

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

The power of zero

Help your child understand the importance of turning in every assignment. Have her add up several of her grades ($97 + 89 + 93 = 279$) and divide by the number of grades to get her average ($279 \div 3 = 93$). Then, ask her to change the last grade to zero and average again—suddenly, the 93 becomes a 62.

Great advice!

Want to raise the odds that your middle schooler will actually follow your advice? Get his input. Instead of saying, "Setting your alarm 10 minutes earlier will keep you from scrambling to get ready every morning," try, "I've been running late in the mornings, too. What ideas do you think could help us?"

DID YOU KNOW?

Just a few minutes of physical activity can immediately improve your middle grader's concentration. Remind her to use her distance-learning or study breaks to move around. She could write quick ideas on slips of paper ("Dance to a song," "Do 5 jumping jacks") and pick one to do between classes or subjects.

Worth quoting

"The mind that opens to a new idea never returns to its original size."

Albert Einstein

Just for fun

Q: What falls in winter but never gets hurt?

A: Snow!



Kindness makes a difference

Clue your middle schooler in on this formula for a happier, more successful life: When he is kind and sees kindness in others, he will feel better about himself and the world around him—and other people will view him more favorably, too. Try these ideas.

Be a detective

Challenge your tween to spot kind acts throughout the day and jot them down in a pocket notebook. He might notice someone stepping aside to let him pass on the sidewalk, for instance. How many kindnesses can he find in one day? Make it a point to call out his kind acts, too: "It was kind of you to offer your seat on the bus to that woman holding her baby."

Watch for opportunities

Suggest that your middle grader think of safe ways to assist people who are struggling or lonely. Maybe he'll make cards or bookmarks for nursing



home residents or have a virtual game night with younger cousins who miss seeing their friends.

Play bingo

Your child can create a bingo card to fill with kind acts (donate clothes you've outgrown, let someone go ahead of you in line, do a chore for a sibling). Make a copy for each family member, and cross off acts you complete. Who will get bingo (five in a row) first? Can everyone finish their cards? 🍷

Look on the bright side

Having a good attitude toward school can help your tween learn more. Here's how to nurture positive thinking.

■ **Use upbeat language.** Encourage your child to reframe negative remarks. "We get too much homework in math" becomes "All this practice means I'll remember the formulas." Let her hear you talk up school, too. ("Your art teacher gives really interesting assignments!")

■ **Act as a cheerleader.** Show your tween that you believe in her and expect her to do well. Regularly ask to see or hear work she's proud of, such as a poem she wrote in English or a solo she's working on in chorus. 🍷



Plan ahead for better essays

Like going for a hike, writing an essay requires advance planning. In both situations, your tween needs to know where she's headed and how she'll get there. Share these steps to map out a well-written paper.

1. Choose a destination. Suggest that your child list at least three ideas for her essay topic. Say she's asked to write a personal narrative about an obstacle she overcame. Possibilities might include moving to a new town or recovering from



a soccer injury. Then she can pick the one she believes will make the most compelling narrative.

2. Make a map. Your middle grader could draw a big soccer ball in the middle of her paper and write her essay title inside ("Getting Back in the Game"). Then, she can surround it with medium-sized balls for subtopics (her injury, physical therapy) and add small balls with supporting details (recovery milestones, teammates' support). Now she can refer to her map as she writes her essay. 👍



Q & A Screen addiction?

Q I think my son is addicted to screens. He only wants to play video games in his free time and can't seem to go a minute without checking his phone. What should I do?

A While "screen addiction" isn't an official diagnosis, excessive screen use can be connected to anxiety and depression.

Ask yourself whether your child's usage is so all-consuming that it's having a negative effect on him. Consult his pediatrician if you notice any of these red flags:



- He can't control his screen use or lies about it.
- He has lost interest in other activities.
- His screen time interferes with sleep, school, or relationships.
- Screens are his main source of happiness or comfort.

You can help your son cut back by setting limits for the whole family. That way, he's not watching others play on their phones when he can't use his. Finally, encourage him to fill downtime with screen-free activities he enjoys, perhaps running or drawing. 👍

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Kitchen chemistry

Holiday baking is a science—literally! Talk about these physical and chemical reactions while making treats with your middle grader.

