

Home & School CONNECTION[®]

Working Together for School Success

February 2018

Central Middle School
Mildred Beall, Principal



SHORT NOTES

I love you because...

Family members can share what they love about each other with this writing activity. Have your youngster cut out paper hearts. Write love notes on them and hide for others to find. For example, maybe your child will put one under her sister's placemat that says, "I love you because you make me laugh."

On the road again

Carpooling with other parents is a great way to save time and money—and to get to know your youngster's classmates. When you drive, you'll probably hear them discuss school, sports, and friends. *Note:* Ask parents about booster seats—if a child uses one in his parents' car, he'll need one in yours, too.

Indoor "recess"—at home

When winter weather keeps your family inside, ask your child to show you what she does during indoor recess at school. She could teach you games, crafts, or songs she enjoys. Then, encourage her to come up with new ideas to try at home or in class.

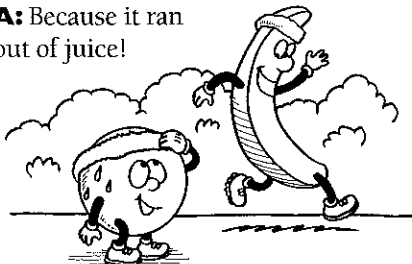
Worth quoting

"Life itself is the most wonderful fairy tale." *Hans Christian Andersen*

JUST FOR FUN

Q: Why did the orange lose the race?

A: Because it ran out of juice!



Olympic-sized learning

While the 2018 Winter Olympic Games are taking place thousands of miles away, your child can earn a "medal" in learning at home. Turn Olympic magic into educational gold with these suggestions.

Reading

Speed skating, ski jumping, luge... which Winter Olympics sports does your youngster enjoy watching? Head to the library together to pick out books about their history, the rules, and how the athletes train. *Idea:* Hold a "reading Olympics." Let family members count the books they read in February. At the end of the month, everyone can award medals to their three favorites.

Math

Your child will practice gathering, recording, and calculating data to find out which of his favorite countries wins the most medals. Encourage him to divide poster board into four columns: "Country," "Gold," "Silver," "Bronze." In column one, he can list teams he'd like

to follow. Every day, have him check a newspaper or olympic.org and add tally marks for each country's medals. After the Olympics end, he can total them up to see who got the most in each category.

Social studies

Where in the world do the Olympic athletes come from? To explore geography, help your youngster use a map to find countries represented in the Olympics. He might put star stickers on the countries on a wall map. Or let him print out a world map and make a dot on each competing country.♥



Decisions, decisions

Learning to make smaller decisions now will prepare your youngster to make bigger ones later. Here are ways to build her decision-making skills:

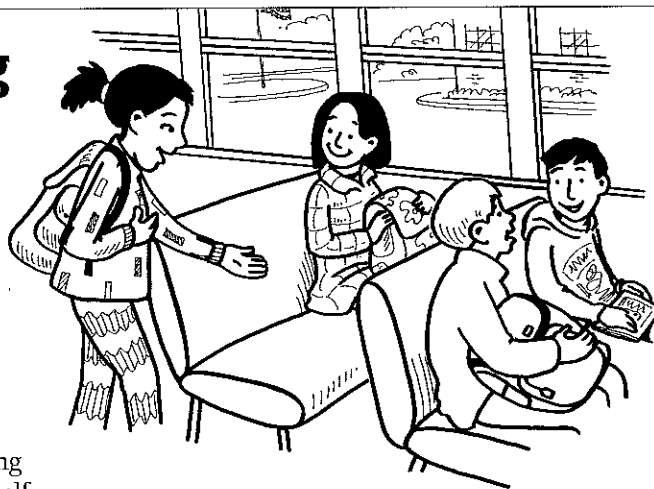
- Hearing you think through your choices gives your child an example to follow. You might say, "I'd like to visit Aunt Sue tonight, but then I might not finish this proposal for work. I'll go Saturday instead."
- When possible, give your youngster two to three specific options. That way, she can make a decision without feeling overwhelmed. *Example:* "Do you want to sweep or dust?" rather than "Which chore would you prefer to do?"♥



An anti-bullying attitude

Having a positive attitude toward others can help to keep your youngster from participating in bullying. With these ideas, she'll be more apt to be kind to others and want them to feel included.

