

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Building trust

Encourage your child to imagine that when he keeps promises or is honest, he's making deposits in a trust "bank." When he's dishonest, however, his "account" is "in the red"—meaning friends and family can't rely on him. If that happens, ask him to think about ways he could begin refilling his account, perhaps by writing a letter of apology.

### Learn sign language

When your tween considers languages to study, she might add American Sign Language to her list. Knowing how to sign would let her communicate with friends or others who are hearing-impaired. Plus, demand is rising for interpreters, so the skill could lead to a career. Her school may offer the course, or she can find one online.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The suicide rate for children ages 10–14 tripled between 2007 and 2017. Be aware of warning signs, which include changes in sleep habits, saying things like "I'm worthless" or "There's no point anymore," or withdrawing from family and friends. If you ever believe your tween is in immediate danger, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK.

### Worth quoting

"Be the best of whatever you are."  
Martin Luther King Jr.

### Just for fun

**Q:** What flies all day but never goes anywhere?

**A:** A flag.



## Great expectations

Setting expectations for your tween tells her, "I believe you can do this!" And that can motivate her to do her very best. Try these strategies to develop and share your expectations.

### Know where to start

Think of your middle schooler's goals as rungs on a ladder, with an ultimate goal (say, going to college) at the top. To set realistic expectations, start by considering where she is now (regularly getting Cs on papers, not keeping up with assigned reading). Then, let her know you expect her to climb up at least one rung next semester or month (earning Bs on papers, reading 30 minutes a day).

### Focus on effort

Telling your child that you expect her to do better in art class because she's "talented" can send the message that she can't do better in subjects in which you don't think she's "talented." Instead, try talking about how she raised her English grade last year after working hard. She'll develop a growth mindset—the belief that she can succeed in anything she puts effort into.

### Help her plan

When you set an expectation for your tween that she's struggling to meet, ask what might be holding her back. Say you expect her to complete and turn in all assignments, but she often runs out of time. Help her come up with ideas to get around these roadblocks. Maybe she could start assignments sooner and find strategies to avoid time-wasters. 👍



## Bring history to life

History is woven from individual stories—just like your child's! Help him expand his view of history with these activities.

### ■ Read a personal perspective.

Encourage your tween to read a first-person account from a time period he's studying. For the civil rights movement, he might choose an autobiography of Rosa Parks. How does her story give him a better understanding of that moment in history?

■ **Write your own history.** Challenge each family member to write a short summary titled "A History of Our Family's Year." Compare your versions, and talk about how each person's viewpoint and experiences determined what they wrote. Together, combine the accounts into a more complete picture of your family's year. 👍



# Keep the peace at home

Skipped chores, sibling squabbles ... most families have occasional conflicts. With everyone spending more time together these days, tempers are even likelier to flare up. Use these ideas to maintain the peace.

## Choose your words carefully.

Speaking from anger can cause small annoyances (someone not emptying the dishwasher) to spiral into bigger issues ("You never do anything you're supposed to do!"). Take a deep breath,



then focus on the problem rather than the person. It's also helpful to use "I" instead of "you" statements. ("I feel overwhelmed and angry when everyone doesn't do their part around the house" vs. "Why can't you keep track of your daily chores?") You'll lower tensions and open the door to finding a solution.

## Negotiate and compromise.

View conflicts as problems to be solved. If siblings argue over borrowing each other's things, for instance, encourage them to clearly explain why they're upset. ("You borrow

my baseball bat but won't share your equipment." "That's because I'm afraid you'll break my tennis racket.") Then, help them find a solution they both feel okay about. ("We'll share as long as we get permission first and take good care of each other's stuff.")

# Dial down fears about speaking up

Taking part in discussions helps your tween connect with her classwork and her classmates. Not everyone is comfortable speaking up, though, especially during video classes. Share these ways to make it easier.

## Do prep work

Your middle grader will feel more confident if she already has ideas in mind. Before class, encourage her to preview the material that will be covered. She can write down questions or comments so she'll be ready to jump in.



## Practice at home

Suggest setting up video chats with grandparents or friends for "dress rehearsals." Have her ask for specific feedback: Is she speaking loudly enough? What can they see in the background? Hearing from people she trusts that she's coming across great (or making adjustments based on their advice) will help her feel more comfortable during class.



# Q & A Independence days

**Q** I'm still doing things for my tween that I did when she was little. How can I shift more responsibility to her?

**A** By letting your daughter handle more things now, you'll give her a chance to be independent while she's still under your watchful eye. Think of it as "training wheels" for adulthood.