What happens when you melt butter?

When energy (heat) is added to a solid, like butter, it causes the atoms to speed up—and the butter becomes a liquid. This is an example of a physical reaction. Together, observe what happens when melted butter cools again. It turns back into a solid because the atoms slow down.

What makes cakes rise?

Have your tween mix 1 tsp. baking soda with 1 tbsp. vinegar. He'll see bubbles, signaling a chemical reaction. In a cake recipe, baking soda reacts with acidic ingredients like vinegar, lemon juice, or buttermilk to release carbon dioxide, and the expanding gases make the cake rise. 👍



Parent to Parent

Peer pressure: Trust your instincts

My daughter Rosa went to the mall with friends when they were supposed to be at the park. Because she broke our pandemic-safety rule about no indoor socializing, I told her she had to stay home for two weeks.

When I asked Rosa why she went somewhere she wasn't supposed to, she said, "Because everyone else did." Then she admitted to feeling nervous and guilty inside the mall.

I encouraged her to think of feelings like those as "alarms"—when an alarm goes off, that's a sign to "wake up" and think for herself.

Next, we brainstormed responses she could have used like "My parents would ground me" or "My family is careful about indoor spaces."

My daughter wasn't happy to be grounded—but next time she's pressured to do something that sets off alarm bells, I hope she'll make a better choice. 👍



Math+Science Connection

Building Understanding and Excitement for Children

December 2020

Middle Country School District

Title I - Parental Involvement



INFO BITS

World records

World records offer a fun way for your child to compare numbers. Encourage him to look up records that interest him (the speed of the fastest animals, the length of Olympic-winning long jumps). Then,





help him set his own records by timing his speed for running around the block or measuring his jumps.

Family science fair

"Welcome, scientists!" Let your youngster host a science fair where you take turns conducting experiments. She might ask younger siblings to predict which objects will sink or float, then test the items in a sink while everyone watches. *Idea:* Hold a science fair with extended family via video chat.

Book picks

 Zookeepers use fractions as they hand-raise two tiny cubs in *Polar Bear Math: Learning About Fractions from Klondike and Snow* (Ann Whitehead Nagda and Cindy Bickel).

 With *Science You Can Eat: 20 Activities That Put Food Under the Microscope* (Stefan Gates), your child can make instant ice cream, edible slime, and more.

Just for fun



Q: Why isn't your nose 12 inches long?

A: Because then it would be a foot!

Explore number patterns

Find the next number in this pattern: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64. It's 128, because the "rule" is to double the number each time. Your child can recognize all kinds of patterns and develop her math thinking with these playful ideas.



Keep it going


Have your youngster cover a baking sheet with a thin layer of sugar. Write a simple number pattern (3, 5, 7, 9) in the sugar for her to continue. She'd write 11, 13, 15, and 17, because your rule is add 2. Next, let her smooth out the sugar to erase the numbers and begin a different pattern for you to extend.

Step it up

Think of a pattern rule with at least two steps (multiply by 3, add 1). Write numbers in the pattern on separate sticky notes (3, 10, 31, 94), number the backs to indicate the order (1, 2, 3, 4), and hide the notes around the room. Your child should search for them, arrange them in

order, and figure out the rule they follow. Now it's her turn to hide numbers in a two-step pattern for you.


Predict it

Show your youngster that patterns let her make predictions. Start a pattern with toy vehicles (car, car, truck, train, car, car, truck, train) or beads (red, blue, green, red, red, blue, green, red). Ask her what the 21st toy (car) or bead (red) in the pattern will be—and why. She can continue the pattern, using more objects (or drawing pictures) to check her predictions. 

Build a cantilever

A house of cards is quite an engineering feat—but it's not the only thing your youngster can construct with cards. Here's how to make a *cantilever*, a structure that's supported on just one side (like a balcony).

Let him lay down a card with one end lined up at the edge of a table. Ask him to place a card on top that extends slightly over the edge of the table and another that extends over the edge of the card below it. It's a cantilever! How many cards can he add before the cantilever falls?