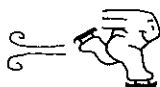
1. Watch your words. Let your youngster know you expect her to speak kindly. Before she says something she's unsure about, she could ask herself if she would want you to hear it. If she overhears another



student calling a classmate names or gossiping, she could counter the unkind words with nice ones. ("I hear you're really good at gymnastics.")

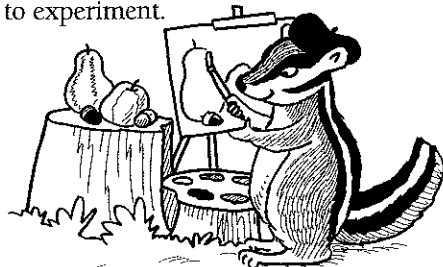
2. Accept everyone. Leaving people out on purpose is a form of bullying. Suggest that your child look for chances to make others feel that they belong. For example, she might ask to

join someone who normally sits alone on the bus. Or she could invite a new student to her birthday party. She'll see how good it feels to make someone's day—and perhaps she'll even gain a friend!♥



ACTIVITY CORNER Inspired by art

Art unleashes your child's imagination and lets him practice fine-motor skills. Try these tips to encourage him to experiment.



Use natural supplies

Challenge your youngster to find free art materials right in your backyard! For instance, he might use sticks or feathers as paintbrushes. Or he could draw on rocks with colored chalk.

Try new formats

Suggest that your child arrange objects (toys, fruits) on a table and sketch a *still life*. Or go outdoors where he can paint a *landscape* of natural scenery like trees or a pond. If he wants to draw a *portrait*, he could ask a family member to pose—or look in a mirror and create a self-portrait.♥

PARENT TO PARENT

Safe to make mistakes

My third grader, Mark, gets discouraged when he can't do something correctly right away. While he was practicing his typing skills, he said, "Forget it, I'm no good at this," and walked away from the computer.

I told Mark that mistakes are part of learning. I admitted that when I was his age, I wanted to quit the violin because I couldn't get the notes right on my favorite piece. Luckily, the school music teacher encouraged me to continue, and Mark knows that I enjoy playing the violin to this day.

To show Mark his mistakes were "stepping-stones," I drew circles across a sheet of paper. Each time he made a mistake while typing, I suggested he cross out a stepping-stone and start the sentence again. I knew that if he kept trying, he'd type an error-free sentence before he got to the last stone—and I was right.

Now Mark has a way to track his progress with typing and other things that require persistence.♥



Q & A

Study with a pencil in hand

Q: When my daughter studies for a test, she simply reads through her notes or textbook chapter once and announces she's finished. How can I help her study more effectively?

A: Reading is an important part of studying. But writing and drawing can help cement the information in her mind—in fun and interesting ways.

For example, if she's studying a textbook chapter, she could write answers to

the end-of-chapter questions or even design her own quiz. When she studies with a classmate, they might write questions on index cards and play "quiz show."

Sketching pictures is another good study strategy. To prepare for a test on planets, she can draw and label the solar system. Or she could draw pizzas and write fractions on the slices while studying for a math test.♥



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Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

No skipping allowed

Middle graders may think it's cool to roam the halls or hang out in the bathroom instead of going to class. Make sure your child knows you expect him to be in all of his classes every day—and explain ahead of time what consequences he would face from school, and from you, if he skips.

Shifting moods

Tweens often go through ups and downs because of changing hormones. When your child seems out of sorts, that's when she most needs you to remain calm. Showing you have control will comfort her and make her feel secure, even if she doesn't realize it at the time.

Where's my glove?

Are family members constantly looking for missing gloves? Make it easier to get out the door to school and to work by giving each person his own bin for winter gear (mittens, hats, scarves). Stack them by the door, or place in a closet. *Tip:* Designate a spot for gloves without matches in case the mates show up.

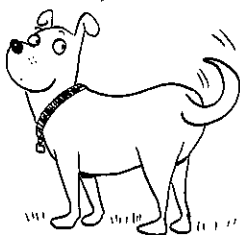
Worth quoting

"We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand."
Randy Pausch

Just for fun

Q: Why do dogs wag their tails?

A: Because nobody else will do it for them.



Happy to collaborate

You may have heard your middle schooler talk about group assignments—perhaps a paper she's writing with a partner or a slide presentation she's creating with classmates. Learning to collaborate will help her succeed in these projects *and* teach her an important skill for the future. Share these strategies.



