

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

January 2021

Gene Dillon Elementary

Book Picks

■ *Voyage of the Dogs* (Greg van Eekhout)

Lopside, Champion, Bug, and Daisy are barkonauts—dog astronauts. When their human crew abandons their spaceship, the pack must work together to figure out how to get back to Earth. Each dog brings a special strength and talent to the mission in this sci-fi adventure.



■ *Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook* (Anne Mazer and Ellen Potter)

This nonfiction guide is chock-full of tips and stories to inspire young writers. Written in a friendly question-and-answer format, the book includes advice about writing “ugly” first drafts, bringing characters to life, creating suspense, and keeping a journal.

■ *Cosmic Commandos* (Christopher Eliopoulos)

This exciting graphic novel tells the tale of identical twins Jeremy and Justin. When Jeremy finds a charm in a cereal box, his favorite video game comes to life! The twins may look alike, but they are total opposites, and they have to join forces to win the game.



■ *Smart About the Fifty States: A Class Report* (Jon Buller and others)

Discover facts about every state in the USA, from Alabama to Wyoming. Your child will learn state nicknames, capitals, historical facts, and much more. Each state's section contains an illustrated map that highlights important places. What will your child learn about your state?



Vocabulary games

A rich vocabulary can help your youngster get her point across during a conversation or find the right word when she's writing. Strengthen her word power with these fun games.

Dictionary charades

Take turns flipping to a random page in the dictionary and choosing one word to act out. If your child picks *mountainous*, for example, she might pretend to climb mountains. The first family member to identify the word gets to act out the next one.

Definition bingo

Together, choose 25 vocabulary words from a dictionary or your youngster's textbooks, write each definition on a separate slip of paper, and put the slips in a bowl. Each player draws a bingo board and writes the words randomly in the squares. Now a caller reads the definitions, and players put a penny on the



matching word. Cover five in a row to call “Bingo!” *Tip:* Have the winner read out the words and check the definitions.

Synonym sense

Each person secretly chooses a theme, such as winter, for the other players to figure out. Players jot down five words that fit their themes. Then, they each get one minute to browse through a thesaurus (or thesaurus.com) for synonyms. If your child's list includes *cold*, she might add *brisk* and *shivering*. Take turns reading the synonyms from your lists and trying to name each other's themes. ■

Think outside the book

The world is full of things to read. Share some with your youngster each day, and watch him become a well-rounded reader. Here are a few suggestions:

- Turn your refrigerator door into a reading center. Encourage everyone to post reviews of books, movies, restaurants, and gadgets. You could also hang up comics or fortune cookie slips.
- Email each other. You might send schedule reminders, news about your day, poems, or inspirational quotes.
- Share cards and letters that come in the mail. Use takeout menus and catalogs for reading practice, too—ask your child to find coupons or to tell you about foods or products that interest him. ■



“Just right” books

Most of the time, reading shouldn't be too easy or too hard for your youngster. Ask him to read aloud to you, and then help him find books he'll enjoy—and that stretch his reading ability—with these tips.

Too easy? Does your youngster read the book quickly? Can he recognize each word and easily understand the plot? The book may be too easy. Although it's perfectly fine for him to read books like that, more challenging material will offer new vocabulary and more complicated plots. And that will prepare him for the increasingly complex texts he'll read in school.



Too hard? Is your child's reading slow and choppy? Does he stumble over several unfamiliar words per page? Is he confused about what's happening? These are clues that a book is too difficult for now. Offer to read it aloud to him or read it together. *Note:* If he struggles with assigned reading, talk to his

teacher to see if he needs extra help.

Just right! Can your child read most of the text smoothly? Did he find a few new words? Can he understand what's going on with a little thought? His book sounds like a good fit—it provides enough of a challenge without frustrating him. ■

Fun with Words

Name that phrase!

Here's a word game that will stretch your child's thinking skills. All you need are pencil and paper.

First, show your youngster these examples of how arranging words in a particular way can turn a phrase into a brainteaser.

million = one in a million

eiln pu = line up in alphabetical order

MIND = mind over matter
matter

Once your child has the idea, take turns making up brainteasers for one another to work out. *Hint:* To find phrases to use, suggest that she look for them when she's reading or listen for them during conversations. It helps to choose phrases that use prepositions, such as *in*, *on*, *over*, and *under*.

She can also find examples online by searching “frame games.” Or she could look in library books like *The Big Book of Frame Games* by Terry Stickels. ■

OUR PURPOSE

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

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Q&A

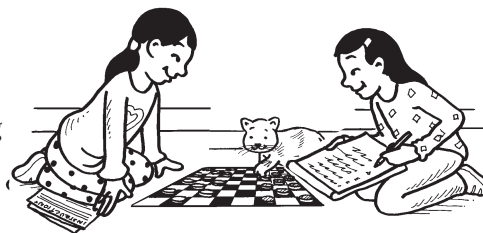
In my own words

Q My daughter knows she can't copy from sources when she's writing reports, but she says it's hard to think of new ways to say the same thing. Is there a way I can help her with this?

A Your daughter is right—copying others' words is known as plagiarism. Not only is it dishonest, but it can cause her to lose credit for an assignment. Help her practice paraphrasing, or putting material in her own words, with this activity.

Ask her to read a short item, such as board game rules or a recipe. Put it away, and have her rewrite it to be as different as possible from the original. Instead of “Checkers is a two-player strategy game,” she might write, “You need two people to play checkers. Use strategic thinking to win.”

Encourage her to use the same method when she does research for a school report. She can read a page or section, then look away and write about it in her own words. She should check her writing against the source to make sure it's not too similar. ■



Tips for writing dialogue

It's fun to make characters “talk”!

Inspire your youngster to write his own stories with dialogue for each character. He'll learn to develop a plot and show how his characters respond to various situations.

To start, suggest that he think about who the character is, what the situation is, and what his tone would be. For instance, a child would speak more formally to a teacher (“Good morning, how are you?”) than to a friend (“Hey, what's up?”).

When your youngster finishes his story, he should read it aloud. Does the dialogue sound realistic—like something a person would actually say? He may realize he should change “You cannot go in there” to “You can't go in there,” since people often use contractions when they speak.

Tip: Paying attention to dialogue in books, plays, and movies is a great way for your youngster to recognize how different characters speak. ■

