

Reading Connection

INTERMEDIATE EDITION

Working Together for Learning Success

September 2011

Holyoke Public Schools
Curriculum Department

Book Picks

■ *A Dog's Life*

What does a stray dog think about? Ann Martin's story is told from the viewpoint of a dog named Squirrel. As a puppy, he became separated from his mother. Now he must search for a permanent home—while avoiding many dangers along the way.



■ *10 Explorers Who Changed the World*

The focus is on adventure in this book by Clive Gifford. Cartoon illustrations accompany biographies of well-known explorers like Christopher Columbus, Ferdinand Magellan, and others. (Also available in Spanish.)



■ *The Grand Plan to Fix Everything*

Moving to India puts 11-year-old Dini one giant step closer to meeting her movie idol Dolly Singh. But when Dolly quits acting, Dini must make a plan to convince her to return to film-making. A fun blend of humor and culture by Uma Krishnaswami.

■ *Jacob Wonderbar and the Cosmic Space Kapow*

Jacob's knack for finding trouble on Earth is nothing compared to what happens when he and his buddies go into space. They get chased by pirates, are stranded on strange worlds, and may have caused a huge explosion. Humorous science fiction by Nathan Bransford.



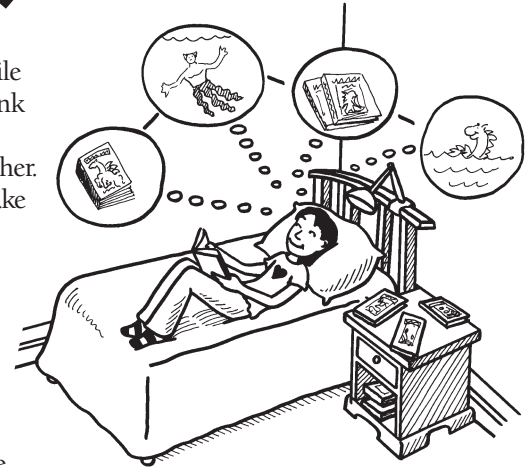
Think while you read

Good readers connect what they already know with what they read. While your child enjoys a story, she might think about her own life, another book, or what's happening in the world around her. Ask questions like these to help her make connections and improve her reading comprehension skills.

How does the story remind you of your life?

Your youngster can use her experiences to understand a book. For example, *Ella Enchanted* (Gail Carson Levine) might make her think of a time she had to do something she didn't enjoy. Did she feel like Ella, who is under a magic spell that makes her obedient at all times? Ask your child to share or write down her personal connections.

How is this story like another? Perhaps a book's plot or theme reminds your youngster of a story she has read before. Comparing two books, like *The Water Horse* (Dick King-Smith) and *Aquamarine* (Alice Hoffman), can help her understand them more deeply. She might point out that both are fantasy tales about legendary water creatures. Then,



encourage her to take her thinking a step further and figure out the common themes (survival, friendship).

How is the story related to real-world issues? When your child reads a book that addresses a topic (civil rights), suggest that she focus on how the story is relevant today. For example, the characters in *Remember Little Rock* (Paul Robert Walker) and *Flygirl* (Sherri L. Smith) experience discrimination. Your youngster might think about people in today's world who are treated unfairly, or how school rules help protect everyone's rights. ■

Keep reading front and center

As your youngster eases into the new school year, here are some ways that he can make reading a priority:

- Have him write down titles of books he'd like to read. (Friends and teachers can offer recommendations.) He might collect the titles in a notebook, on a whiteboard, or on the computer.
- Encourage your child to hang around with friends who love books. They can read together in their spare time.
- Remind him to use his planner or calendar. In addition to keeping track of assignments and tests, suggest that he schedule time to visit the library and to read on his own every night. ■



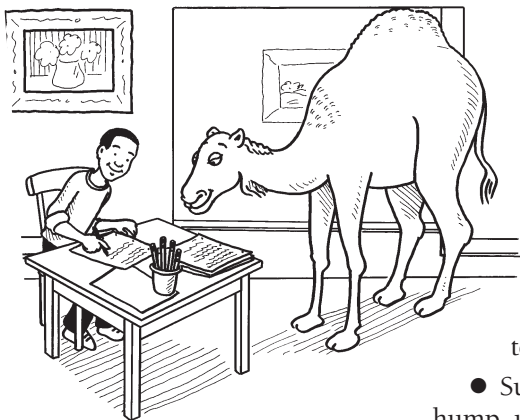
Beginnings and endings

The way your child begins and ends a writing assignment can make a big difference in his finished product. Help him create a good first—and last—impression with these suggestions.

Attention-grabbing introductions

A powerful beginning pulls the reader in. Your youngster might:

- Kick off with a question. “Did you ever wonder why camels have humps?”
- Use an interesting fact. “Camels can close their noses to block out sand.”



- Set a scene. “A line of camels marches across the desert. The air is dry and hot, and there’s no water in sight.”

Memorable conclusions

The ending should wrap things up in a way the reader will remember. A good conclusion shows how all the information in a paper fits together. Here are some possibilities:

- Summarize the main points. “Its large hump, unusual nose, and big feet make the camel the best transportation through the desert.”
- Echo the introduction. “A camel isn’t just interesting to look at. Its unique features help people travel in a hot, dry climate.”
- Close with instructions. “If you visit the desert, take a ride on a camel. He may look funny, but his hump, nose, and feet will get you where you need to go.”



Make a list, write a poem

Your child can learn to describe a topic thoroughly by writing a “list poem.” It’s just what it sounds like: a list of words and phrases that go together to make a poem.

First, have your youngster pick a person, an animal, a place, or a thing for the title of her poem (“My Cat,” “The Library,” “A Rainy Day”). Next, she can brainstorm interesting words and phrases that describe the title and list them underneath. Encourage her to pick each word carefully. Finally, she might wrap up her poem with the title as the last line.

Example:

A Rainy Day
Drips, drops,
sprinkles
Gray sky
Dark clouds
Lightning flashes
Thunder booms
Clouds burst
open
A rainy day.



Variation: Think of a topic together, and take turns adding lines to your poem.



Parent 2 Parent

Speaking of reading...

Last year my son started reading more advanced books in school. I recognized some of the titles from when I was a child, and others were new to me.

I leafed through one that he was finished with, and I got hooked! What I didn’t realize was that reading the same book as Jonas would give us something new to talk about. We discussed our favorite characters and the best parts of the story.

Now we try to read a book together about once a month. We take turns picking a title, and then we check out two copies from the library. When we’re both finished, we sit at the kitchen table with a snack and talk about the story. Sometimes we find discussion questions online, usually on the book publisher’s website. Since we started this tradition, Jonas reads more, and our conversations have become more interesting!



A balancing act

Q My daughter likes to spend time online reading blogs and writing messages to friends. Does this count as reading and writing?

A All types of reading and writing have benefits, whether your youngster does them electronically or with print. Checking out the latest blog posts introduces new ideas while building comprehension and vocabulary skills. Writing messages to friends strengthens communication skills.

Help your daughter become a well-rounded reader and writer by setting limits on screen time (TV,

computer, and video games). Encourage her to balance online with print activities by providing newspapers and magazines and playing writing games like Hangman or Mad Libs as a family.

When your child does go online, be sure she visits safe, appropriate sites. Her school website might contain educational links, or you can ask her teacher for suggestions.



OUR PURPOSE

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

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