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www.TeachingK-8.com

The Parent Connection

A Monthly Newsletter for Parents

Youth Art Month

Help broaden your child's concept of art

We are all surrounded by beauty every day. Often, however, we don't take the time to notice it. Kids do, though. They see it and want to share it with us or ask us how it got there. Listen closely to what your child is trying to show you this month while driving or walking. See the beauty and talk about it. Store windows are planned and put together with a lot of time and effort. How do the colors work together? Are the displays symmetrical? Do narrow windows have tall displays?

Art surrounds us

Look at the clothes in the mall with a new eye. What kind of designs are out there? What is being done with color and fabric? How would your child design a T-shirt? Encourage your child to talk about how or why

Field Trips from Home

- 1) www.epa.gov/sunwise This government-provided site teaches the importance of sun protection all year round and offers a free kit from the Environmental Protection Agency.
- 2) www.martingrund.de/pinguine/pinguin_cam2.htm Watch penguins in Antarctica by going to this international webcam site.
- 3) www.crayola.com/calendar/detail.cfm?event_id=127&year=2006 Celebrate Youth Art Month with hundreds of craft ideas from Crayola.

he or she chooses certain clothes to go together. Look at billboards for how they are put together instead of what they advertise. Art is everywhere in our lives. Teach yourself and your children to see it. Consider what is pleasing to your eye and why. Comment on the shapes and colors of cars. Look at furniture with a fresh eye. Do colors coordinate? Look at the pictures in magazines and books. Take a Sunday afternoon trip to a museum and to a craft store. Make sure your child has lots of art supplies for experimenting and creating. Set aside time and space this month for creative play and watch the artist emerge.

Puzzles Are Fun

...and educational

Doing a family puzzle used to be a holiday tradition. Of course, that was back when entertainment wasn't available in your palm or on every screen. Puzzles are still available in toy stores as well as novelty stores. Pick out one, perhaps a beautiful scene, a dizzying picture of marbles or something related to a favorite sport. Set out a card table and let the fun begin.

Sorting sides

The first task is one that even the smallest children can help complete. Get all the pieces turned right-side up and lay the edge pieces off by themselves. Already, you are practicing important skills like sorting, examining details and distinguishing among those details. Decision-making skills are getting a workout.

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Books to Share

- 1) *White Rabbit's Color Book* by Alan Baker (Kingfisher, 1994). In this wonderful story about mixing colors, the rabbit is sitting in tubs of paint that look just like the cups kids use for coloring eggs.
- 2) *St. Patrick's Day* by Amy Margaret (PowerKids Press, 2002). An easy-to-read nonfiction book, this story tells the background of the holiday St. Patrick's Day and explains its symbols.
- 3) *Buster's Sugartime* by Marc Brown (Little, Brown, 2006). Buster takes a trip to Vermont during the spring sugaring season. He writes postcards to his friends back home telling them what he has learned.
- 4) *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman (Dial, 1991). This precious story celebrates all the things that your child probably "just loves."
- 5) *A Fine St. Patrick's Day* by Susan Wojciechowski (Random House, 2004). This is a fictional story about one adventure that took place on this March holiday.
- 6) *The Cat In The Hat* by Dr. Seuss (Random House, 1957). Celebrate this book's 50th birthday this year on March 2, which is Read Across America Day.

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Puzzles Are Fun

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Next, sort pieces of the same color. Use particular language while doing this so color gradation is noted. Stand up the box where everyone can see it and watch those parts turn into a whole. An ability to visualize will help, as will an understanding of directionality. The orientation of the picture won't matter in some cases, but it will always matter to the person working on it to know which way is up; sky or no sky.

Configuration clues and fine motor coordination

Looking for the piece with the correct shape is related to beginning reading, where students are taught to look for particular shapes of words. If you don't remember this term, just take a pencil and outline the word "and" above as well as the word "fine." Notice that they have particular configurations. To a beginning reader, those configurations contain clues as to the word's identity. Working on a puzzle will sharpen everyone's vision and attention to details.

Another great advantage to working on puzzles is the development of dexterity in the fingers. Those small muscles in a child's hand need particular development that is achieved by coloring, drawing with pencils, making crafts and working the pieces of a puzzle. Did you ever think that a puzzle could teach so many skills while being fun?

Testing Time

Some simple techniques for addressing test anxiety

Sometimes when we talk to our children about testing, we need to reassure them that being nervous is just part of the process. It's just like the pitcher who gets anxious walking out to the mound or the singer with stage fright. The best ways to combat test anxiety include realizing that testing is just a natural part of the school process rather than a one-time big deal.

Websites for Parents

- 1) www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/succeed/05-study-habits.html Here you'll find ways to help your children succeed in school from the University of Illinois.
- 2) www.aboutourkids.org This informative site from the NYU Child Study Center promotes engaged parenting.
- 3) www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/violence.cfm The National Institute of Mental Health offers free articles on helping children and youth who have experienced trauma.

Proper preparation, as well as good organization of materials, can help calm the nerves. Knowing that the calculator has new batteries and that there is an extra pencil in your pocket can help; so can studying on a regular basis during the unit study. Waiting until the last minute to "worry" about a test or trying to memorize material the night before the test is sure to lead to anxiety as well as to a poor performance. Recognizing the anxiety for what it is and focusing on controlling it are good tools for success.

Stress-relieving basics

A breathing exercise, stretching of fingers, rolling of shoulders or a minute of centering silence can all stop the nervous reaction. Solid health, as much as is within our power, should always be maintained prior to and during periods of testing. At least eight hours of sleep, good meals and plenty of hydration all help a student be able to use his or her brain to complete the tasks at hand.

Once the testing situation is handled in an organized manner and leads to a successful completion, the next one will be less stressful. It might turn into something like that trip out to the mound or to the microphone; each time will get a little easier. Some of these techniques can be put to use by us adults at work. If you notice yourself becoming anxious, try everything you've suggested to your kids. ♡

Skill-Builders at Home

- 1) **Family Mailbox** – Use a shoebox to create a household information center. Decorate it and put it in a central location. Practice taking phone messages and placing them in the box.
- 2) **Schedules and Timelines** – can be practiced easily by talking about weekend plans ahead of time and jotting them down. During or after the weekend, help your child make a timeline of things done or places visited. Use digital photos or illustrations of your own.
- 3) **My Own Magazine** – A child's own magazine subscription can build confidence in your young reader. Talk to the teacher or librarian about subscribing to an age-appropriate magazine for your child. Encourage him or her to get his or her magazine to read when you are reading yours. Then spend time reading your child's magazine together.
- 4) **Letter Games** – Games such as SCRABBLE®, SCRABBLE® Junior and BOGGLE® are great activities that the whole family can participate in for strengthening vocabulary and spelling skills.
- 5) **Newspaper Games** – Word searches and crossword puzzles help older kids practice vocabulary. These games can be found in daily newspapers and also on websites, such as www.middle-school.net/ToDo/crosspz.htm, where they may be downloaded for free.