

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

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Darien Public Schools

A. Fornshell, Language Arts/Social Studies Specialist

Book Picks

■ *All of the Above*

Inspired by
a true story,

Shelley Pearsall's book follows four inner-city kids as they try to set a Guinness world record for building the world's largest tetrahedron (a triangular pyramid). Soon the whole community gets involved. A great tale about setting and achieving goals.



■ *Sebastian Darke: Prince of Fools*



Half-elf Sebastian Darke might not be funny, but his adventures are. When he begins his quest to become a court jester, he

meets a tiny warrior, rescues a princess, and winds up as an enemy of the king. Humorous fantasy by Philip Caveney.

■ *Brothers Below Zero*

In this adventure novel by Tor Seidler, John is used to doing everything better than his older brother, Tim. But when Tim discovers his artistic talent, John is the one who is jealous. His act of revenge ends up putting both boys in danger. (Also available in Spanish.)

■ *The Word Snoop*

Designed for word lovers, this book by Ursula Dubosarsky gives children an entertaining look at language. Chapters cover punctuation, word origins, acronyms, word plays, and more. Solve a puzzle or code at the end of each section to spell out a secret message.



Great beginnings

When your child has a creative-writing assignment, getting started can be the hardest part. Help him find the perfect beginning for each story with these ideas.

Introduce the character

Encourage your youngster to choose an unusual character to narrate his tale. For instance, he might use an alien or a stuffed animal and begin the story with the character talking to the reader. ("You are a lucky reader. Most people have never met a stuffed cat who can talk. Some of us even write stories.")

Show the setting

Suggest that your child start the story with a tour of the setting. Let him pretend he is standing in the middle of the story's setting. What does he see as he looks in each direction? Have him write what he imagines. ("The mountains rose to the sky. An empty field stretched away



on one side, and a dirt path snaked into the forest on the other side.")

Open with action

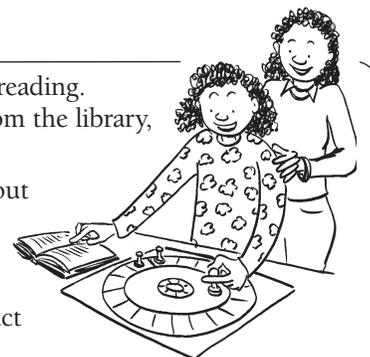
Have your youngster ask himself, "What exciting thing can happen at the beginning of my story?" He might pick a race, a storm, or an encounter with a monster. Once he has decided, he can write an exciting action scene. ("The giant chased Tom into a corner. Tom screamed as the beast raised its foot to squash him like a bug.")

Really? Using facts for fun

Use trivia as a fun way to get the whole family reading. Gather almanacs, record books, or trivia books from the library, and try these activities:

- Let your child pose a challenge: "Find a fact about outer space." Everyone searches the books for a fact that fits. The first person to find one reads it aloud ("Venus is the only planet that spins clockwise"). Then, she asks for the next fact ("Find a fact about a spring sport").

- Borrow the board and pieces from any board game. Take turns rolling a die and moving around the board. To make your move, you must answer a question that another player makes up using a fact from the books. *Example:* "What was Thomas Edison's middle name?" (Alva) The first player to circle the board wins.



Newspaper reading

What's black and white and packed with opportunities to improve reading comprehension? The newspaper! Here are ways to use the news to deliver a daily dose of reading skills.

Headline highlights

Explain that a headline gives the main idea of a news story. Let your youngster secretly choose a story, read it, and write a new headline based on the main idea. For instance, she might replace the headline "Volunteers Needed for Local Charity" with "Help the Homeless." Your job is to match her headline to the correct story in the newspaper. Then, swap roles and rewrite a headline for her to match.



News quiz

Help your child read for details by having her try to stump you with a quiz about a news or sports story. First, read a story together. Then, have her ask you three questions about it. For a story about a local politician's speech, she might ask: "Where did the speech take place?" "How many people attended?" "What was the weather like?"

Step by step

Use how-to articles such as recipes to give your youngster practice following directions. She can choose one for the two of you to do together. For instance, you might bake lasagna. You could take turns reading the directions aloud to each other as you cook. ■



Q&A TV alternatives

Q My children watch a lot of TV. How can I encourage them to turn it off and spend that time reading and writing instead?

A Start by making one or more nights each week "TV free." Then, use your children's favorite shows as a jumping-off point for activities that involve reading and writing.



For example, your youngsters might enjoy choosing a show they like and outlining a plot for the next episode. Or they could make up a sequel to a movie.

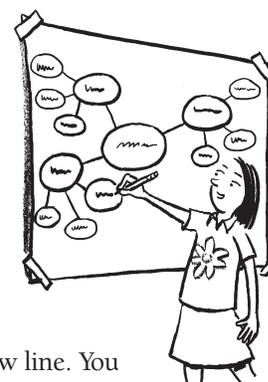
To encourage them to read, go to the library and look for books based on their favorite programs or movies. They can also ask the librarian to recommend novels with similar plots. ■

Fun with Words Wild word web

This quick activity will help your youngster's vocabulary grow.

Write a word (hippopotamus) in the center of a poster board, circle it, and draw three lines leading away from it in different directions. At the end of each line, your child should write a word that's related to hippopotamus (animal, gigantic, gray). She can circle those words and draw three more lines from each circle.

On your turn, add a related word at the end of each new line. You might write "whale" for "animal," "ship" for "gigantic," and "sky" for "gray." Circle your words, and add three new lines to each circle. Keep taking turns until the web covers the whole board. *Tip:* Use a thesaurus to find new words if you get stuck. ■



Other Picks GAMES

Perfect Sense

Players solve riddles based on the five senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell) to move around the board. The fewer clues you need to solve the riddle, the more spaces you get to move. *Patch Products*

Aunt Millie's Millions

Use storytelling and strategy to collect Aunt Millie's valuables and win this hilarious game. But beware! If two players claim the same item, they must both try to persuade the judge to give it to them. *Gamewright*



SOFTWARE

Africa Trail

Take an interactive bike trip through Africa and explore its history, geography, and culture in this game from the creators of *The Oregon Trail*. Read maps, track your progress in a travel log, and solve problems along the way. *The Learning Company*



Boggle

This software program features classic Boggle and four new games, including an outer space and a 3-D version. Players have three minutes to create words from the scrambled letters. *Hasbro Interactive*

OUR PURPOSE

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

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