Why this works: The weight of the overhanging cards is supported by the other cards pressing down on top of them. 



Money games

10 quarters + 25 nickels + 8 dimes + 16 pennies = 1 handful of fun (and \$4.71). Help your child make sense of dollars and cents with these activities.

Three in a row. This twist on tic-tac-toe lets your youngster practice adding coin values. Have him stack any combination of coins in each square of a tic-tac-toe board, and give each player a different color crayon.



Take turns removing any pile, counting the coins, and writing the total value in the square. *Example:* Pick up 1 quarter, 3 dimes, and 4 pennies, then write “59 cents.” The game ends when one person gets three in a row. Add up all the coins you’ve removed—the player with the most money wins.

Shopping relay. Place three store flyers or catalogs around the room. Each player gets a \$50 budget and lists three items to “buy” (shoes, shampoo, book). On “Go,” race to each catalog and “shop,” subtracting the price of each item from your budget. The winner is the first person to finish shopping, stay within budget—and get the math right! 📦

MATH CORNER

Geometry “Pictionary”

Illustrating math terms in pictures only—no words or symbols allowed!—can boost your youngster’s understanding of math concepts. Try this game.

● **Set up:** On separate index cards, ask your child to write math vocabulary words he’s learned in school this year. *Examples:* denominator, factor, multiple, trapezoid, parallelogram, pyramid, divide, area, perimeter. He should fold the cards in half and put them in a bowl. Divide players into two equal teams.



● **Play:** Teams take turns picking a card, setting a 2-minute timer, and having one teammate illustrate the word on a whiteboard or paper. The other players on his team try to name the term. Your youngster might sketch a fenced-in field for *perimeter*, and a sliced pie for *divide*.

● **Score:** Earn a point for each vocabulary word your team identifies correctly. 📦

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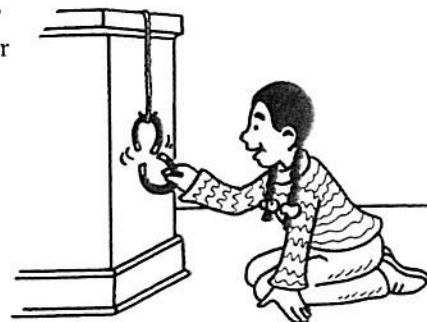
SCIENCE LAB

Magnetism: Opposites attract

An invisible force field? Sounds like science fiction—but your youngster can observe this very real physical property of magnets in this experiment.

You’ll need: tape, yarn, two magnets, table

Here’s how: Help your child tape one end of the yarn to one magnet and the other end to a tabletop, so that the magnet dangles off the table. Now have her hold the second magnet and move it toward the hanging one. She should move her magnet back and forth so each side, or *pole*, has a chance to attract the hanging magnet.



What happens? The hanging magnet moves toward the one your youngster holds. It turns around (or doesn’t) depending on which pole of her magnet is facing it.

Why? Every magnet has a north and south pole. Opposite poles attract. When two north or two south poles face each other, the poles repel each other—in this case, causing the hanging magnet to turn around. 📦

PARENT TO PARENT

Baking, the metric way

Our family has been baking a lot lately: bread, muffins, cookies, you name it! Recently, my daughter Caitlin found a recipe with standard and metric units. She wondered why 1 cup flour was 120 grams while 1 cup sugar was 200 grams—and frankly, so did I.

I bought an inexpensive food scale, and Caitlin measured the ingredients. She decided sugar must weigh more because it’s denser,

so we looked it up online, and she was right. And she realized something else: Using a scale makes measurements more precise, since it’s hard to eyeball whether you have a level cupful or spoonful.

Now she converts all our recipes to metric units and weighs the ingredients. Not only does she bake delicious cookies, she also gets an extra helping of math practice with the metric system every time we bake. 📦



Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

December 2020

Middle Country School District

Title I - Parental Involvement

Book Picks



■ *The Dragon with a Chocolate Heart* (Stephanie Burgis)

In this magical tale, Aventurine the dragon breaks her family's rules and sneaks away from her cave. When she's offered a sip of hot chocolate, the brave dragon is turned into a human girl. With no dragon powers left, she has to figure out how to survive as a human.