For example, she should be able to make simple meals and snacks, as well as handle personal chores like sorting her laundry, putting away clothes, changing her sheets, and cleaning her room.

Offer support, perhaps by stocking healthy snack options, showing her how full the washer and dryer should be, and demonstrating how to change a pillowcase more easily. But let her take responsibility for following through. If she can't find something in her messy room, she's the one who will need to straighten up.

Add more responsibilities as she shows she can handle them—odds are, she can!



# Parent to Parent Test-taking tips

My son Philip studied hard for tests and knew the material. But he still got nervous and didn't do as well as he could have. Since his cousin Gina was succeeding in high school, I suggested that he talk to her.

First, Gina sent Philip a link to a deep-breathing exercise she uses when she's nervous before a test. At first, he felt silly doing it, but he had to admit that it helped him feel less stressed.

His cousin also recommended glancing

quickly through the whole test first, so Philip would know how fast to work. Lately my son has been timing himself doing practice tests to get a feel for the right pace.

Finally, when teachers allow scrap paper, Philip uses Gina's strategy of jotting down formulas as soon as tests are handed out so he'll have a reference.

Philip's test grades have been trending up lately, and he doesn't seem quite as nervous on test days.



**OUR PURPOSE**

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# Math+Science Connection

Intermediate Edition

Building Understanding and Excitement for Children

January 2021

Middle Country School District

Title I - Parental Involvement



## INFO BITS

### My favorite number

Suggest that your child survey family members about their favorite numbers (1–10) and see how her data compares to this fun fact: 7 is the most common favorite number. She can make a picture graph or bar



graph to show the results and share them with everyone. Was 7 the most popular number?

### Center of mass

Have your youngster sit on a chair with his feet together, flat on the floor. Place your thumb on his forehead—can he stand up without pushing against your thumb? His center of mass (the point at which his weight is most concentrated) is over the seat. To stand, he must lean forward to shift his center of mass.

### Book picks

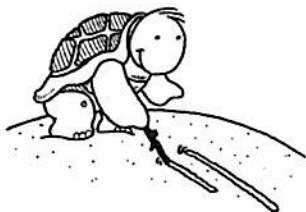
Your child will enjoy the lift-the-flap fun of *Mesmerizing Math* (Jonathan Litton) with creative examples of decimals, prime numbers, and shapes.

Discover how wildlife survives harsh climates and freezing temperatures in *Winter Bees & Other Poems of the Cold* (Joyce Sidman).

### Just for fun

**Q:** How can you make a line longer without touching it?

**A:** Draw a shorter line next to it. Now the first one is longer.



## Fractions make my day

If your youngster reads for 2 hours, that's a fraction of his day ( $\frac{2}{24}$ , or  $\frac{1}{12}$ ) well spent! Here's how to weave fractions into his whole day.

### Reading time

Encourage your child to create a fraction bookmark. He can draw lines to divide a strip of cardboard into equal sections, one for each chapter in a book he plans to read. When he finishes a chapter, he gets to color one section of the bookmark before sticking it into his book. Can he tell you what fraction of the book he has read?



### Snack time

Make fruit salad with your youngster. Before eating, have him count how many pieces of each type of fruit are in his bowl. *Example:* 7 grapes, 5 mandarin orange segments, 3 banana slices, 2 apple chunks. Now he could add to find the total number of pieces ( $7 + 5 + 3 + 2 = 17$ ) and say what fraction of his serving each fruit makes up (grapes =  $\frac{7}{17}$ , oranges =  $\frac{5}{17}$ ).

### Game time

Invite fractions to family game night. Play Scrabble, assigning fractional values to letters. Ten-point letters like Z and Q could be worth more (maybe  $2\frac{1}{2}$  points) and 1-point letters like A and S worth less (perhaps  $\frac{1}{2}$  point). Your child will add fractions to calculate scores. Or play bingo with fractions instead of numbers. Equivalent fractions count—so if  $\frac{4}{5}$  is called, a player could put a chip on  $\frac{8}{10}$ .

## What's in an ecosystem?

Let your child take an up-close look at an ecosystem—a community of living and nonliving things—with this activity.

In your backyard or at a park, help your youngster spread a blanket on the ground. She can lie down and examine the ground through a magnifying glass. Encourage her to draw and label what she observes, perhaps, rocks, grass, plants, soil, and insects.

