

# Home & School

## Working Together for School Success

### CONNECTION®

March 2016

Nordstrom Elementary School  
Debbie Grove, Principal



## SHORT NOTES

### Car chats

If you carpool, your child's conversations with the other kids can shed light on what's happening at school or with activities. Later, use what you heard to start a conversation. ("You mentioned something about a new science club. Is that an activity you'd be interested in?")

### Double-check homework

Looking over completed assignments carefully will help your youngster turn in her best work. She should check for skipped questions and math errors like adding numbers instead of subtracting them. Suggest that she pay attention to mistakes she often makes. Then, she could write reminders ("Put my name on my paper!") to post in her homework area.

### Which group am I in?

As your child gets older, you may notice him placing more emphasis on how he fits in with peers. Explain that it's natural for youngsters to form groups, but it's nice to be friends with a wide variety of people. For example, he might have friends in class, friends from soccer, and neighborhood friends.

### Worth quoting

"You can observe a lot just by watching." *Yogi Berra*

## JUST FOR FUN

**Q:** Can a kangaroo jump higher than the Empire State Building?

**A:** Of course. The Empire State Building can't jump!



## In real life: Beyond screen time

Today's children—and parents—are spending more and more time in front of computers, tablets, smartphones, and TVs. And that means fewer opportunities to interact as a family. Try these steps for cutting back on screen time and increasing the amount of time you enjoy together.

### 1. Track habits

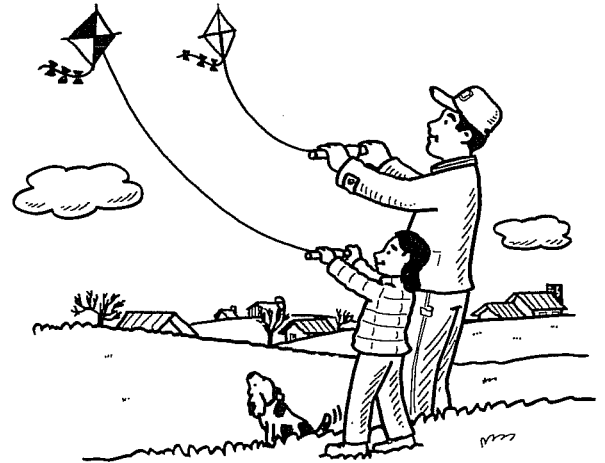
A little screen time here and there really adds up. For one week, have each person carry a small notebook to log usage. Every bit counts—your youngster might write "Music video on laptop, four minutes," and you could write "Facebook on phone, two minutes."

### 2. Set ground rules

Share your logs to see how you spent your screen time. Then, come up with rules to help you cut back, and ask your child to write them down. Her rules might include doing homework first, turning off screens an hour before bed, and not using devices in the car. A whole-family rule could be no screens during meals.

### 3. Brainstorm alternatives


Together, think of screen-free activities for home and on the go. *Examples:* Fly kites, play hangman on restaurant napkins, read aloud to each other from magazines in the doctor's office. *Tip:* Post the list. Have your child refer to it regularly—and add ideas to it, too.♥



## RE + MANIA


Encourage your youngster to explore word parts and sounds by making his own *rebuses*, or puzzles that use pictures, symbols, and letters to represent words and phrases.

Take turns making rebuses for each other to figure out. For instance:



 +  = tree house

 +  + U = I love you

Suggest that your youngster say words aloud to get ideas. He will hear word parts that may help, such as *arrow* in *wheelbarrow*:

 + B + →

Mention that he can subtract letters, too! What does he think this one means?

 - s + 

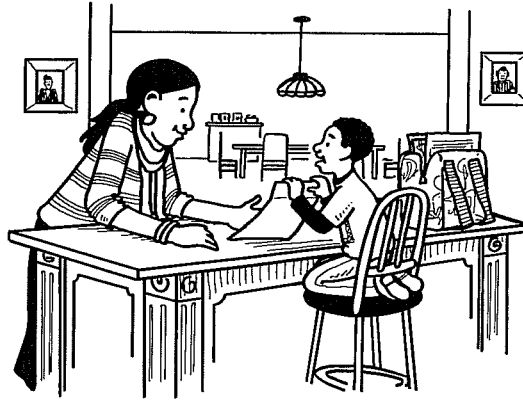
Answer: unlock



# How to talk about report cards

Report cards are one way that teachers communicate with parents about how their youngsters are doing. Use these ideas to discuss grades with your child.

