

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

December 2011

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District

Book Picks



■ *The Black Paw*

Oz Levinson

meets an unusual spy at the International Spy Museum: a mouse named Glory. She needs Oz's help to recover a weapon from enemy rats. In return, she'll help him deal with school bullies. The first book in Heather Vogel Frederick's *Spy Mice* series.



■ *That's Awesome! The World's Most Amazing Facts & Records!*

Read about the world's largest Ferris wheel and award-winning gingerbread houses. This records book from the editors of *Time for Kids* magazine also features facts about an ice museum with five-ton sculptures and unusual foods like eel soda and bird's nest soup.



■ *The Great Wall of Lucy Wu*

In Wendy Wan-Long Shang's novel, Lucy Wu lives in America and loves basketball and pizza. But when her great-aunt visits from China, Lucy must attend Chinese school Saturday mornings and eat Chinese food. With her aunt's help, Lucy learns to take pride in her family's language and traditions.

■ *Lunch Money*

Sixth-grader Greg Kenton faces an uphill battle when creating and selling comic books at school. What will happen when his rival starts making her own books and the principal forbids all sales? Find out in this book by Andrew Clements. (Also available in Spanish.)



Before you write...

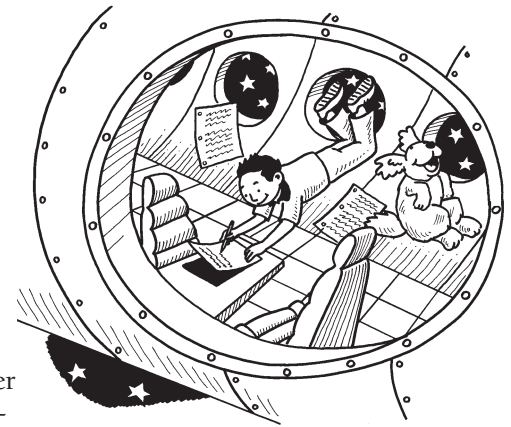
Good writers take time to come up with ideas and organize their thoughts before they begin writing. Encourage your youngster to use this three-step strategy for his next report or essay.

1. Choose a topic

Set a timer for five minutes, and ask your child to write down as many ideas as he can think of. If his assignment is to write about technology, his list could include social networking, space travel, and digital photography. When the timer goes off, he can cross out his least favorites and choose from what's left. Then, he needs to decide on a specific angle—a report on space, for example, might focus on the early space missions.

2. Gather information

The next step is research. Your youngster could go to the library and use the online card catalog or look at encyclopedias in the reference room. He might also try kid-friendly online search engines such as www.kidslick.org or www.factmonster.com. He should take notes, remembering to write down the sources. If he has



trouble finding information, encourage him to ask the librarian for help.

3. Organize

Suggest that your child arrange his facts on sticky notes. He could write each subtopic (space shuttle, commercial space flights) and each fact ("First U.S. space station, 1973") on a separate note. Then, he can make an outline by arranging the notes on poster board (subtopics across the top, related facts underneath) until the order makes sense. He'll have his outline to refer to as he writes his paper. ■

Where's the setting?

A story's setting is the world in which the characters live. Here are ways your child can "tour" a setting to help it come alive:

- Together, browse a travel guide such as one in the Lonely Planet series. For example, before reading *The Secret Garden* (Frances Hodgson Burnett), your youngster can "see" England's colorful gardens and foggy moors.
- Visit a website. If your child reads *The Charioteer of Delphi!* (Caroline Lawrence), she might type "Ancient Rome" into her favorite search engine. At a site like www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/romans, she can find facts and see photos and videos that may make the book's setting feel more realistic.
- Talk to someone who has been there. Say your youngster reads *The Cricket in Times Square* (George Selden) and your brother lives in New York City. Suggest that your child ask him questions about the subway system. ■



Winning combinations

What's more fun than reading a book? Reading two books! Your child can try these ideas for finding books she'll love.