Look for themes

Collaborating is about using everyone's thoughts and opinions to find a solution.

First, group members need to brainstorm and keep track of suggestions. Then, they can look for ways to combine their ideas. For example, they might realize most of their concepts fit into three main categories and work together to divide their paper into three parts.

Learn to compromise

Help your tween use language that encourages others to participate and shows she is considering their recommendations. For instance, she could ask, "What's your reaction to this?" Or she can paraphrase someone's comments with "It sounds like

you're saying..." To disagree politely, she might reply, "I see what you're saying. I also see it another way."

Figure out roles

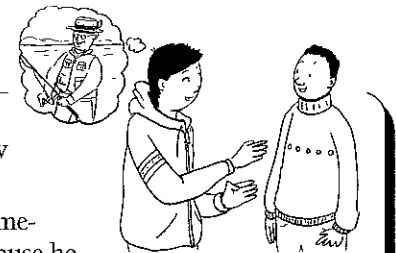
Another key to collaboration is using everyone's strengths. Say your middle grader's group is making a slide show. One person might use her organizational skills to schedule meetings and decide how to arrange the slides. Another can use technology know-how to create the slides and add special effects. 👍

"I care about you"

Caring about others can make your child feel good about himself and even help him make new friends. Inspire compassion with these ideas.

Trade places. Suggest that he put himself in someone else's shoes. Say his friend is disappointed because he didn't make a sports team. Your tween could think about how he would feel if he worked hard for something and didn't get it. Seeing things from his friend's perspective will help him understand his friend's feelings—and empathize.

Take action. Encourage him to find a way to support others who are going through a rough time. If a classmate loses his grandfather, he might visit the friend and invite him to tell stories about his grandpa. Or he can make a sympathy card and have other students sign it. 👍



Grow by the rules

Setting rules during the tween years can be puzzling, since middle graders aren't little kids anymore, but they aren't teenagers either. Try these tips.

Consider new freedoms

Think of ways to adapt rules for your child's age and maturity level. Ask for his input, and decide which suggestions make sense. Say he wants you to start dropping him off at the mall with his friends. You might agree to read in the mall's coffee shop while they walk around. Once you see how he handles it, you can choose whether to drop him off in the future.



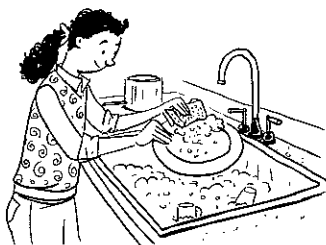
Encourage problem solving

Parents want to protect their children—but your tween will often be better off experiencing the natural consequences of his actions. Perhaps your rule is that he needs to remember his own items for school. If he forgets a book for class, let him work out a solution instead of dropping it off for him. He'll learn to problem solve, and chances are he'll try harder to remember next time. 👍



Chores without complaints

Does your child pitch in around the house? Having her do chores helps her develop a good work ethic that will benefit her at home and in school. Here are ways to foster this quality.



■ **Think “we.”** Have her regularly help with chores that benefit the whole household, such as doing dishes or cleaning out closets. That way, she'll learn to work hard even if it won't benefit her directly.

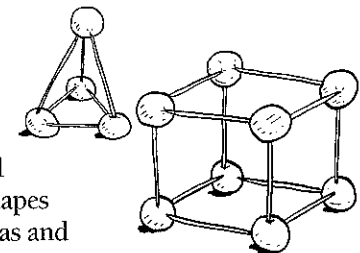
■ **Make it snappy.** Set a timer for 2 or 3 minutes, and challenge everyone to do a specific chore before time is up. Your tween might straighten up the family room while you wipe down kitchen counters. Keeping it short and fun makes it more likely she'll pitch in willingly—and be more open to helping out next time. 👍

Parent to Parent

Math night at school...and at home

My daughter and I recently attended family math night at her school. Marissa found the activities fun, so when her teacher sent home more ideas to try, we decided to hold a math night at home.

First, we rolled play dough into little balls and connected them with toothpicks to create 3-D shapes like cubes and cones. Marissa measured their areas and showed me how to do it.