**Start out positive.** First, ask your youngster to tell you about his report card. Have him show you something he is proud of, such as maintaining a good grade in writing or bringing up his social studies mark. Then, point out something positive you noticed.



## Focus on the future.

If your child gets a low grade, or a grade that drops from last quarter, discuss ways he could improve. He may need to get help from his teacher, or he might have to put in more study time. Pay attention to effort grades, too. Maybe your youngster's math grade stayed the same

but his effort grade went up. He'll appreciate hearing, "You're really trying in math. Keep up the good work."

*Note:* Avoid paying your child or giving him prizes for grades. Instead, help him focus on the built-in rewards of doing his best. ("Your reading grade improved—soon you'll be able to read that new series you saw at the library!")♥

## Q & A Understanding state tests

**Q:** My daughter will be taking "performance-based" tests this month. What are these, and how can I help her prepare?

**A:** These tests ask students to perform tasks based on information they're given. For instance, your daughter may have to read a graph, answer questions about it, and then create her own graph. Or she might need to read two nonfiction articles on the same topic and compare the facts in them.



The best way for your child to prepare is by working hard in school each day and by reading regularly for pleasure. If the teacher sends home a test review packet or a practice test, look it over together when your youngster has finished—this will give both of you an idea of what to expect.♥

## ACTIVITY CORNER

### Pin the magnet on the map

Where in the world is Iceland? How about South Africa? This version of Pin the Tail on the Donkey will help your youngster learn locations on a map.

Hang a world map on the refrigerator, and stand with your backs to it. One person names a continent or an ocean. Each player takes a turn closing her eyes, spinning around, and trying to place a refrigerator magnet on the correct location. *Variation:* Call out countries or states, and have players "pin" small sticky notes onto them.

Who came the closest? Let your child use a length of string or a ruler to measure the distance from each person's magnet to the place. Older students could use the map's scale to calculate how many miles away it is. The person who wins that round picks the next spot.♥



## PARENT TO PARENT

### Parent volunteering: A first-time experience

I recently changed to the second shift at work, and the first thing my son Tony said was that now I could be a classroom volunteer like some of his friends' parents. I figured it was too late in the year, but I sent a note to the teacher anyway. I was glad when he called and said he'd love to have my help.

It turns out that my ability to speak Spanish and my sewing skills have come

in handy. First, I worked with a group of Spanish-speaking students who are learning English. Now I'm sewing costumes for the class play.

Mr. Brown told me that even if my hours at work change again, he has ways for me to lend a hand.

Tony was happy to see me at school, and he and his classmates are excited about wearing the costumes in the play.♥



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# Reading Connection

Tips for Reading Success

Beginning Edition

March 2016

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Debbie Grove, Principal

## Book Picks

Read-aloud favorites

### ■ *Biscuit Finds a Friend*

(Alyssa Satin Capucilli)

In this adorable story for beginning readers, Biscuit the puppy befriends a lost baby duckling. Even after Biscuit helps him find his family, the little duck continues to follow his puppy friend. Part of the Biscuit series. (Also available in Spanish.)

### ■ *The Listening Walk*

(Paul Showers)

A girl takes a walk with her dad and enjoys all

the sounds of their neighborhood. From crickets to lawnmowers to woodpeckers, the book features many familiar sounds—and it just may inspire your family to go on a listening walk of your own.

### ■ *Before We Eat: From Farm to Table*

(Pat Brisson)



Food doesn't grow in a supermarket! Using simple language, this nonfiction book explains to children where food comes from.

