

INTERMEDIATE EDITION Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

November 2010

Batavia City School District
Reading Department

Book Picks



■ *Smart Dog*

Sherlock is a talking, computer-

using dog on the run from scientists who want to study his brain. Amy is a fifth-grader struggling with a school bully. The two join forces to solve their problems in this humorous fantasy by Vivian Vande Velde.



■ *The Time Machine*

What will life be like in the future? In H. G. Wells's science fiction classic, a man travels in a time machine. He discovers a society without disease, poverty, or war—but the people have also lost the special qualities that make each one unique. (Also available in Spanish.)

■ *Almost Astronauts*

In the 1960s, you had to be a man to become an astronaut. That didn't stop the "Mercury 13" women from trying. Tanya Lee

Stone's true story tells of the struggle that led to American women going into space nearly 20 years later.

■ *Big Nate:*

In a Class by Himself

Nate has a lot of confidence. After all, his fortune cookie said that he will "surpass all others." But every time he tries to outdo his classmates, something goes hilariously wrong. Will his day get better, or is he doomed to detention? Find out in this book by Lincoln Peirce.



Nonfiction fun

Juggling, trains, knights... if your youngster wants to read about a particular topic, he can find a nonfiction book about it. And when he reads nonfiction for fun, he's building skills that will help him understand textbooks and do school assignments. Here are ideas for sparking his interest.

Follow directions. How-to books let your youngster practice reading and following instructions while he learns something new. Encourage him to read all the steps carefully before he starts a task—and then follow them as he goes along. For example, he might build something (a bird feeder, a mini-greenhouse) after reading *Steven Caney's Ultimate Building Book*. Or he could try juggling—look for *Juggling for the Complete Klutz* by John Cassidy and B. C. Rimbeaux.

Research a topic. Encourage your child to become the family expert on a topic, and he'll build research skills that can help with essays and reports. Have him choose a subject that interests him (trains, pyramids), and let family



members submit questions to him. He can search for the answers in nonfiction books or encyclopedias or on Web sites.

Explore "extras." Your child will get used to textbook features like glossaries, charts, and maps by seeing them regularly in other nonfiction books. Help him find books with a variety of elements—he might try a DK Eyewitness book such as *Knight* or *Forensic Science*. Ask him how the graphics add to the text. For instance, a timeline might help him put the historical events a book describes in context. ■

Write about a hobby

Hobbies offer plenty of opportunities for your child to stretch his writing muscles. Suggest these three ways:

- Perhaps your youngster enjoys painting pottery or decorating cakes. She can photograph her finished products and write descriptions of them. Encourage her to be specific (include materials, colors) so she'll learn to use details in her writing.
- Suggest that your child create a monthly newsletter for family and friends about her favorite sports teams. She can practice summarizing by writing a few sentences about each game she watches.
- A youngster who loves the outdoors might keep a nature journal. She'll learn to record observations as she tracks seasonal changes ("Our tree is completely red now") or notes animal behavior ("The geese flew in a V shape"). ■



Online reading and writing

Computers and MP3 players are tools that children love—and they can motivate your youngster to read and write. Try these tips.

Magazines. Many online magazines encourage kids to read articles and write responses. This can teach your child to use information from her reading to support what she writes. For example, at www.odysseymagazine.com, she



might read about a mysterious space object and then send in her ideas for what it could be.

Stories. Let your youngster download audiobooks to enjoy on a computer or an MP3 player. (Check your public library's Web site or www.childrensbooksonline.org.) Encourage her to follow along in the print version as she listens—she'll learn new words by hearing and seeing them. *Idea:* Suggest that your child write her own story and record it as a podcast. She can create MP3 files for free at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net>. ■

Fun with Words

Improv night

Turn the whole family into storytellers with this activity that will build your child's language skills.

Ask your youngster to write imaginary story characters (duck, superhero) on 10 slips of paper and place them into a bag. Have her fill a second bag with 10 settings (restaurant, playground) and a third bag with problems that characters might face (flat tire, don't know the language).

To play, have your child draw a slip from each bag and begin telling a story using the ideas. For example,



if she picks "duck," "restaurant," and "don't know the language," she might say, "Gee, I'm hungry, but I can't read this menu." Then, other family members add to the story. You might respond, "I'm sorry. Let me get someone who speaks duck." The goal of improv is to be funny and keep the action moving smoothly. So everyone has to listen carefully to what others say and play along based on what pops into their minds.

When you're finished with one scene, draw new slips and play again. ■



Parent 2 Parent

Graphic novels

My son Thomas used to avoid reading. But then his cousin came for a sleepover and brought a graphic-novel version of *The Boxcar Children*.

I'd never seen a graphic novel before. It looked kind of like a comic book, with drawings and balloons for the characters' lines. Thomas really enjoyed it, so I asked his teacher if graphic novels counted as "real" books. Mr. Brooks told me that all reading is good practice.

Since then, Thomas has collected an entire shelf of graphic novels. All of that practice seems to have made him more comfortable with reading, because lately he has been reading more regular books, too. In fact, he liked the graphic-novel version of *The Call of the Wild* so much that he went to the library and checked out the original version to read! ■



Other Picks

SOFTWARE

■ Bonnie's Bookstore

Click on letter tiles to form words in this storybook-themed game. Your child can choose to race the clock or play with a limited number of turns. Bonus tiles, "writer's blocks," and three levels of play add to the fun. *PopCap Games*

■ I Spy Fantasy

Solve riddles and search for hidden items on an alien planet, in an underwater cavern, and in a sandcastle. This game, like the "I Spy" book series, will build your youngster's observation skills and boost her memory and thinking. *Scholastic*



WEB SITES

■ WayBack

This Web site takes readers on a trip through history. Your youngster will find articles about U.S. presidents, the first airplanes, and civil rights activists. Children are also encouraged to enjoy offline activities such as exploring your family history and planning a reunion. <http://pbskids.org/wayback>

■ National Geographic Kids

Visitors to this National Geographic Web site can read news and see photographs of animals, people, and places around the globe. Articles cover cultures, conservation, space exploration, scientific discoveries, and more. <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com>



OUR PURPOSE

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

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