend the book to a friend. Why or why not? Discussing what he reads will help him understand the plot and characters better.

He'll learn to visualize when he reads, even if he doesn't draw every time.

Visualize

Picturing the plot or a concept in a book can strengthen your youngster's comprehension. He may want to sketch a scene or character from a chapter book. If he's reading a textbook, he might draw a plant or an atom and label its parts.

Summarize

Suggest that your child write in response to books. He can practice summarizing a plot by writing a book review to share with the whole family. He could even submit it to a magazine like *Stone Soup* (stonesoup.com) or an online bookstore. Or he can show how he feels about a book by writing a poem about it.

A shortcut to reading fun

What kind of book has many plots and dozens of characters? A short-story collection! Consider these reasons for your child to try this type of fiction:

- Action usually moves quickly in short stories. A fast-paced tale can motivate a reluctant or struggling reader.
- Some collections allow children to sample different authors. After your youngster reads one, visit the library for titles by the writers she liked best.
- A book with various topics is bound to have something for everyone. If your child doesn't like one story, she might enjoy another.



Memories of me

Inspire your youngster to enjoy writing nonfiction by focusing on a topic she's an expert on: herself! Here are suggestions to help her turn her memories into a memoir.

Narrow the focus. A memoir often zeroes in on one slice of the writer's life. For example, your child might write about the first thing she remembers clearly, such as making pierogies with Grandma when she was little. Or perhaps she wants to describe a turning point in her life, like becoming a big sister.



Choose a format. Memoirs can take different forms. If your youngster likes poetry, suggest that she write a series of poems. Or she could create a picture book memoir with text and drawings. Another idea is to tell her tale in graphic novel format.

Dig deeper. An interesting memoir goes beyond simply stating what happened. As your child writes about an event ("We went strawberry picking on a beautiful spring day"), remind her to weave in her thoughts and feelings ("I was surprised that the strawberries grew so close to the ground").

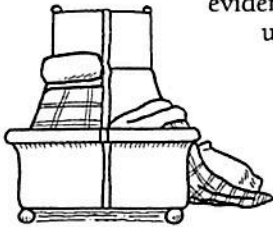


Let's debate

With this family debate, you'll actually encourage your child to argue with you. She'll get better at making logical arguments and backing them up with evidence—skills she needs for school assignments.

1. Pick a topic. You might debate about whether people should make their beds every day or about which way to put toilet paper into the holder.

2. Prepare notes. Have each person jot down her opinion ("Making your bed seems pointless") and supporting evidence ("You just unmake it every night"). Family members should also write ways to rebut—or argue



against—the opposite view. How will your youngster respond if someone says an unmade bed looks messy? *Example:* "Yes, but you can close your door so no one sees it."

3. Debate. Take turns making your cases and rebutting opposing arguments. Then, try to decide who made the most convincing case—whether you agree with that person or not.

Fun with Words

Fill in the part of speech

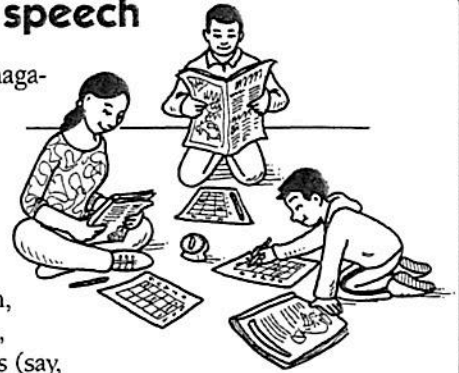
Dive into a newspaper or magazine, and race to find parts of speech in this game.

Materials: pencils, paper, newspaper or magazines, timer

Have each player draw a 3 x 5 grid on his paper and write a part of speech (noun, verb, adjective) above each column. Then, let your youngster pick five random letters (say, S, T, A, V, and G), and write one to the left of each row. Give each person a section of the newspaper or a magazine, and set a timer for three minutes.