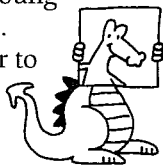
Your youngster will discover how farmers plant seeds, grow crops, and tend animals to give us fruit, vegetables, grains, and milk.

### ■ *How to Draw a Dragon*

(Douglas Florian)

"Dragons, when they wake, are grumpy, and their heads are rather bumpy." Through clever rhymes, this how-to book teaches young artists to draw dragons.

Your child will be eager to try his hand at drawing his own dragons after reading the book!



## Read with an eagle eye

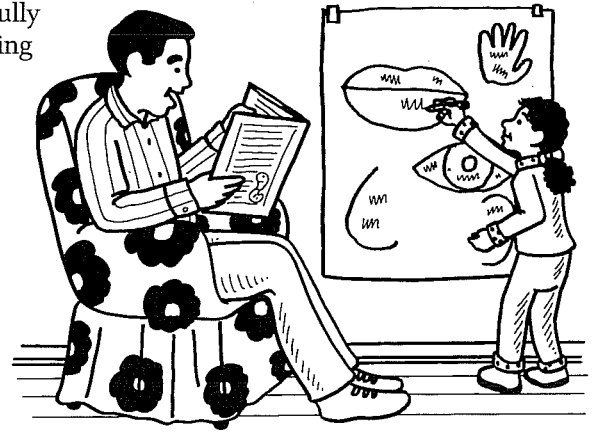
Close reading is reading carefully and thoughtfully—really thinking about what a passage says and what it means. Noticing and reflecting on the words an author chooses is one way for your youngster to practice reading closely.

### Senses

Which words or phrases appeal to your child's five senses? On a sheet of paper, have her draw a large eye, ear, mouth, nose, and hand to represent seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. As you read a book aloud, she can write words on the pictures to match the senses. For example, if she hears "bowls of spicy chili," she might write "spicy chili" on the mouth.

### Feelings

Your youngster can use clues from a story to tell how characters feel. Encourage her to listen for words that describe or hint at emotions. ("The bunny hopped in *delight*." "The queen *sighed*.") Then, ask her to act out each feeling. She might hop around to show the bunny's delight.



Can she explain why the character felt that way? ("The bunny was happy because she found a carrot.")

### Time and place

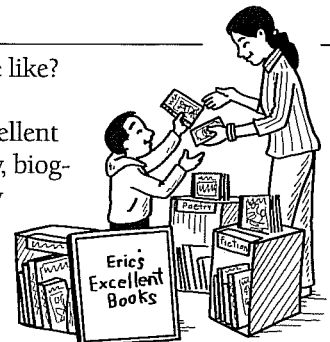
Authors add details to give readers a sense of when and where the story happens. A sentence like "Mornings were cold and dark now when she woke for school" suggests that it's winter. Read a book without showing your child the illustrations. Next, let her draw a picture of the setting. She could use details about the weather, clothing, and activities to imagine the time and place. ♥

## My own bookstore

If your child opened a bookstore, what would it be like? Suggest that he find out by creating a pretend one.

He could start by making a store sign ("Eric's Excellent Books") and arranging books by type (fiction, poetry, biographies), topic (animals, sports), or alphabetically by author. Then, he could add price tags ("50 cents") and write a calendar of events ("Story Hour").

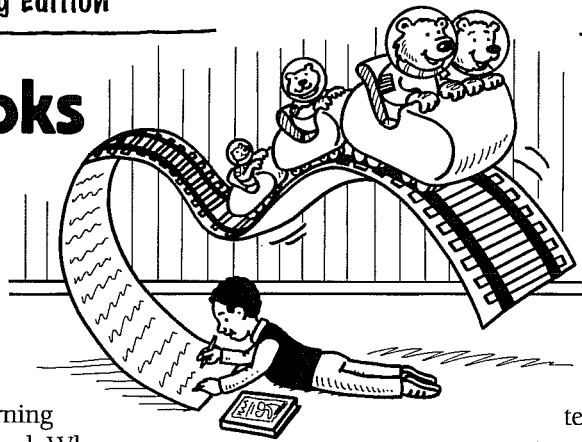
Now it's time for family members to shop! Ask your youngster to recommend books—he'll practice summarizing stories and giving opinions. Finally, "buy" a book with play money so he can make change. *Idea:* Have him hold story time. As he reads aloud, he'll work on reading smoothly and with expression. ♥



# Write about books

Books can inspire your child to write. Suggest these ideas for having fun with writing after he reads fiction or nonfiction.