■ *Earth Verse: Haiku from the Ground Up* (Sally M. Walker)

Science and poetry come together in this beautiful book of haiku. Readers will learn about Earth, minerals, rocks, fossils, volcanoes, and more with haiku, illustrations, and a fact-filled section at the end.



■ *The Extraordinary Mark Twain (According to Susy)* (Barbara Kerley)
This biography of author Mark Twain is based on the journal entries of someone who knew him well: his 13-year-old daughter, Susy. The author weaves together Susy's original writings with information about the lives of both father and daughter.

■ *Comeback Catcher* (Jake Maddox)
Meet Eddie Jackson from the Jake Maddox Graphic Novels series. He's in a band and also plays baseball. But baseball becomes tricky for Eddie when he gets nervous every time he's up to bat. Find out how Eddie overcomes his fears. Includes a glossary with baseball terms. (Also available in Spanish.)



Winter reading traditions

Short days and chilly weather make reading a great indoor winter activity. Use these suggestions to encourage your child to snuggle up with good books.



Pajama party

On a weekend night, put pillows and sleeping bags in the living room and share a book of short stories. Pass the book around and take turns reading to each other by flashlight. Or use the cozy time for everyone to read their own books. *Tip:* Ask a librarian or your child's teacher for book recommendations based on your family's interests.

have each person try to recite the poem from memory. The family member who comes closest to the original chooses the next poem.

Comedy fest

Read jokes for an evening of laughter. Have each family member find a book of jokes or riddles from the library, browse through them, and mark favorites to share. Everyone can vote for the funniest jokes. *Idea:* Your youngster could write his own jokes and do a stand-up comedy set. 📖

Game night

Suggest that your child invent games that involve reading. For example, he might suggest a poetry contest. One person could pick a short poem from a book and give everyone five minutes to memorize it. Then, close the book and

Story ideas: Look here!

Does your family's junk drawer tell a tale? Is there a story behind a lost-and-found notice or a song on the radio? When your youngster has a creative writing assignment or writes just for fun, suggest that she find inspiration in one of these places.



- **The junk drawer.** Let her pick a few random items, such as an old key and a business card. Maybe she'll imagine that the key unlocks a secret room at the address on the card.
- **Online posts.** Show your child posts on neighborhood forums. She might write about a lost dog being reunited with his owner or a girl who starts a successful snow-shoveling business.
- **The radio.** Your youngster can use a line or a verse from a song to make up her own story. For instance, a song about traveling on a plane may prompt a tale of a trip to a desert island. 📖

A guide to taking notes

Being able to take notes quickly and accurately is a skill your child needs now. Plus, it'll come in handy in later grades as well as in college and on the job. Share these strategies for your youngster to become a first-rate note taker.

Before. Have your child prepare to take notes on new material by reading the previous day's notes. At the beginning of class, she should label her notes with the date and topic (12/11/20, American Revolution) so it's easier to put them in order for studying.



During. Suggest that your youngster use abbreviations and symbols for faster note taking. *Examples:* T for *the*, V for *every*, > for *more*. Point out that she should always write down dates, formulas, and definitions exactly as they're given. When the teacher says, "This is an important point," your child could highlight that section in her notes. Finally, she might leave extra lines so she has room to add comments or questions later.

After. Encourage your youngster to go over her notes and underline main points. If the notes are hard to read, it's a good idea to rewrite or type them. Copying them not only makes the notes more legible, it will help her remember the information better. ■

Parent ² Parent Editing out loud

My son Lucas used to rush through writing assignments and make a lot of careless mistakes. When I asked his teacher what to do, she suggested that we have Lucas edit his work by reading it aloud. She said hearing his words out loud would help him hear his mistakes.



We started by having Lucas read his writing to me. I pointed out what I liked about it and asked questions about parts I didn't quite understand. And Lucas noticed that he used some of the same words over and over and caught a couple of grammatical errors. Then, he used our feedback to edit his paper.

