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The Parent Connection

A Monthly Newsletter for Parents

Hitting the Books

Help your kids establish a summer reading routine

Soon the school doors will close, but before they do, your kids will receive lots of handouts about summer reading programs. Chances are that your librarian has passed some out and that the local public library has sent some to the school. The reading teachers often send suggested lists for young kids and required lists for older kids. Paperback book clubs and tons of children's magazines are also available.

What's a parent to do?

Book clubs will work for some kids, but for others, often those who need the practice most, those enticements won't work. You'll need to set clear expectations: Require 30 minutes of reading each day, with you or in front of you. Don't assume that the kids are reading in their bedrooms, just as you can't

assume they are always doing their homework or brushing their teeth. Things that are important take time to learn how to do well. Reading is one of those. Don't just stand back and "hope" your kids are interested in reading. Even if they aren't overly excited about it when they are good at it, at least they will have that skill.

Writing also needs to be practiced on a regular basis. Perhaps the kids can write in a daily log every night before bed. It doesn't have to be great writing; it will grow and improve on its own with sheer practice. It just needs a good, consistent parent to get it started and maintained. Chances are that same parent can make the reading and writing time enjoyable. If not, you should still get satisfaction in knowing that you are doing the best you can to get your kids the skills they will need for their future.

Everyday Art

Build confidence and pride with these fun projects

Art is what makes life colorful, enjoyable and gives us some order. Help your kids express their inner artist this summer. Start with something easy, like creating a windsock out of an empty paper towel tube and some tissue-paper streamers. Paint it, color it, hang it, admire it and use it to tell which way the wind is blowing. Move on to planting flowers in a particular design or arranging the potted plants on the balcony in a rainbow effect. Have the kids help paint the shed or stencil a "Welcome" sign to hang by the front door. Make paper airplanes or

continued on next page

Books to Share

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble by William Steig (Simon & Schuster, reissue edition, 2005) This classic favorite is fun to read on the porch or while having a picnic. It's about wishing you were something else and finding out there is nothing better than being yourself.

Marvin Redpost: Super Fast, Out of Control! by Louis Sachar (Random House, 2000). Marvin finally has the mountain bike he has been pestering for, but now he is afraid to ride it. This chapter book is funny and oh, so true.

Christina Katerina & the Box by Patricia Lee Gauch (Putnam Juvenile, 1998). This story tells the wonderful things that Christina does with a big empty box. You'll want to have a big box on hand!

Growing Vegetable Soup by Lois Ehlert (Voyager Books, 1990). This is a wonderful book for the youngest in the family who wants to help plan or work the garden.

Get Some Exercise! by Angela Royston (Heinemann, 2003). This title from the "Look After Yourself" series has beautiful photos of fun activities and text that tells how each activity strengthens particular muscles.

Field Trips from Home

1) www.airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=aqikids_new.main The EPA has developed this website about airborne pollutants that is geared for K-1 or 2-4 emergent readers. Where are the danger sites in your area?

2) www.familywritingprojects.com Why not begin a family writing project before the vacation or camping trip? Get some great pointers at this site, then get the pencils, cameras and paper ready for a super family scrapbook.

The Parent Connection

Everyday Art

continued from previous page

rockets to fly off the porch. Look around the neighborhood and in magazines for ideas. Let the kids copy ideas from catalogs using the same or different materials. Play houses made out of empty refrigerator or dishwasher cartons need lots of paint and doors that open and close. If you're lucky enough to have a sturdy tree in your yard, let the kids design and decorate a tree house. Don't settle for factory model playhouses that all look alike.

Art is everywhere

Take time to discuss with your kids window displays, which are set up in a particular fashion. They are designed to get one's attention and make people want something, yes, but they are also set up to please the eye. Most of them are symmetrical. Let the kids rearrange the porch or living-room furniture to make it symmetrical or pleasing to the eye. What colors go together well? Get the kids a latch-hook rug kit to work on for their own room. Watch their pride in their room and their confidence in themselves grow.

The next time you are in a restaurant, ask your children to look at how their food is arranged on their plates. Does it matter how the food is presented? Of course it does. Have the kids copy that at home. Buy or grow a little parsley. Put a lettuce leaf under that grilled chicken breast and see if it makes a difference. Put the finger Jell-O® on a bed of lettuce instead of just a plate. Doing a little extra with the porch or the plate will translate into taking time to do the little extras that will make all projects successful.

"Why do we have to do this?"

Making sense of end-of-the-school-year projects

During the last few weeks of the year, parents face this question and others like it as students just want to get their

Websites for Parents

- 1) www.colstate.edu/mathcontest Math help is available at this site, as well as a problem-of-the-week contest on various ability levels.
- 2) www.ext.colostate.edu This website features activities that can be enjoyed indoors or out, as well as a family newsletter – click on "Family/Consumer," then "Family Matters."
- 3) www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/firstgarden Take kids in grade 3-5 here for planning the garden. Remember, gardens can be pots on a patio, too.

work done. The kids don't understand why they should do experiments when the teacher already knows the outcome; they wonder what the purpose is of writing a biography on an already well-known and often-written-about figure. It's a question that's sometimes difficult to answer. Other subjects like math, reading and spelling are easier to explain because students will need to do these activities on their own to complete other tasks. But what about these projects for which the outcome seems obvious at the outset?

What's the point?

The point is that in school often the process is more important than the product. Yes, chemistry students have done the same experiments for decades and students still write biographies about Abraham Lincoln. But what the lesson is about is not just acids or the sixteenth president of the United States, but rather the process necessary to conduct a scientific experiment and the process necessary to find and assimilate information about an important person. Many careers ask people to solve problems, write new information and find answers not yet discovered. That requires planning a timeline, conducting research, following through to a reasonable conclusion and presenting in a concise and clear manner. That's a process and that's what school is all about. ↓

Skill-Builders at Home

1) *Sidewalk Spelling* – This is fun especially as the weather is warmer and the evenings longer. Take chalk outside to write words, math problems or states and capitals on the sidewalk or driveway.

2) *Common Compost* – Dig a hole away from the house and place in it a layer of biodegradable garbage, some coffee grounds and then cover it with a light layer of soil. Repeat often. This is a science activity that can be ongoing.

3) *Outdoor Math* – Practice this in any parking lot. Count the cars, then count the cars in one row and the number of rows. Calculate the totals. How many cars are blue? Silver? Red? Have two doors or four?

4) *Dynamic Dialog* – Turn on a TV show but mute the TV. Assign each character to someone in the room. Make up dialogue to go along with the scenes. This can be played with just two or with many people.

5) *Find the Clues* – This game can be played anywhere; all you need is two people and two books. Without showing the cover or telling the title, read the first chapter aloud and see if the other person can identify the time of year and the time of day during which the story takes place, as well as the period in history. What were the clues? Now the other person read aloud the first chapter of their book.