**Hold a quiz show.** Read a book to your family. Have your youngster write questions about it on separate index cards. Spread them out facedown, and take turns pointing to one. Your child plays “host,” turning over the cards and reading the questions aloud. Whoever correctly answers the most chooses a new book to read. Then, let your youngster write new questions, and play again.



**Continue a series.** What if the Berenstain Bears went to Mars, or Frog and Toad rode a roller coaster? Your child can use the familiar plot format from a series he loves to write the next installment. For example, he may know the bear cubs always run into a problem and their parents teach a lesson about good character to help solve it.

**Write an argument.** Encourage your youngster to look critically at an author’s decision or a piece of information in a book. Maybe he thinks Jack should not have climbed up the beanstalk, or perhaps he believes Pluto should be considered a planet again. He could explain his viewpoint and give reasons to support it.♥

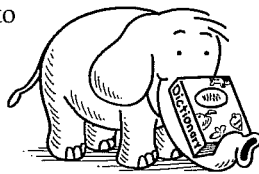
## Fun with Words

### Dictionary games

When your youngster is familiar with the dictionary, she’ll be comfortable looking up words. Use a children’s dictionary to play these games.

#### Word detective

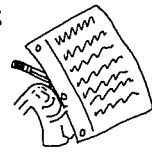
Together, flip to any page. Take turns secretly choosing a word for the other player to guess.



Give clues like “I start with E. I am an animal. I have three syllables.” After your child finds the word (*elephant*), she can read the definition. She’ll discover that a dictionary also gives a word’s part of speech and shows how to pronounce it.

#### Speed search

Give your youngster practice using the dictionary’s *guide words* with this game. Show her the words at the top of the page, and explain that all the words on a page fall between those two words in ABC order. Then, browse through the dictionary and pick a random word (*lilac, pumpkin*) for her to find. When she spots your word, help her read the entry. Next, she can give you a word to locate.♥

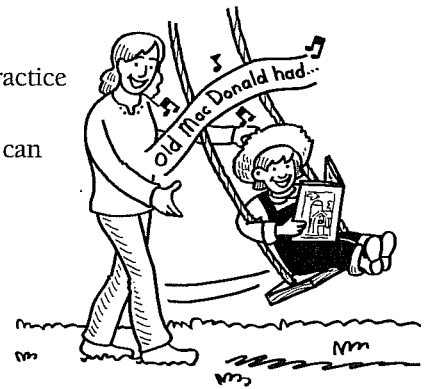


### Sing, read, and write

You can use songs to help your youngster practice reading and writing. Here’s how:

- Check out library books of songs. Your child can sing along while you run your finger under the words in a book, such as *The Wheels on the Bus* (Paul O. Zelinsky) or *Old MacDonald Had a Farm* (Salina Yoon). Look back through the pages, and ask her to point out words she knows like *round* or *cow*.

- Encourage your youngster to create her own songbook. Have her write each line of a favorite song on a separate sheet of paper. She could illustrate the lyrics and staple the pages together. Or she might make up her own version (“The Wheels on the Bike” instead of “The Wheels on the Bus”). Then, let her turn the pages as you sing the song together.♥



### Q&A Spelling confusion

**Q** My son often spells words in unusual ways. He’ll write *laeck* instead of *lake* or *wight* for *white*. Should I be concerned?

**A** Probably not. You can ask his teacher whether his spelling is on track, but the examples you gave actually show that your son knows a lot about how words are spelled.

When a child first learns a spelling pattern, he might try to use it every time he hears the sound it

represents. Your son knows that a vowel plus silent e (*lake*) makes a long vowel sound—he just forgot that a consonant goes between them. He also learned that *ck* sounds like *k* and *igh* makes a long *i* sound.

