

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

September 2012

Sweetbriar Elementary

Book Picks

■ Up and Down the Scratchy Mountains

Best friends

Lucy and Wynston couldn't be more different. Lucy gets her clothes dirty and doesn't follow the rules. Wynston is a prince who does everything his father expects of him. When it's time for Wynston to find a princess, he decides to bend the rules. A fairy tale by Laurel Snyder.



■ Dog Sense



In Sneed Collard III's coming-of-age novel, 13-year-old Guy Martinez makes a bet to stop a bully. If Guy and his dog win a Frisbee competition,

the bully will leave everyone alone. But if they lose, Guy has to give up what he loves most—his Border collie, Streak.

■ Who Was Albert Einstein?

This illustrated biography by Jess Brallier explores the life of Albert Einstein. Einstein was a shy child who struggled in school but grew up to be one of the world's most famous scientists. (Also available in Spanish.)

■ Signed By: Zelda

Lucy wants to be a graphologist—a person who analyzes handwriting. Her skills are tested when her neighbor's grandmother disappears and leaves a handwritten note. Lucy takes on the case with the help of her neighbor and a talking bird. A funny mystery by Kate Feiffer.



Strategies for a new year

As your youngster reads more complex stories and textbooks this year, he will need new reading strategies. Help him start the year off right with these ideas for understanding and remembering new material.

Fill a "thinking cap"

When your child needs to tackle a challenging chapter, have him get a baseball cap. Each time he finds a new fact or vocabulary word, he can write it on a slip of paper and put it in the hat. After he finishes reading, he should reread everything in his thinking cap and look up definitions of words he doesn't know. Writing and reviewing the information will help him learn it.

Draw a comic strip

Suggest that your youngster make a comic strip about what he's studying (stick figures are okay!). Say he's reading about the water cycle in his science book. He could draw one panel with a character boiling a pot of water and explaining evaporation, and another panel with someone walking in the rain and talking



about precipitation. This is a fun way for him to visualize and remember material.

Take a "commercial break"

Your child can pretend there's a commercial break at the end of each chapter in his novel. His job is to write a "teaser"—a question to encourage the audience to stay tuned. For example, if he's reading *Bunnicula* (Deborah and James Howe), he might write a teaser like "Will Bunnicula get caught in the vegetable garden?" Then, have him predict the answer to his own question. Asking questions and checking his predictions lets him monitor how well he understands a story. ■

Interest + involvement = success

Showing interest in what your child is doing in school can lead to big gains in her reading and writing skills. Here are simple ways to play a part in her learning:

- When she's preparing for a presentation, offer to be her audience. You might also videotape it so she can watch herself.
- Browse through her textbooks to get an idea of what your youngster is learning. Comment on things you think are interesting, and ask her to explain them to you.
- If she gets excited about a topic, visit the library together to learn more about it. She can ask the librarian to recommend a book or documentary about subjects she's studying. ■



Writing techniques

When your youngster has a creative-writing assignment, encourage her to see it as an opportunity to try new ideas. The following suggestions can make her stories stronger and help her enjoy writing.

Foreshadowing. Authors sometimes drop hints about what will happen later in a book. If a big thunderstorm is important in your child's story, she might mention her character's fear of storms early in her tale.



Titles. Encourage your child to consider different titles for her story. One way to create an eye-catching title is to refer to a major event in the story. Instead of "My Summer Vacation," her title could be "Trapped in the Treehouse."

Flashback. Rather than starting her tale at the beginning, your youngster might begin at

the end. Perhaps the main character is finishing her first year at a new school. Your child could write about the character spending time with friends she has made, and then go back and describe her struggle to fit in throughout the year. ■

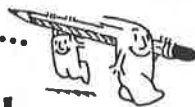
Parent ² Recommended reading

My son Derrick has never been an avid reader, so I was surprised when he said, "Mom, you've got to read this book!" *All the Broken Pieces* by Ann E.

Burg wasn't something I would have picked, but Derrick insisted I try it—so I did.

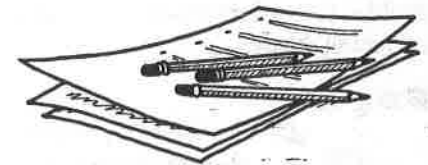
When I was finished, Derrick wanted to talk to me about the story. We had a nice discussion, and afterward, I recommended a book to him.

Now, we take turns suggesting books for one another to read. We try to pick from a variety of genres, such as science fiction, biographies, and realistic fiction. This method has helped both of us enjoy books we might not have read otherwise. We're currently reading my choice, *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio, and we're looking forward to discussing it. ■



Follow my rule

Your child can practice sentence-writing skills with this quick game.



The object is to write sentences following a particular "rule." Let your youngster pick the first rule ("Every word must have the same number of letters"). Quickly write a sentence that fits ("Will they join your team?"), and put down your pencil. Then, read your sentences aloud. The person who finished first—and followed the rule correctly—gets to pick the next rule.

Here are some more rules to try:

- Every word has to start with the same letter. ("Tim takes two tests tomorrow.")
- All the words need to share the same vowel. ("Bob got on top of Bo's roof.")
- The sentence must contain two words that are anagrams—words with the same letters in a different order. ("It's easier to listen if you are silent.")

Idea: Challenge your family to come up with creative rules. ("The sentence contains two adjectives and at least one word with three syllables.") ■

What's your opinion?

A family debate can teach your youngster valuable communication skills like staying on topic and including important details. Try these steps for hosting a debate at your house.

1. Agree on a subject. An easy way to start is with a "Which is better?" question.

For example, "Which is better: renting a movie or watching it in a theater?" or "Which is better on pizza: meat or vegetables?"

2. Choose a moderator. This person reminds everyone to stick to the question, take turns, and avoid interrupting.

3. Start talking. Your child can begin by sharing her opinion and giving an explanation for it ("The theater is better

because of the big screen"). When she is finished, the next person gives her arguments ("Renting a movie is better because it's cheaper"). ■



OUR PURPOSE

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

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