

Book Picks



■ Soccer Halfback

Football vs. soccer—it's a tough choice for Jabber Morris. Should he follow in his late father's footsteps, or stick with soccer, the game he loves? Matt Christopher's novel is full of play-by-play action that sports fans will enjoy. (Also available in Spanish.)



■ Because of Mr. Terupt

The fifth-graders love Mr. Terupt, a creative, brand-new teacher. Each chapter of Rob Buyea's book is told from the point of view of a different student. The story takes a serious turn when an accident changes everything.

■ Dewey the Library Cat

On a cold morning, librarian Vicki Myron discovers a freezing kitten in the book drop box. This is her true story of Dewey, who found a home at the library. He attended story hours, napped among the stacks, and eventually became famous around the world.

■ You Wish

Orphan Benjamin Piff has a difficult life until he gets his birthday wish: unlimited wishes. But this affects everyone else's wishes, and it makes life difficult for the people in charge of granting them. The first book in the Benjamin Bartholomew Piff series by Jason Lethcoe.



Words in every subject

You know your child needs a strong vocabulary to do well in reading and writing. But did you know that vocabulary is important in math, science, and social studies, too? Help her explore words in every subject with these three ideas.



1. Find words


Whenever your youngster reads, suggest that she look for words related to school subjects. She might find science words like "metamorphosis" in a comic book, "sodium" in an advertisement, and "precipitation" in a weather report. Seeing how the words are used in real life will help her recognize and understand them in her textbooks.

2. Use words

Help your child find reasons to say her vocabulary words aloud. If she's studying state history, you might visit a state park and talk to a ranger. ("What tribes are *native* to this area?") Or if she's learning about economics, she can practice the terms while shopping. ("There must be a high *demand* for these sweaters—they


need to increase their *supply* in my size.") When she reads a textbook, her first-hand experiences will help her identify with the vocabulary words.

3. Play with words

Games can make words a permanent part of your child's vocabulary. Have someone pick a letter of the alphabet and a school subject, and set a timer for three minutes. Race to list terms that begin with the chosen letter. If you picked "c" and math, you could write "centimeter" and "calculate." The winner is the person with the most words that no one else has—but a word counts only if a player can use it in a sentence. 

Reading aloud

What activity builds family bonds *and* reading skills? Reading aloud to your youngster! Consider these suggestions:

- Bedtime stories are fun and relaxing at any age. Try reading a chapter a night from a novel. Afterward, ask your child what he thinks will happen tomorrow. He'll practice making predictions and get excited about the next chapter.
- Boost your youngster's comprehension skills with poetry. Borrow a volume or two from the library. Take turns reading poems to each other and discussing what you think each one is about.
- Suggest that your child check out a how-to book that interests him. Have him choose a project (building a toy, doing a craft). Then, read the instructions aloud to him as he works. 



Authors as role models

The pages of your child's favorite book hold more than a good tale. They contain examples of writing techniques he can use in his own stories. Encourage him to watch for...

Transitions. Good writing flows smoothly from one event to another, and transition words and phrases make that happen. Suggest that your youngster look closely at how an author switches the action to a different place ("Meanwhile, back at the villain's lair...") or time ("Later, while Mom fixed dinner..."). Ask him why clear transitions are important (they make the



plot easier to follow). When he writes a story for class, suggest that he circle places where the action changes. Then, he can come up with interesting transitions.

Tense. Encourage your child to read a paragraph from a story written in past tense and then read it again, changing it to present

tense. Example: "The wind *moaned*, and the branches *grabbed* at me" becomes "The wind *moans*, and the branches *grab* at me." How does each affect him as a reader? Suggest that he try changing tenses on his next creative-writing assignment to see which one he likes better. **Tip:** Your youngster should reread his work to be sure that all tenses agree. ■

Fun with Words: Playing with palindromes

What do "wow," "civic," and "racecar" have in common? They are all *palindromes*—words or phrases spelled the same way forward and backward. Encourage your child to stretch her thinking and spelling skills by playing a palindrome game.



Find palindromes in a book like *Go Hang a Salami! I'm a Lasagna Hog!* by Jon Agee or on a website such as <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/palindromes.htm>. Take turns secretly choosing a palindrome and writing a hint to help the other player guess it. For "radar," you might write, "A police officer uses it to find people who are going too fast." If she's stumped, try more hints ("It measures speed") until she figures it out. Then, she can choose a palindrome ("level") and write a clue for you ("Our house has no basement or upstairs, so it has just one of these").

For extra fun, guess palindrome phrases like "Was it a cat I saw?" or "Madam, I'm Adam." ■

Q&A: Young adult books?

Q My daughter wants to read books that I think are too mature for her. She says "everyone" reads them. How should I handle this?

A It's great that your daughter is eager to read. Luckily for both of you, there are plenty of books out there that she'll enjoy—and that are appropriate for her.

Explain to your child that some stories can be confusing or upsetting. And while her friends might read a particular book, it may not be a good match for her maturity level or your family's values.

Ask a librarian to help you find books you and your daughter can agree on. She can suggest stories with popular themes (middle school life, friendships) but without subjects that you might consider too mature (romance, partying). ■



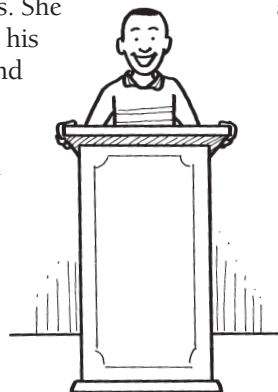
Parent 2 Parent: Speaking confidently

At our recent conference, my son's teacher mentioned that Jeremy tends to mumble and look down when he talks. She explained that this will affect his grades as class discussions and oral presentations become more important in school.

Mrs. Ross suggested that I give Jeremy opportunities to practice speaking clearly and making eye contact. We started with phone calls. I had him RSVP for a holiday party and make his own dental appointment.

Then, he worked on face-to-face communication. He practiced making eye contact as he ordered at a restaurant and asked a store clerk where to find an item.

When Jeremy's first presentation rolled around, he rehearsed at home while I reminded him to speak clearly, look at his audience, and use gestures and facial expressions. He said it went well—and he told me the practice helped him feel more confident. ■



OUR PURPOSE

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

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