Teachers call this “using but confusing”—and they look at youngsters’ misspellings to decide what to teach next. If his teacher isn’t concerned, then you can look forward to seeing steady improvement in his spelling. In the meantime, reading regularly will expose him to words that are spelled correctly.♥



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## Book Picks

### ■ *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Brian Selznick)

Twelve-year-old Hugo is determined to find out how his dead father, a broken robot, and an old toy-maker are connected. But while he does, he must keep a secret—he lives alone in a Paris train station. Will Hugo be able to repair the robot without getting caught? A mystery novel with stunning illustrations. (Also available in Spanish.)

### ■ *Parrots Over Puerto Rico*

(Susan L. Roth and Cindy Trumbore)



This is the true story of one of the world's most endangered birds, the Puerto Rican parrot. Your child can read about the history of the island, learn how humans have affected the parrots, and discover what scientists are doing to save the beautiful birds.

### ■ *The Tapper Twins Go to War (With Each Other)*

(Geoff Rodkey)



Twins Claudia and Reese Tapper are waging a prank war against one another. The twins each tell their side of the hilarious story through emails, interviews, cartoons, text messages, and chat logs. When the dust settles, does anybody really win? The first book in the Tapper Twins series.

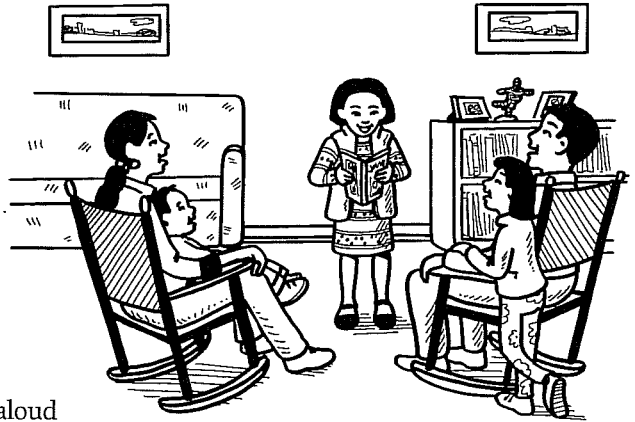
### ■ *Making Books That Fly, Fold, Wrap, Hide, Pop Up, Twist & Turn*

Your child can learn to create home-made books with this guide. Eighteen projects include books with secret compartments, books made into scrolls, and pop-up books. Features diagrams and photographs, along with suggestions for writing and illustrating each type of book.



## The road to fluency

When your youngster reads fluently, she recognizes words without much effort, understands the material, and uses good expression. Reading this way will help her do better in all subjects. Here are fun suggestions for building fluency by reading and rereading books and other material.



### Be a comedian

Have your youngster read aloud from a joke book, looking up unfamiliar words so she won't stumble over them and so she "gets" the humor. She can rehearse until she's comfortable and then hold a stand-up comedy night where she reads favorite jokes to friends or relatives.

she's not satisfied with. *Idea:* Let her entertain your family by playing the recording at dinner or in the car.

### Record a story

Ask your child to read a short story aloud a few times, and watch for places where the meaning might change if she reads with different expression. For example, should "That's just fantastic!" sound enthusiastic or sarcastic? Understanding the passage will determine her tone. Next, record her reading the story. She could listen and re-record any parts

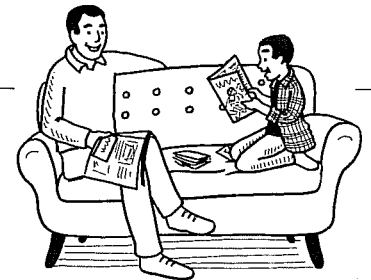
### Do impressions

Together, list six characters your whole family is familiar with. *Examples:* Scooby-Doo, the Queen of Hearts, Little Orphan Annie. Write each character's name on a separate index card and stack the cards facedown. Now, pick a magazine or newspaper article your child can read. Take turns drawing a card and reading a paragraph in that character's voice. When all the cards are used, start over with a new article.