Then, suggest that she think about how everything is related (insects eat plants, plants grow in soil). She could draw arrows from the insect to the plant and from the plant to the soil.




# Hands-on solid shapes

Help your youngster grasp 3-D, or solid shapes, and find real-life examples with this idea.

**1. Collect.** Have your child label a separate container for each of these 3-D geometric shapes: rectangular prism, cylinder, cone, cube. Each of you can choose a container and gather household objects in that 3-D shape. She might find a tissue box (rectangular prism), an oatmeal canister (cylinder), a



paperweight that's cone-shaped, and a die (cube).


**2. Make.** Encourage your youngster to build solid shapes out of 2-D shapes. She can look at a solid shape (perhaps a can of beans that's a cylinder), and think about which 2-D shapes it includes (1 rectangle, 2 circles). Then, she could cut the flat shapes from paper and cardboard and use duct tape to make a cylinder. She'll learn which 2-D shapes make up each 3-D one. 

## Q & A Explain your math thinking

**Q:** On math assignments, my son has to explain how he gets the answers. He always says, "Because I know." Why does he need to explain?

**A:** Tell your son that his teacher wants to know what's going on inside his head when he does math! Reading his explanations tells the teacher whether your child understands the steps involved in getting the answer. Plus, explaining math thinking will often lead your youngster to correct his mistakes.



Ask your son to pretend you don't know anything about math and he needs to teach you to solve the problem. His explanation might go something like this: "10 + 12 = 22 because 10 + 10 = 20, 12 is 2 more than 10, and 20 + 2 = 22." Then, encourage him to write down what he said. 



## MATH CORNER


### Parentheses first

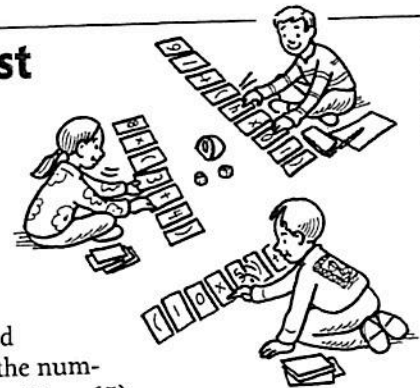
Play this game to help your child solve equations with parentheses.

**Materials:** index cards, pencils, paper, 2 dice, timer

Have each person make a set of index cards with the numbers 0-9, signs for the four operations (+, -, ×, ÷), and opening and closing parentheses. Roll the dice, and use the numbers rolled to create a two-digit number (say, 56 or 65).

Set a timer for 5 minutes. Each person arranges her cards to form equations equaling that number and lists the equations on her paper. Every equation must include parentheses and at least two different signs (remind your youngster that problems in parentheses are solved first). For 56, your child might make "8 × (3 + 4)" and "(10 × 5) + 6."

When time's up, trade papers, and check each other's math. Get the most correct equations to win the round and roll the dice for the next round. 



## SCIENCE LAB

### A frosty experiment


Your youngster can make frost with this indoor experiment that lets him explore the science of condensation.

**You'll need:** two metal bowls or empty soup cans (rinsed, labels removed), ice, water, measuring cup, salt, timer

**Here's how:** Have your child fill each bowl with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cold water and 6 ice cubes. He should add  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup salt to one bowl and stir. Encourage him to observe the

outside of the bowls. What does he notice after 5 minutes? 10 minutes?

**What happens?** Water droplets collect on the bowl containing only water and ice. Frost forms on the bowl with ice and salt water.

**Why?** Salt makes ice melt faster and lowers water temperature, so the bowl containing salt is colder than the bowl with just water and ice. Water from the air formed condensation on the outside of both bowls, and on the colder bowl, the condensation froze—now it's frost! 



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# Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

January 2021

Middle Country School District

Title I - Parental Involvement

## Book Picks

### ■ *Voyage of the Dogs* (Greg van Eekhout)

Lopside, Champion, Bug, and Daisy are barkonauts—dog astronauts. When their human crew abandons their spaceship, the pack must work together to figure out how to get back to Earth. Each dog brings a special strength and talent to the mission in this sci-fi adventure.



### ■ *Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook* (Anne Mazer and Ellen Potter)

This nonfiction guide is chock-full of tips and stories to inspire young writers. Written in a friendly question-and-answer format, the book includes advice about writing “ugly” first drafts, bringing characters to life, creating suspense, and keeping a journal.