Next, we played “secret function.” I wrote numbers on slips of paper. Marissa picked one at a time, performed a “function,” like adding 8 or dividing by 3, and wrote the answer on the flip side. I had to figure out the function she used. For “4,” she had written 16, and I said she had squared the number. She said that was right, but added, “It could have been $x \cdot 4$ or $+ 12$.” That led to a great discussion about how many different functions may have been right!

I enjoyed seeing math in a new light. And I'm glad Marissa is enjoying playing with math. 👍

Q & A Work that's mine

Q My son recently received a zero on a paper because it was too similar to an online article he used as a source. He had simply rearranged the information, and he didn't understand this was plagiarism! What should I do?

A In today's online world, students may pass off someone else's work as their own without realizing it. They might believe that just rewording or rearranging material makes it theirs. Or they may

even forget which part is a direct quote from a source and fail to give credit.

Your son can avoid unintentional plagiarism by taking careful notes as he researches. Encourage him to put quotation marks around direct quotes and to keep a running list of sources.

Also, suggest that he jot down his own thoughts and reactions while researching. That will give him a good place to start when he writes so he is sure to use his own words. 👍



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Reading Connection

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Book Picks

■ **A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray** (Ann M. Martin)

What does a stray dog think about? This story is told from the viewpoint of a dog named Squirrel. As a puppy, he became separated from his mother. Now he must search for a permanent home—while avoiding dangers along the way.



■ **Eye of the Storm: NASA, Drones, and the Race to Crack the Hurricane Code** (Amy Cherrix)

Young weather buffs can follow hurricane hunters and NASA scientists doing the difficult work of predicting when and how hard a hurricane will hit. Also explains how smartphones and social media have saved lives and improved emergency preparedness.



■ **Smile** (Raina Telgemeier)

Sixth grade isn't off to a great start for Raina, especially since she lost her two front teeth when she tripped and fell. This funny and colorful graphic memoir is based on the author's middle school dilemmas. (Also available in Spanish.)

■ **Lives of the Presidents: Fame, Shame (and What the Neighbors Thought)** (Kathleen Krull)

Celebrate Presidents' Day with these profiles that focus on fun facts. Kids will enjoy discovering how one president got stuck in the bathtub, another had a beard that was so long it dipped into his soup, and much more.



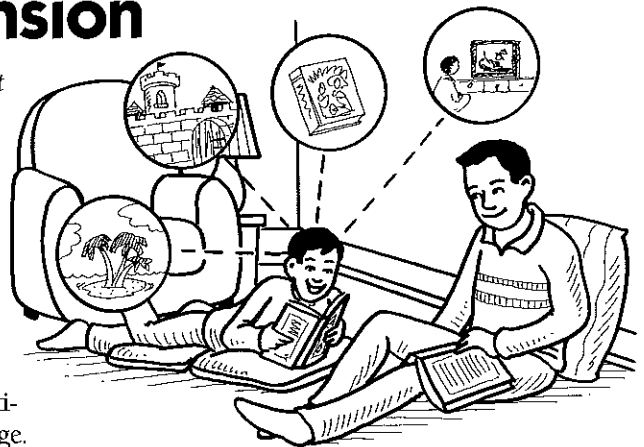
Background knowledge builds comprehension

"I saw a shark just like that at the aquarium."

"I camped out under the stars once."

"I always want to win big prizes at carnivals, too."

When your child connects what he already knows to something he's reading, his comprehension can soar. Try these ideas to activate his background knowledge.



Brainstorm word associations

Before your youngster starts reading a book, ask him to scan the cover for an interesting word or picture—and use it to trigger associations with words he knows. For *Treasury of Greek Mythology* (Donna Jo Napoli), he might target *mythology* and come up with a string of words like *stories*, *legends*, *heroes*, and *old*. This kind of brainstorming gives him a general idea of what to expect from the book.

Visualize the setting

Having an image in his head increases your child's understanding. As he reads, he could jot down places mentioned in

the text (*examples*: castle, island). Every time he adds a setting to the list, he can ask himself: Does this place remind me of any place I have visited or that I've seen in a TV show or movie?

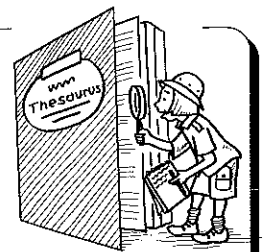
Think about other books

When your youngster starts a new book, encourage him to look back on similar books he has read. For example, if he's reading historical fiction, he might relate it to a textbook chapter he read about the same time period. Before reading the second book in a series, he can skim through the first installment to recall details about the characters' personalities and the plot.

