

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

November 2012

Sweetbriar Elementary School

Book Picks

■ *The Bad Beginning*

When Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire become orphans, they are taken in by Count Olaf, a distant relative. The three children must protect each other—and their inheritance—from their cruel new guardian. The first book in Lemony Snicket's collection, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. (Also available in Spanish.)



■ *Top Secret*

Paul B. Janeczko's nonfiction guide explains how people have used codes and other secret communication throughout history. Readers will learn about spies and discover how to make and break different kinds of codes, create invisible ink, experiment with cipher systems, and more.



■ *Remarkable*

In the unusual town of Remarkable, everyone is interesting or talented—except for 10-year-old Jane Doe. When the mischievous (and less-than-perfect) Grimlet twins come to Remarkable, Jane's ordinary life is suddenly full of adventure. A funny mystery by Lizzie K. Foley.

■ *The Phantom Tollbooth*

What happens when Milo discovers a tollbooth in his bedroom? Your youngster can find out in this classic novel by Norton Juster. Read about Milo's travels through Dictionopolis, where he tries to rescue Princesses Rhyme and Reason from the Mountains of Ignorance.



Read-aloud time

When your child was younger, he probably loved snuggling up with you to hear a good story. As he gets older, he can still benefit from (and enjoy!) listening to you read. Here are some read-aloud tips to try at home.



Discuss the story

Try pausing periodically to ask for your youngster's opinion about a character's decision or to share a memory that the book triggered. These conversations can improve his understanding of the story and boost his reading comprehension.

Mix it up

Take turns choosing reading materials. When it's your turn, consider using read-aloud time to expose your child to more challenging material than he reads on his own. You might also introduce him to an author or a series that you enjoyed when you were his age. Knowing that you liked a book can get him interested in hearing it.

Encourage participation

You and your youngster might alternate reading chapters, or you could each pick a

character and read that person's dialogue. Encourage him to really get into his part so that he can practice reading smoothly and with good expression.

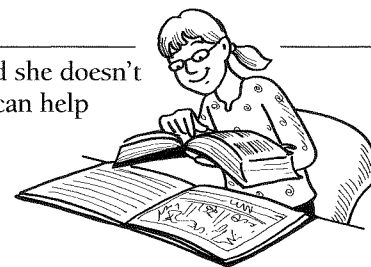
Create a routine

Try to set aside time once or twice a week to read aloud (say, after dinner on Thursdays or before bed on Sundays). If you have more than one child, you could read to them together so they can discuss the story and learn from each other. At other times, you might read to each one individually—they'll appreciate the special one-on-one time with you, and you'll be able to select books more targeted to their ages and tastes. ■

Unraveling words

Your youngster is reading and comes to a word she doesn't know. What does she do? These three strategies can help her figure out what the word means:

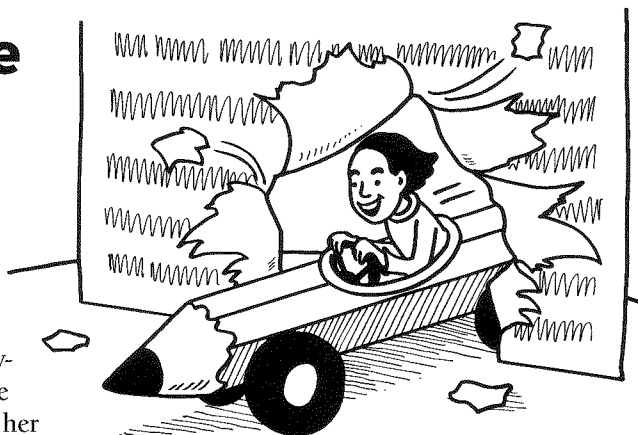
- Reread the sentence, and try to substitute a different word that would make sense. The context might make the unfamiliar word clear.
- Study the word for clues. Does she recognize any part of the word, such as a prefix (beginning), suffix (ending), or root (base word)?
- Write down the word. Then, look up its meaning in a dictionary and its synonyms in a thesaurus. Seeing synonyms for the word can help her remember its definition in the future. ■



Ways to overcome writer's block

"I can't write. I'm stuck!" Sound familiar? If your child's story stalls out, help her get things moving again with these suggestions.

Keep writing. Have her set a timer for 10 minutes and write nonstop about anything that pops into her mind. When she reads her "free writing," a possibility for her story may jump out at her.



Add something new. Remind her that a first draft is a playground for ideas. She might add another character to the story or give one of her existing characters a new problem to solve. The changes she makes may help the story come "unstuck."

Skip ahead. Encourage her to fast-forward and write another part of the story. Sometimes taking a detour will trigger an idea about the section that has her stumped.

Take a break. Suggest that she set the story aside for a little while to go for a walk or read a book. Once she stops thinking so hard, the perfect solution may appear. ■



What's in a contraction?

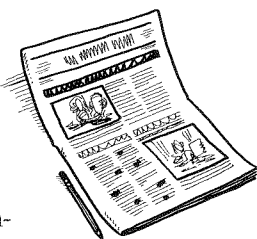
Contractions such as *it's*, *she'll*, and *wouldn't* add variety to our language and help make writing flow smoothly. These activities will show your youngster how language sounds without contractions and help him learn to spell them.

Talk and listen

Announce that no contractions are allowed at dinner, and have a conversation without using any. Your child will need to choose his words carefully—and listen closely to others to make sure they don't use a contraction. Who can go the longest?

Read and write

Ask your youngster to read a short newspaper article out loud, replacing each contraction with the two words that form it. For example, if he sees "you're," he would say "you are." Then, have him write each contraction on one side of an index card and the two words that form it on the other side. This will help him remember the correct spelling. ■



More magazines = more learning

My son Bryan has always enjoyed reading magazines, but subscriptions are expensive. I mentioned this to the school librarian, and she suggested that we start a magazine swap with a few relatives and friends.

Now, several of us save issues and pass them on when we see each other. For example, we get *Boys' Life*, and Bryan's cousin Gabe subscribes to *Muse*. After trading a few issues, the boys decided to add a scavenger hunt to the swap. When they trade issues, they include a list of words or facts for the other one to find.

Through the swap, Bryan has also begun reading magazines for older readers, including *Smithsonian* and *Popular Science*. This has given us new topics to discuss, like modern art and space tourism. I'm glad Bryan is getting to read so many magazines—without costing us anything! ■



Musical poetry

Every time your youngster hears a song on the radio or in music class, she is listening to poetry. That's because songs are poems set to music. Here are two ways she can learn from song lyrics:

- Encourage her to listen carefully to songs for examples of figurative language, or words and phrases that aren't meant to be taken literally. For example, "walking on

sunshine" means "happy." This will help her recognize figurative language when she sees it in books.

- Your youngster can explore the rhythm of poetry by writing her own poem set to music. She might use a familiar tune and change the lyrics. For instance, "This Land Is Your Land" might become "This Dog Is My Dog," or "Singin' in the Rain" could be "Dancin' in the Snow." ■



OUR PURPOSE

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

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www.rfeonline.com
ISSN 1540-5583