### ■ *Cosmic Commandos* (Christopher Eliopoulos)

This exciting graphic novel tells the tale of identical twins Jeremy and Justin. When Jeremy finds a charm in a cereal box, his favorite video game comes to life! The twins may look alike, but they are total opposites, and they have to join forces to win the game.



### ■ *Smart About the Fifty States: A Class Report* (Jon Buller and others)

Discover facts about every state in the USA, from Alabama to Wyoming. Your child will learn state nicknames, capitals, historical facts, and much more. Each state's section contains an illustrated map that highlights important places. What will your child learn about your state?



## Vocabulary games

A rich vocabulary can help your youngster get her point across during a conversation or find the right word when she's writing. Strengthen her word power with these fun games.

### Dictionary charades

Take turns flipping to a random page in the dictionary and choosing one word to act out. If your child picks *mountainous*, for example, she might pretend to climb mountains. The first family member to identify the word gets to act out the next one.

### Definition bingo

Together, choose 25 vocabulary words from a dictionary or your youngster's textbooks, write each definition on a separate slip of paper, and put the slips in a bowl. Each player draws a bingo board and writes the words randomly in the squares. Now a caller reads the definitions, and players put a penny on the



matching word. Cover five in a row to call “Bingo!” *Tip:* Have the winner read out the words and check the definitions.

### Synonym sense

Each person secretly chooses a theme, such as winter, for the other players to figure out. Players jot down five words that fit their themes. Then, they each get one minute to browse through a thesaurus (or *thesaurus.com*) for synonyms. If your child's list includes *cold*, she might add *brisk* and *shivering*. Take turns reading the synonyms from your lists and trying to name each other's themes. ■

## Think outside the book

The world is full of things to read. Share some with your youngster each day, and watch him become a well-rounded reader. Here are a few suggestions:

- Turn your refrigerator door into a reading center. Encourage everyone to post reviews of books, movies, restaurants, and gadgets. You could also hang up comics or fortune cookie slips.
- Email each other. You might send schedule reminders, news about your day, poems, or inspirational quotes.
- Share cards and letters that come in the mail. Use takeout menus and catalogs for reading practice, too—ask your child to find coupons or to tell you about foods or products that interest him. ■



## “Just right” books

Most of the time, reading shouldn't be too easy or too hard for your youngster. Ask him to read aloud to you, and then help him find books he'll enjoy—and that stretch his reading ability—with these tips.

**Too easy?** Does your youngster read the book quickly? Can he recognize each word and easily understand the plot? The book may be too easy. Although it's perfectly fine for him to read books like that, more challenging material will offer new vocabulary and more complicated plots. And that will prepare him for the increasingly complex texts he'll read in school.



**Too hard?** Is your child's reading slow and choppy? Does he stumble over several unfamiliar words per page? Is he confused about what's happening? These are clues that a book is too difficult for now. Offer to read it aloud to him or read it together. *Note:* If he struggles with assigned reading, talk to his

teacher to see if he needs extra help.

**Just right!** Can your child read most of the text smoothly? Did he find a few new words? Can he understand what's going on with a little thought? His book sounds like a good fit—it provides enough of a challenge without frustrating him. ■

## Fun with Words Name that phrase!

Here's a word game that will stretch your child's thinking skills. All you need are pencil and paper.

First, show your youngster these examples of how arranging words in a particular way can turn a phrase into a brainteaser.

**million** = one in a million

**eiln pu** = line up in alphabetical order

**MIND matter** = mind over matter

Once your child has the idea, take turns making up brainteasers for one another to work out. *Hint:* To find phrases to use, suggest that she look for them when she's reading or listen for them during conversations. It helps to choose phrases that use prepositions, such as *in*, *on*, *over*, and *under*.

She can also find examples online by searching “frame games.” Or she could look in library books like *The Big Book of Frame Games* by Terry Stickels. ■

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## Q&A In my own words

**Q** My daughter knows she can't copy from sources when she's writing reports, but she says it's hard to think of new ways to say the same thing. Is there a way I can help her with this?

**A** Your daughter is right—copying others' words is known as plagiarism. Not only is it dishonest, but it can cause her to lose credit for an assignment. Help her practice paraphrasing, or putting material in her own words, with this activity.

Ask her to read a short item, such as board game rules or a recipe. Put it away, and have her rewrite it to be as different as possible from the original. Instead of “Checkers is a two-player strategy game,” she might write, “You need two people to play checkers. Use strategic thinking to win.”