## Writing together

Turn writing into a family affair with these activities:

- Write about a simple activity or task you do regularly—it can be something you like or don't like. Each person chooses his own topic, perhaps playing hopscotch, riding the school bus, or washing the dishes. Swap papers, and see what you learn about each other's days.
- Let your child choose a sentence from a magazine, and have family members each put it into a story. The twist: One person has to use the sentence as his opening, another has to make it the ending, and the others have to put it in the middle. Read your stories aloud. How did the placement of the sentence change the plot?



## Research strategies

Knowing how to find information is a skill that will serve your child well throughout school—and in his career and life. These tips can help him find and keep track of facts when he writes reports.

**Know what's inside.** Will a book, an article, or a website contain the facts your youngster needs? Have him list information he wants. For a report on hippopotamuses, his list might include “diet,” “habitat,” and “lifespan.” Then, he could check his list against the table of contents or index in each book or use the search feature on each website.



**Organize before taking notes.** Have your child set aside a separate sheet of paper for each category of facts and jot his notes on the appropriate sheet as he reads.

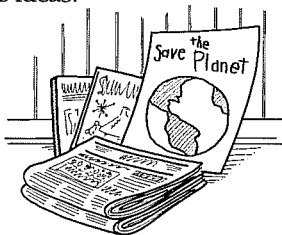
For instance, a report about a famous person may include sheets for “childhood,” “education,” and “accomplishments.” That way, his facts will already be sorted—and easy to find—when he’s ready to write.

*Tip:* Remind your youngster to use his own words when he takes notes. He should put quotes around any information he copies directly and cite the source. 📖

## Read and write for a cause

There are many reasons for your youngster to read and write. Here’s a good one: to make a difference in the world! Try these ideas.

**1.** Suggest that your child find an event your family can participate in. She could read neighborhood newsletters and bulletin boards to learn about a stream cleanup day or a race to raise money for cancer research. Remind her to write down the details, including the date, time, and location.



**2.** Give your youngster brochures or newsletters that your power or water company sends or the inserts that come in your bills. Based on what she reads, can she write up a plan for your family to use less energy or water?

**3.** Clip or print out news articles about issues she feels strongly about, such as animal rights or pollution. Then, encourage her to write a letter to the editor expressing her views and stating what she believes the community should do. 📧

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## Fun with Words

### Singular or plural?

Should that verb be singular or plural? If the subject of the sentence is a pronoun, it can be tricky for youngsters to decide. Play this game to help your child match pronouns with the correct verbs.

On separate index cards, you and your youngster should write:

- six singular pronouns, such as *I, she, he, you, everybody, someone*
- six plural pronouns like *we, they, few, many, several, both*
- six singular verbs, such as *loves, dances, or giggles*
- six plural verbs like *eat, swim, or tell*

*Hint:* Singular verbs end with *s*, and plural ones don’t—even though that might seem backward!

Place all the cards facedown in rows. Take turns flipping over two at a time. If you get a singular subject and a singular verb, use them in a sentence. (“Everybody loves chocolate.”) Keep the cards, and turn over two more. If the words don’t go together (“Everybody love”), flip them back over, and your turn ends.

When all the cards are used (or you can’t make any more sentences), the player with the most pairs wins. 📅



## Q&A

### Jog your memory

**Q** My son says it’s hard to remember information that he studies. Any suggestions that might help?

**A** Encourage your child to use memory strategies to remember facts. For example, he can try visual devices, like picturing a girl named Georgia swimming in the Atlantic to recall Georgia’s capital (Atlanta).

Also, have your youngster think up acronyms as memory aids, such as JEL for the three branches of government

(judicial, executive, legislative). Or he could link each word he needs to remember with a familiar item. For the presidents on Mt. Rushmore (Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, Lincoln), he might use favorite drinks—water, juice, root beer, and lemonade.

*Idea:* Suggest that he illustrate the memory devices and post them. Writing them out—and having them in view—are memory builders, too. 📅