Players race to fill their grids with words from the newspaper or magazine. For example, your child might fill his S row with *sunshine* (noun), *sell* (verb), and *superior* (adjective).

When time is up, check the grids, and cross out any words that are in the wrong column (use a dictionary if you're not sure). The player with the most words remaining wins.



Parent 2 Parent

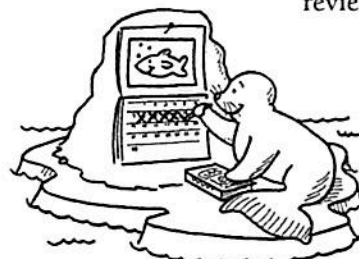
Manage reading assignments

My son Oliver likes to read, but only when he gets to choose the book. He has always struggled to finish assigned reading that he thinks is "boring."

I remembered having the same problem at his age. What helped was reading a few pages each day rather than leaving the whole assignment until the last minute. So I suggested that Oliver divide the number of assigned pages by the

number of days. He writes each day's page numbers on his calendar and crosses them off as he finishes.

Also, I encouraged Oliver to learn as much as possible about a book before he opens it. He enjoys online reviews, and reading goes more smoothly once he has an idea of what a story is about. To his surprise, he has even discovered a few new favorites along the way!



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Recipes for Success

Practical Activities to Help Your Child Succeed

FEBRUARY 2021

READING Book previewer

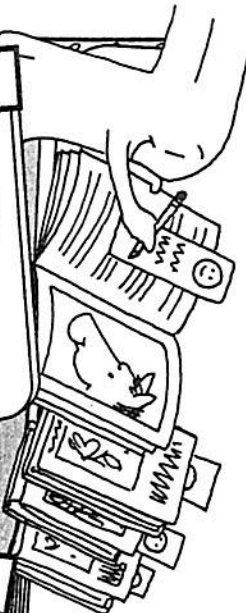
Help your youngster choose library books she'll love with this idea.
Ingredients: paper, books, pencil

Have your child put a blank strip of paper in each book that looks interesting. One by one, she can read the description on the inside jacket or back cover, leaf through any pictures, scan the table of contents (if there is one), and read the first few pages.

After previewing a book, your youngster could mark the paper with ☺, ☹, or 😐 and add notes. **Examples:** "The character is my age," "Realistic photos of horses," "I loved this author's last book." Then she can choose the best books to check out.



Variation: To preview e-books, help your child read samples online and type her comments in a file.



FITNESS

How many different body parts can you and your child use to keep a balloon from hitting the ground? Toss a balloon from hitting the ground? Toss a balloon, and take turns bumping it with elbows, knees, feet, or other body parts. If it hits the floor or you use the same body part twice in a row, you're out!



CULTURES

On February 12, celebrate Chinese New Year with your youngster by searching online for traditional greetings in Mandarin. He might learn to say "gong xi fa cai" (gong she fa tsai), which means "Wishing you great happiness and prosperity." And "xin huan hao" (shin hee-an how) translates to "Happy Chinese New Year."

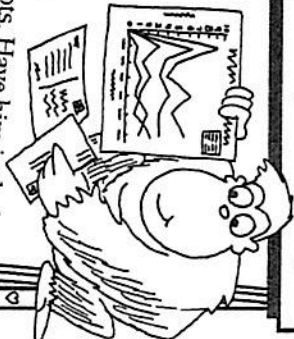


MATH You've got mail!

On which days of the week do you tend to get more mail? Your child can make a line graph to find out.

Ingredients: paper, colored pencils, mail

Up the left side of a sheet of paper, your youngster should draw a line with tick marks (0-10). Across the bottom, he could draw a line labeled with the days that comes (Monday-Saturday). Each week, let him choose a different-color pencil to plot data. He can count the mail each day, mark a dot where that day and the number of pieces intersect (say, Tuesday and 3), and connect the dots. After a few weeks, ask what trends he notices. ("We usually get the most mail on Mondays!")



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."