Now Lucas regularly reads his papers aloud to himself. He seems to be catching more mistakes—and he's getting better grades on his written assignments. ■



An occasion for reading

Turn gift giving into an opportunity for your child to read. Here are some ideas:

- Book reviews will help her choose novels as gifts for others. Your youngster can look at library book lists or newspaper reviews. Encourage her to check for words and phrases such as "a must-read" or "action-packed."
- Suggest that your child make a craft for someone. She might create finger puppets, a mosaic, or a bracelet. To find possibilities, she could look through craft books (*The Best Craft Book Ever* by Jane Bull) or check online (craftsforkids.com) and then read them as she follows the instructions.
- Young bakers can use cookbooks to prepare homemade treats like cookies and muffins. Let your child select recipes and write a grocery list. Then, remind her to carefully read recipes again before she starts baking. ■



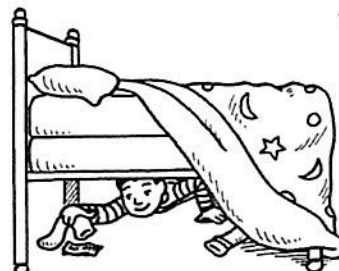
Fun with Words Read the clues, find the treasure

Treasure hunts are fun for all ages. And figuring out the clues will help your youngster learn to infer, or read between the lines.

First, hide a treasure (a new book, a small toy). Then, hide a set of clues that will lead your child to it. The first clue should give instructions for finding the second clue, which should lead to the third, and so on, until your youngster discovers the treasure.

Try to come up with clues that give hints—but make your youngster think. For example, if you want him to look under his bed, you might write, "Find the next clue in a place socks like to hide." Or get him to open an end-table drawer with "Look under the lamp and coasters."

Once your child tracks down the treasure, have him create a treasure hunt for you or a sibling. ■



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Recipes for Success

Practical Activities to Help Your Child Succeed

DECEMBER 2020

Character Corner

CURIOSITY

What colors are on a "One Way" sign? On separate strips of paper, have your child write questions about things you might see on the road. She could keep the questions in a zipper bag and choose ones to answer each time you're out.

PRIDE IN WORK

Let your youngster create a checklist for reviewing his schoolwork before he turns it in. His list might include "I followed the directions" and "I checked my spelling." He could decorate the list and keep it handy.

FORGIVENESS

Expressing feelings can help your child forgive others. Say her brother borrowed something without her permission. Ask her to explain to him why she's upset. ("That's my special stuffed animal, and I like to always know where it is.")

LISTENING

Have your child close his eyes and listen as you make three noises. You might open and close the refrigerator, bite an apple, and sounds can he recognize correctly? Increase the number of sounds for a bigger challenge.



SOCIAL STUDIES

Design a city

What fun! Your youngster can create an imaginary city—and learn about maps at the same time.

Ingredients: map, crayons, paper

Together, look at a map of your area. Ask your child to locate places like the airport, park, or library.

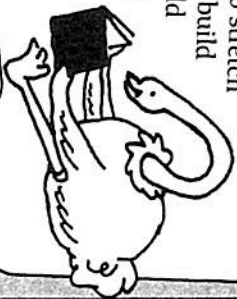
Next, suggest that he draw a map of an imaginary city named after himself. For example, Michael could design Michaelville. What will he include? A baseball stadium? A subway system? A post office?

Now he can compare the two maps. Ask what they have in common (museum, school) and what's different (maybe his map shows a toy store and the real one has a town hall).



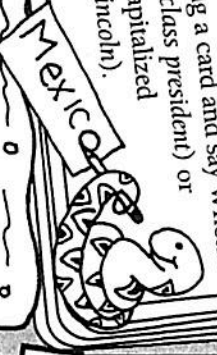
FITNESS

Challenge your child to find ways to fit in more exercise throughout the day. To work on flexibility, she might sit with her legs in a wide V to stretch while reading. To build strength, she could squat by bending at the knees with her back against a wall when she watches TV.



