

# Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

January 2013



## Book Picks

### ■ Sophie the Awesome

Sophie knows her life would be great if she could show people how awesome she is. But her humorous stunts lead to trouble, and it's an unexpected rescue that finally earns her the title of "Sophie the Awesome." The first book in the Sophie series by Lara Bergen. (Also available in Spanish.)



### ■ Liar & Spy

Georges thinks it will be fun when his only friend, Safer, invites him to join a spy club. But as plans to observe their mysterious neighbor become dangerous, Georges isn't sure he can trust Safer. A tale about friendship by Newbery Medal-winning author Rebecca Stead.

### ■ Guys Read: The Sports Pages

This collection, edited by Jon Scieszka, includes short stories by children's authors and nonfiction from famous athletes. Read about unusual baseball superstitions, the case of the missing trophy, the life of hockey player Dustin Brown, and more. From football to track to mixed martial arts, there's something for every sports fan.



### ■ Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook

Anne Mazer and Ellen Potter share tips and stories to inspire young writers. Written in a friendly question-and-answer format, the book includes advice about writing "ugly" first drafts, bringing characters to life, creating suspense, and keeping a journal.



## Reading resolutions

Here's a New Year's resolution that's fun and rewarding to stick with: read more! Have your child try these tips for a year full of reading.

**Read a "mile."** There are 5,280 feet in a mile. How long will it

take your youngster to read that many pages? He can resolve to read a certain number of pages each day and keep track of his daily page count on a calendar. You might celebrate with a trip to the bookstore when he reaches  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile (1,320 pages),  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile (2,640 pages), and  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile (3,960 pages). *Variation:* Work toward this goal as a family, and combine your totals.

**Explore new genres.** Encourage your child to branch out. If he normally reads mysteries, for example, he could try science fiction or historical fiction. He might aim to read a book from a different genre each month.



**Get to know an author.** Have your youngster list several books by a favorite author and check off each one as he finishes it. When he has read every book on his list, ask him to tell you about the one he liked best. *Idea:* Help him explore the author's website to learn more.

**Watch less, read more.** This year, your youngster could spend more time reading than he spends watching TV. Ask him to track his time for both activities on a calendar. (He might draw a book for every 30 minutes spent reading and a TV for every 30 minutes he watches.) At the end of each month, he can see how he did. ■

## What's on a map?

Knowing how to "read" symbols that stand for words is an important literacy skill. Here are ways your youngster can use maps to practice reading symbols:



- Cover up the key on a map. Point to a symbol, and ask your child to guess what it represents. For instance, a star probably stands for a capital city. She can check the key to see if she was right and then pick a symbol for you to guess.

- Suggest that your youngster draw a map of a familiar place (your neighborhood, her school). She could come up with symbols to represent different map elements, like a slide for a playground or a desk for a classroom. Then, have her make a key to show what each symbol stands for.

*Idea:* Look for symbols everywhere you go, and ask your child to figure out what they mean (fork and knife = restaurant, suitcase = baggage claim). ■

# Reports that stand out

Finding a fresh, creative angle can turn an ordinary writing assignment into a fun project. Suggest these approaches to get your youngster motivated—and see how her enthusiasm shows in her work!

## Create a list

Your child might list 10 unusual facts to include in a report. For instance, she could call her paper, "Ten Facts to Know About Robotics" or "Ten Ways Frogs Are Fascinating," and write a paragraph or section about each fact on her list.



## Focus on characters

Before your youngster begins her next book report, she might make a "who's who" describing each character's role in the story. Example: "Dorothy Gale is taken to Oz by a tornado. She makes unusual friends on her way to meet a wizard." She can refer to her descriptions as she writes her book report.

## Ask questions

What does your child wonder about the topic she has been assigned? Encourage her to write questions before she starts ("Why did Amelia Earhart want to fly?" "How did she learn to fly?"). As she does research, she can jot down the answers. Afterward, she can use her notes to write the report. ■



## Backward spelling



Your youngster can practice spelling and creative thinking by playing these two "backward" games.

1. Write the letters of a well-known word in reverse order on a piece of paper. For example, "freeze" would be "ezeerf." Ask your child to try sounding out the backward word. Then, he can give the word a silly definition. Example: "Ezeerf: The sound screeching tires make." Next, let him write a backward word, and you make up a definition.



2. Take turns reading a backward word to each other and trying to figure out what it is. Start with familiar ones, such as your names. Tip: Write the letter sounds you hear, then reverse the letters to discover the word. ■

### OUR PURPOSE

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

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## Discover biographies

Biographies are like people—no two are alike. Your child can try the following ideas for learning about the lives of famous folks:



- Reading a biography can be a fun way to explore a school subject further. If your youngster is studying physical science, for example, encourage him to read biographies of scientists who came up with theories about force, motion, and energy. Or if he's learning about a particular country in social studies, let him look for biographies of famous people who lived there. He'll get an inside look at different aspects of life in that country.
- The story of a person's life is often told in chronological order. Suggest that your child make a timeline to help him keep track of events as he reads. He can write each event on a sticky note and arrange them in order on a piece of paper. Putting events in sequence can strengthen his reading comprehension. ■



## Table talk

**Q** When I try to start a dinner conversation with my daughter, I get one-word responses. Any suggestions?

**A** Conversations improve your child's vocabulary, which can make her a better reader and writer. And the dinner table is a great place to start.

Try asking open-ended questions—ones that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer. Also, be specific. Instead of asking, "What did you do today?" you could say, "What game did you play in gym?" You might also have



everyone share their favorite moment of the day. In general, try to keep the conversation light and friendly, which can make your youngster more likely to talk.

Another idea is to make a dinner conversation kit. Have family members write questions or topics on separate index cards, and keep the cards in a recipe box on the table.

Examples: "Which zoo animal would make the coolest pet?" "What would life be like if we didn't have electricity?" Take turns drawing a card and using it to start a discussion. ■