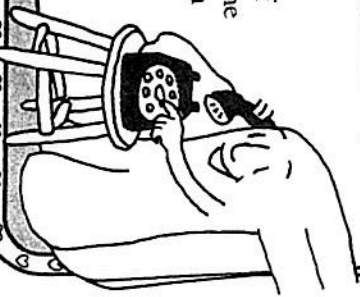
HISTORY Explore inventions

What would your youngster's life be like without modern conveniences? Inspire her to peek into history with this activity.

Ingredients: pencil, paper, books or internet access

For one day, have your child make a list of inventions she uses. She'll need to monitor how she gets things done. For instance, she might heat up food in a microwave, talk to her grandmother on a cell phone, and turn on a lamp to do homework.

To see how inventions have evolved, your youngster can look up older versions of those inventions in books or online. She could make an illustrated history of an invention by drawing all the versions (example: candlestick phone, rotary phone, touch-tone phone, cordless phone, flip phone, smartphone).



Recipes for Success

Practical Activities to Help Your Child Succeed

FEBRUARY 2021

Character Corner

COURAGE

Encourage your child to take small steps to gradually boost her courage. To practice for a chorus concert, she could sing in front of a parent or pet. Then, she might perform for an audience of several relatives.

FLEXIBILITY

When things don't go your youngster's way, he can ask himself, "What could I do instead?" This will teach him to be flexible. Say his older brother isn't available to hang out. Maybe he'll play a card game with you or work on his karate moves instead.

SELF-MOTIVATION

Suggest that your child look for ways to stay motivated while doing chores. If she doesn't feel like cleaning her room, perhaps she'll play "basketball" and toss clothes into the hamper. Or she could see how many items she can pick up in 1 minute.

SCIENCE

Gather items with different textures and temperatures (examples: nail file, damp napkin). Ask your youngster to close his eyes, and hand him one item at a time. What does his sense of touch tell him about each object? The nail file may be hard and rough. And the napkin might feel cold and soft.

SEQUENCING

Have your youngster choose five random household objects and line them up in order based on a "rule" he chooses. Maybe he'll arrange them from lightest to darkest, from tallest to shortest, or in alphabetical order. Can you figure out his sequencing rule?



FRACTIONS

Let your child cut construction paper into same-size squares, then draw lines to divide them into halves, thirds, and fourths. Have her label each part with the correct fraction and cut the squares apart. Now she can arrange the parts to make pictures (house, tree) and add the fractions in each to see how much it's "worth."



WRITING

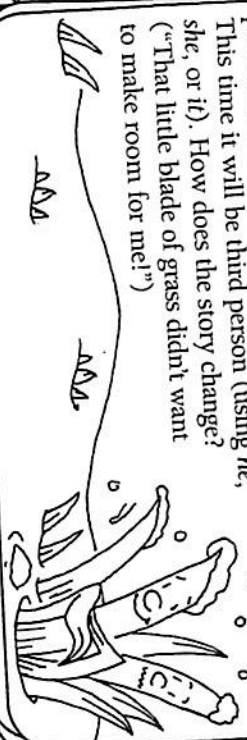
Tinker with point of view

What is life like for a blade of grass? A sidewalk? This creative writing activity helps your child pay attention to point of view, or who is telling a story.

Ingredients: paper, pencil

Ask your youngster to pick an object and write its "autobiography" from the first-person point of view (using I). For a blade of grass, he might write, "I first poked through the ground in spring 2020. I was bright green and basking in the sun. Now I'm covered with snow."

Next, have him write a "biography" from a different point of view—perhaps that of a dandelion. This time it will be third person (using he, she, or it). How does the story change? ("That little blade of grass didn't want to make room for me!")



GRAMMAR

Conjunctions like *and*, *or*, and *but* join shorter sentences together. Have each family member write two short sentences on two separate strips of paper.

Now see how many you can combine using a conjunction. ("It's cold outside, but peanut butter is sticky!") Can you create any sentences that make sense?



Congratulations!

We finished _____ activities together on this poster.

Signed (parent or adult family member)

Signed (child)