Fiction + nonfiction

Suggest that your youngster look for biographies of people who share her interests. If she likes sports, she might enjoy reading about real-life sports figures. For example, she could pair *The Girl Who Threw Butterflies*, a story by Mick Cochrane, with *The Baseball Adventure of Jackie Mitchell*, *Girl Pitcher vs. Babe Ruth*, a biography by Jean Patrick.



Nonfiction + poetry

To help a nonfiction fan discover poetry, suggest that she look for poems on topics she reads about. A child who is fascinated by sea creatures might check out a real-life ocean adventure such as *Far from Shore: Chronicles of an Open Ocean Voyage* (Sophie Webb), followed by a volume of nature poems like *At the Sea Floor Café: Odd Ocean Critter Poems* (Leslie Bulion).

Tip: When your youngster sees how much fun it is to try new reading material, she might want to keep going. Encourage her to check out science fiction, memoirs, mysteries, and other genres. ▣

Fact or opinion?

"It's the best toothpaste for your family!" When your child reads a sentence like this in an advertisement, does he understand that it's an opinion?

Distinguishing fact from opinion is an important reading skill. Suggest that he ask himself these questions to tell the difference:

- Would most people agree? A fact is true regardless of who wrote it ("Trees are plants"), while an opinion usually reflects the writer's feelings or beliefs ("Trees shouldn't be cut down").



- Does it rely on adjectives? Descriptive words ("Apple pie with ice cream is a *fantastic* dessert") frequently indicate opinions, while facts are more likely to stand alone ("Apples are harvested in autumn").

- Are numbers involved? Statistics and percentages are sometimes used to back up facts ("80% of the people surveyed felt the law should be changed"). Opinions are often vaguely expressed ("The law needs to be changed"). ▣

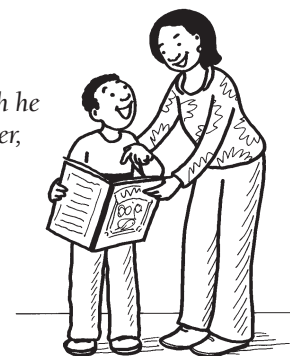


Q&A Getting published

Q My son doesn't seem to enjoy writing, although he gets good grades on his assignments. My sister, who is a teacher, said that seeing his work in print might motivate him. Are there any magazines that publish children's writing?

A If your child's school has a newspaper or literary magazine, he might start by submitting articles or stories to those publications. Let him know that he can also send his work to children's magazines like *Stone Soup* and *Highlights for Children* or to websites such as <http://mag.amazing-kids.org> and www.kidsonthenet.org.uk. In addition, he can ask his teacher about writing contests that he might enter.

Remind your son that everything he writes won't be selected for publication. He can increase his chances of success by looking for magazines that print children's writing and then sending his work to the ones that publish pieces like his. He should also be sure to follow the publication's submission guidelines. ▣



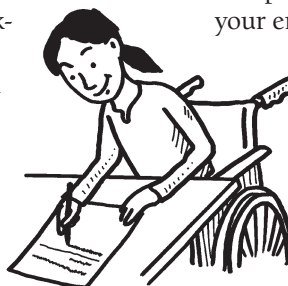
Fun with Words Spot the error

Correcting mistakes can boost your youngster's grammar skills! Try this activity to help her practice recognizing and fixing mistakes.

While your child isn't looking, write down a sentence from a book or magazine and add two or more mistakes to it. You might change the punctuation, switch a verb tense, or use incorrect capitalization. For example, you could turn the sentence

"On Monday, Sally baked cupcakes." into "On monday Sally baked cupcakes." Or you might write, "The kid's love computers games." instead of "The kids love computer games." Ask her to fix your errors and compare her corrections to the original sentence.

Idea: Play a version of this game while you're out. Look for mistakes on billboards and store signs, and try to correct them together. ▣



OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote their children's reading, writing, and language skills.

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www.rfeonline.com
ISSN 1540-5583