Encourage her to use the same method when she does research for a school report. She can read a page or section, then look away and write about it in her own words. She should check her writing against the source to make sure it's not too similar. ■



## Tips for writing dialogue

It's fun to make characters “talk”! Inspire your youngster to write his own stories with dialogue for each character. He'll learn to develop a plot and show how his characters respond to various situations.

To start, suggest that he think about who the character is, what the situation is, and what his tone would be. For instance, a child would speak more formally to a teacher (“Good morning, how are you?”) than to a friend (“Hey, what's up?”).

When your youngster finishes his story, he should read it aloud. Does the dialogue sound realistic—like something a person would actually say? He may realize he should change “You cannot go in there” to “You can't go in there,” since people often use contractions when they speak.

**Tip:** Paying attention to dialogue in books, plays, and movies is a great way for your youngster to recognize how different characters speak. ■



JANUARY 2021



# Recipes for Success

Practical Activities to Help Your Child Succeed

## READING A tree of reading

From books to cereal boxes to board game instructions, the world is full of things to read. Your child can create this tree to keep track of his reading—and motivate himself to read more.

**Ingredients:** scissors, construction paper, crayon, zipper bag, tape, glue

Have your youngster draw and cut out a dozen leaves and a bare tree from construction paper. On each leaf, he can write something different to read (choose-your-own adventure story, comic book, poem, billboard, biography, shampoo bottle).

Let your child hang up his tree and keep the leaves in a bag taped beside it. After he reads each item, he glues that leaf to his tree. When he finishes all 12, he can make more leaves with new ideas for reading. By spring, his tree will be nice and full!

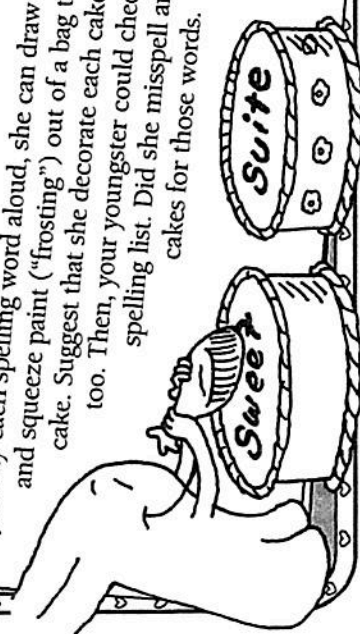


## SPELLING Decorate word cakes

Finger-paint "frosting" makes it fun to learn spelling or word-study words!

**Ingredients:** finger paint, plastic zipper bags, scissors, spelling words, paper tightly, and snip off the bottom corners.

As you say each spelling word aloud, she can draw a circle ("cake") on paper and squeeze paint ("frosting") out of a bag to write the word on the cake. Suggest that she decorate each cake with flowers or swirls, too. Then, your youngster could check the cakes against her spelling list. Did she misspell any? Let her make new cakes for those words.



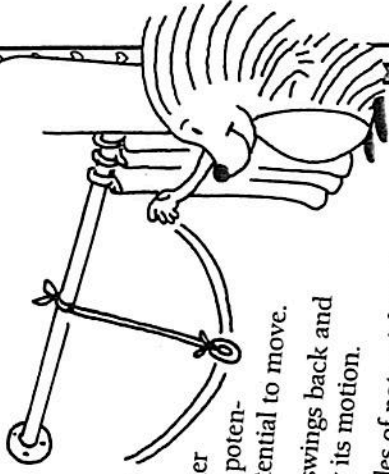
## SCIENCE In full swing

Making a pendulum will show your youngster the difference between potential energy and kinetic energy.

**Ingredients:** string, metal washer, shower rod

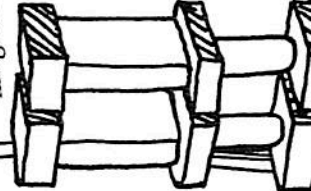
Let your child tie one end of the string to the washer and the other end of the string to the shower rod. Keeping the string taut, have him lift the washer until it's level with the shower rod. Now it has potential energy; meaning its position gives it the potential to move. Then, your youngster can let go—the washer swings back and forth. It has kinetic energy, or energy created by its motion.

**Idea:** Encourage your child to spot more examples of potential and kinetic energy. He might see a cat poised to pounce (potential), then watch her soar through the air (kinetic).