Just-right words

Encourage your child to stretch her vocabulary by going on a "word quest." She'll see how papers and other written assignments can be more interesting when she uses a variety of words.

1. Ask your child to write three sentences and underline at least one word in each. *Examples*: "The ugly monster roared." "The little rabbit ate." "The leaves blew in the dark forest."
2. How many synonyms can she list for each underlined word? Perhaps the rabbit *nibbled* and the leaves *rustled*. (*Hint*: If she's stuck, suggest that she use a thesaurus.)
3. Now she can try the new words in her sentences. Which ones sound best?



Picture this! Write that!

Looking for a way to inspire your youngster's creative writing abilities? Photos can do the trick. Here are ways to get started.

Photo walk. Go for a walk together, and let your child take pictures of scenes that might lead to a story. She could snap a photo of a fire truck speeding past with its lights flashing or of a frozen lake shimmering in the sun. At home, she



can look at the pictures and write a story about a courageous rescue or an ice hockey game.

Magazine clippings. Have your youngster cut out pictures of people, places, animals, and objects from old magazines. Next, suggest that she put the pictures in a paper bag, reach in, and pull out three at random. She can challenge herself to write a story to go with all three pictures. If she pulls

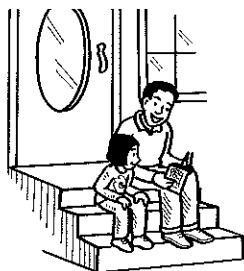
out a photo of a cat, a backpack, and a little girl sitting in a classroom, your youngster may write about a cat who sneaks into his owner's backpack so he can go to school, too. ■



Q&A Never too old for read-alouds

Q Now that my daughter can read by herself, should we still read aloud?

A Reading aloud—at any age—is great for parent-child bonding and for boosting your child's reading and listening skills.



Let her choose books she might not read on her own, perhaps ones with more complex stories or longer chapters. Mix

things up by having her read a page or section to you, too. Or choose characters for you each to “play,” and read their lines in different voices.

Another way to liven up read-alouds for this age is to read in various places and at different times. Reading before bed is great, but you could also read to her in the kitchen over snacks, on the front steps on an unexpectedly warm day, or while waiting for a relative at the bus station. ■

Parent & Parent Watch out for spell-check

For the longest time, I couldn't get my son Max to understand the importance of proofreading his writing. He would roll his eyes and insist that spell-check and autocorrect were there to do the job for him.

Then one day, he read a story he had written to our family. He kept tripping over sloppy mistakes—and he couldn't believe how much they changed the meaning of his story. The first one was kind of funny: “I didn't know he was a police officer because he wasn't wearing his unicorn.” It was obviously supposed to be *uniform*. We laughed about what autocorrect had done to his story, but he quickly realized that proofreading wasn't a laughing matter.

Now when Max writes, he likes to share funny examples from autocorrect. But I'm glad to hear them, because finding the mistakes means he is proofreading his work carefully. ■

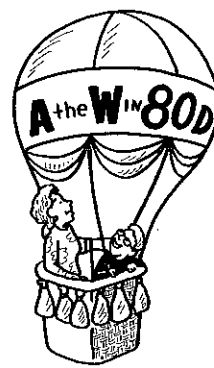


Fun with Words A new kind of word puzzle

What in the world is a *ditloid*? It's actually a rather funny name for a clever kind of word puzzle. Simply put, you combine numbers and letters to represent a familiar phrase, date, or fact. For example, *24 H in a D* is a ditloid for *24 hours in a day*. (Note: Common words like *the*, *in*, *a*, *an*, *of*, and *to* usually aren't abbreviated.)

You and your youngster can take turns making up ditloids for each other to solve. He'll practice creative thinking, and you'll enjoy a fun game together. Score one point for each one you get right.

Idea: If you need hints, sketch pictures to go along with the clues. ■



Try these!

- 50 S on the F
- 27 A in the C
- 52 W in a Y
- 101 D
- 1 F 2 F RF BF
- A the W in 80 D

- Around the World in 80 Days
- Blue Fish
- One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish,
- 101 Dalmations
- 52 weeks in a year
- Constitution
- 27 amendments in the
- 50 stars on the flag

Answers

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