CAPITALIZATION

Ask your youngster to write uncapitalized nouns on 12 separate indexed cards—half common nouns (horse, cards—half proper nouns (Mexico, Mr. Smith). Family members take turns drawing a card and say whether it's correct (class president) or should be capitalized (President Lincoln).



DIVISION

To practice division facts, have your youngster cut ice cream scoops and cones out of construction paper. He can write division problems (28 ÷ 4) on the scoops and the answers (7) on the cones. To study, he puts the ice cream on the cones—matching problems with their answers.



Congratulations!

We finished _____ activities together on this poster.

Signed (parent or adult family member)

Signed (child)

★ Recipes for Success

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READING You're hired!

Inventing an imaginary career for a storybook character will encourage your child to pay attention to details as she reads.

Ingredients: book, paper, pencil

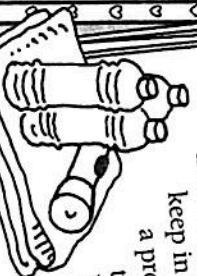
What job would your youngster's favorite character be good at? Read a book together, and encourage her to consider the character's interests, personality traits, and skills. For instance, Nancy from *Fancy Nancy* (Jane O'Connor) may want to be a fashion designer or a clothing store owner since she loves dressing up, is enthusiastic about style, and knows how to put outfits together.

Now have your child use details from the book to write a job listing. ("Must have experience selecting accessories to match clothing.")



SAFETY

Let your child create a cold weather kit to help your family stay safe and warm on road trips. She could gather extra gloves, socks, hats, and blankets, along with a flashlight and jumper cables. Have her pack them in a box or plastic bin to keep in the car in case of a problem like a flat tire or a dead battery.



PHONICS

This activity helps your youngster hear sounds in words. Ask him to secretly pick a consonant combination (pl) and say a sentence with as many words as possible that contain it. ("Please pass the plate of plums.") Can you name the combination? Now pick a different one, and make up a sentence for him.

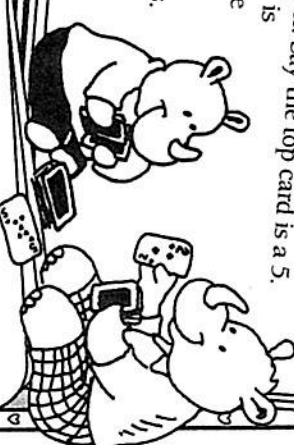


MATH Prime time

Your youngster will practice identifying prime numbers—those that can only be divided by 1 and themselves—with this game.

Ingredients: deck of playing cards (ace = 1, jack = 11, queen = 12, king = 13)

Deal seven cards to each player, stack the rest facedown, and turn over the top two cards must add up to make a prime number. She might lay down a 2, since $5 + 2 = 7$ and 7 is prime. If she can't form a prime, she draws one card from the pile, and her turn ends. The first person to get rid of all her cards wins.



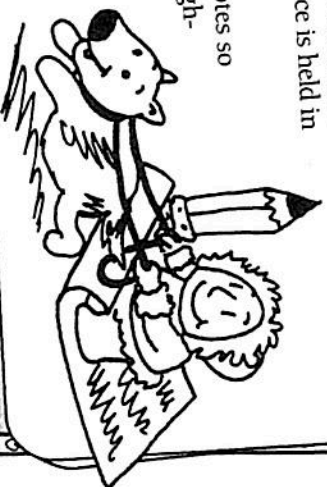
STUDY SKILLS Condensed notes

Going on a fact-finding mission about a favorite topic helps your youngster learn to take good notes.

Ingredients: books or internet, pencil, paper, highlighter, index card

Let your child pick a topic he's interested in, like sled dog racing or skateboard tricks, and research it in library books or online. Have him write down facts on paper. Examples: "The Iditarod sled dog race is held in Alaska." "Many sled dogs are Huskies."

Then, challenge him to condense his notes so they fit on one index card. He could highlight the most important facts and copy them to the card, using symbols (@, &) and abbreviations (aka, i.e.) to make them fit. Now let him present the facts to you.



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."