## SYMMETRY

Together, build a block tower that's symmetrical (each half is a mirror image of the other). Your youngster places one block to start his half of a building. Then, you place a block to begin the other half—symmetrical to his. Take turns adding blocks for the other person to mirror.



## CONCENTRATION

Ask your youngster to line up three identical cups upside down on a table and put a small toy underneath one. While she watches, quickly move the cups around so they trade places several times. When you stop, can she tell you which cup the toy is under?



# ★ Recipes for Success

Practical Activities to Help Your Child Succeed

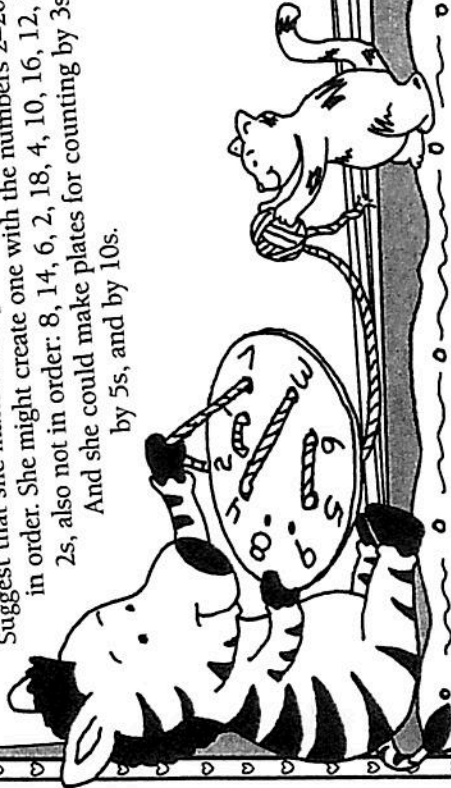
## MATH Plate it up!

Two, four, six, eight ... practice counting with a plate!

**Ingredients:** paper plates, pencil, hole punch, yarn

Have your child write the numbers 1–10 randomly around the edge of one plate. **Example:** 1, 7, 3, 6, 5, 9, 8, 10, 4, 2. Next, she should punch a hole by each number. She can lace the yarn through the holes to connect the numbers in the correct order.

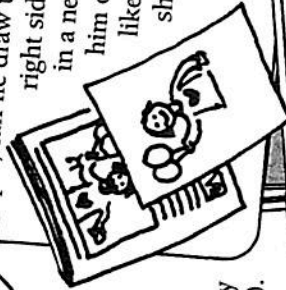
Suggest that she make more plates to lace other numbers in order. She might create one with the numbers 2–20 by 2s, also not in order: 8, 14, 6, 2, 18, 4, 10, 16, 12, 20. And she could make plates for counting by 3s, by 5s, and by 10s.



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## ART

Let your child choose a simple picture from a book or magazine and turn it so he's viewing it upside down. Now, on a blank sheet of paper, can he draw the same image right side up? Seeing it in a new way will help him observe details like lines and shading.



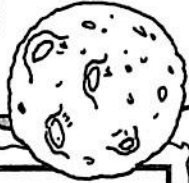
## PUNCTUATION

On a large sheet of paper, write a sentence without punctuation (Let's go to the playground said Charlie). Challenge your youngster to place dry pasta (macaroni, penne, wagon wheel) where punctuation marks belong. ("Let's go to the playground," said Charlie.)



## ASTRONOMY

Help your youngster model how asteroids and meteorites form craters on the moon. She can cover the bottom of a baking dish with a thin layer of flour and set the dish in a sink. What happens when she drops a small rock onto the flour and picks it up carefully? There's a crater!



# Character Corner

## EFFORT

Ask your youngster to rate how much effort he put in today at school, using a scale of 1 (for little effort) to 5 (for best effort). Let him explain his rating to you. How can he keep it up—or do better—tomorrow?

## TOLERANCE

Challenge your child to find things she has in common with people who seem different from her. Maybe she and Grandma both like '70s music even though they're far apart in age. Or perhaps a classmate from another country has three little brothers, too.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Explain to your child that privileges (playing on the computer) come with responsibilities (visiting safe websites). Ask him to divide a sheet of paper into two columns ("Privileges" and "Responsibilities") and list more examples.



## READING

Encourage your child to read in a place that matches her book—it'll help her connect with the story. She could build a fort and use a flashlight to read a book about camping. Or she might read a winter-themed story while she sits by a window and watches snow fall.



## Congratulations!

We finished \_\_\_\_\_ activities together on this poster.

Signed (parent or adult family member)

Signed (child)