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www.TeachingK-8.com

The Parent Connection

A Monthly Newsletter for Parents

Neighborhood Book Clubs

Help your children form a social group around reading

Kids love clubs, especially first through third graders. That interest has led to the success of several club-themed book series, like *The Baby-Sitters Club* by Ann M. Martin and various young detective series. Being in a club gives a sense of belonging as well as being something separate from the family.

Getting a club started

The next time you hear your children say there is nothing to do, suggest they start a neighborhood book club. Encourage the kids to keep it small at the beginning and to set their own plans and rules. They might start with a book they're already reading and enjoying. Help out by providing the books

they are interested in reading – affordable books are available through the order forms that kids get at school, and librarians in the school or public library will be happy to make suggestions.

If the club is open to your input, make suggestions for crafts or activities that go along with the books. Or, encourage the kids to just talk about the characters and move on to the next book. Open up your home for this new club one afternoon a week. Put out some juice and popcorn, then relax and enjoy the giggles as your children go traveling to a new world with their book friends.

Considering the Internet

The pros and cons of spending time online

A recent study conducted by the non-profit group Common Sense Media shows that parents see the Internet as a double-edged sword. The poll was conducted from May 5-10, 2006, and involved parents with 11- to 16-year-olds who go online at least once a week. The purpose of the poll was to provide information to help keep children safe during Internet use.

While 77% of the parents polled recognize the web as crucial to learning and 91% say that it helps their children explore things about which they are passionate, 85% of those same parents fear that the web is more dangerous than television. The largest concern is that children will unknowingly come into contact with sexual predators.

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Books to Share

All Hallows Eve: The Story of the Halloween Fairy by Lisa Sferlazza Johnson (Positive Spin Press, 2006). Here is an alternative to the candy-heavy or scary phantom Halloween stories of the past. It emphasizes friendship and sharing.

The Foot Book: Dr. Seuss's Wacky Book of Opposites by Dr. Seuss (Random House, 1968). A traditional rhyming book with great rhythm. Kids will read along and soon read it to you.

Cat Crafts by Linda Hendry (Kids Can Press, 2002). A nonfiction how-to book of fun things you and your children can do together.

Tops & Bottoms by Janet Stevens (Harcourt Children's Books, 1995). This is a hilarious harvest-time book with wonderful illustrations.

Dunk Under Pressure by Rich Wallace (Viking, 2006). Part of the "Winning Season" sport series. This great read-aloud is aimed at students ages nine and older.

Digory the Dragon Slayer by Angela McAllister (Bloomsbury, 2006). Introduces chapter books as well as the fantasy genre. Your knight or lady will beg for two chapters a night.

Field Trips from Home

- 1) <http://webtech.kennesaw.edu/jcheek3/appleseed.htm> This site has information galore on Johnny Appleseed and apples. Visit this site, then pick apples together to eat and cook.
- 2) www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/fallcolor The Miracle of Fall explains why leaves change colors. Collect some beauties together to observe and enjoy.
- 3) www.nyphilkids.org/main.phtml? Watch videos about different instruments, play games and do puzzles in the New York Philharmonic Kidzone.

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Considering the Internet

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Eighty-two percent of the parents responded that parents themselves should be accountable and know enough about the Internet themselves to protect their kids. The overwhelming majority (88%) agreed that knowing what the kids are doing on the web, at this age, is more important than their personal privacy.

Good outweighs the bad

Reading about all these concerns might cause you to wonder about even having the web available in your home. But the bottom line is that 69% of the parents polled agree that the benefits of the Internet outweigh the dangers. It is like so many other things – swimming pools, bicycles, choice of friends, driving, etc. – in that the benefits come when the children are properly taught, supervised and encouraged to be responsible in their own right.

Tools for Learning

Teach your children to believe “I can”

There is a beautiful poster showing seagulls flying out across the sea. A caption from the Roman poet Virgil reads, “They can because they think they can.” If only we could get the kids to think that way.

But flying isn’t all that a seagull is, in essence; flying is just one thing that a seagull can do. Likewise, reading isn’t the essence of a child; it’s just one thing he or she can do. Children don’t all do it the same way any more than the seagulls are all equally adept at flying.

Proper motivation

In our great hurry to meet standards and reach benchmarks, some children may be losing their self-efficacy. That belief that “I can” makes all the difference in learning new skills. It is essential. Several studies have proven that “Whether or not a reader feels

Websites for Parents

- 1) www.childrenshealthfund.org/publications/healthed.php Here you’ll find up-to-date information dealing with good nutrition and healthy decisions. There is a free Parent’s Guide as well as newsletters available in English and Spanish.
- 2) www.school.com Office Depot is sponsoring the “Great Tools to Start School” campaign. The free download with suggestions is intended to help parents get kids organized.
- 3) www.aboutseafood.com The National Fisheries Institute offers recipes for kids as well as games and activities.

confident that he or she has the skills to handle a given reading situation makes a difference in that readers approach. (*Social Foundations of Thought and Actions* by Albert Bandura, Prentice-Hall, 1986).

Can the child sequence his or her own daily activities? That is essential before we ask him or her to sequence activities from a story. It is much too difficult to sequence things one doesn’t understand when one doesn’t understand sequencing itself. A student is no less perfect because he or she is unable to pass the sequencing benchmark. If the child realizes that sequencing is just a tool, like a hammer or a paintbrush, he or she might see a reason for practicing it and might not fear it as something that can destroy him or her.

A full toolbox

As we teach, practice and encourage children, we must remember to help them separate themselves and their own worth from the ever-increasing demands they face. We need to help them realize that reading, math science and all the other disciplines are tools. They are tools to be used in the pursuit of knowledge and to make life easier, just like tying one’s own shoes or driving a car can make life easier. When the toolbox is full, then a student can go on to build any kind of life he or she wants. ↓

Skill-Builders at Home

1) **Every Which Way** – This game strengthens directionality skills that are vital for development. Everyone gets on their hands and knees, and one person is the caller. He or she calls out, “backwards, frontwards, left, right, up or down.” Once the directions are clear, then add a certain number of steps or jumps. Play it walking, running or crawling.

2) **Home Again** – An activity to strengthen part to whole relationships can be played by putting a set of objects on a tray. Include two playing cards, a game piece, a sock, a can of soup, a hammer, a piece of uncooked spaghetti, etc. Then set a timer for three or five minutes and challenge the kids to put everything back in its proper place before the timer rings.

3) **Chef’s Assistant** – Have your child read aloud the recipe that you are making together. Be sure the ingredients are pronounced correctly and the measurements read properly. Discuss the importance of doing things in a particular sequence. Ask your child to make predictions about what the finished product might look, smell or taste like. On what basis are the predictions being made?

4) **Audio Diary** – Help kids speak in complete sentences and keep in touch, too. Set up a tape recorder for their daily report on school activities when you are going to be away on business.