

Parent Support = Student Success

Experts agree: Showing support at home for your youngster's education leads to success in school and a good attitude toward learning. Here are important ways you can motivate your child to do well.



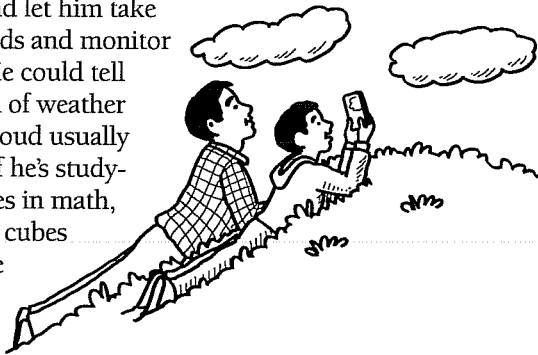
Talk about learning

Check backpacks

Taking an interest in what your youngster is learning at school shows him that you believe education is important. His backpack is full of clues. Go through it together, and look over papers and books he brings home. Focus on learning, while also keeping an eye on grades he's receiving. For example, ask him to read a poem he wrote or to explain how he solved a math problem. *Note:* Be sure to sign any required paperwork, and have him return it to his bag so he can hand it in on time.

Find real-world connections

Whether you're at home or out and about, look for activities that let your child make real-life connections to what he's studying in school. Say he's doing a weather unit in science. Go outside, and let him take photos of clouds and monitor the weather. He could tell you what kind of weather each type of cloud usually indicates. Or if he's studying solid shapes in math, see how many cubes and spheres he can spot on a walk.



Support homework

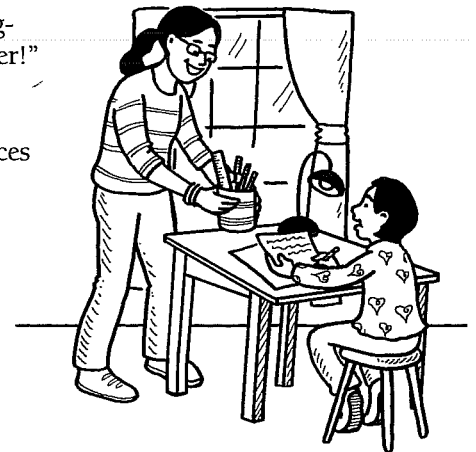
Be a resource

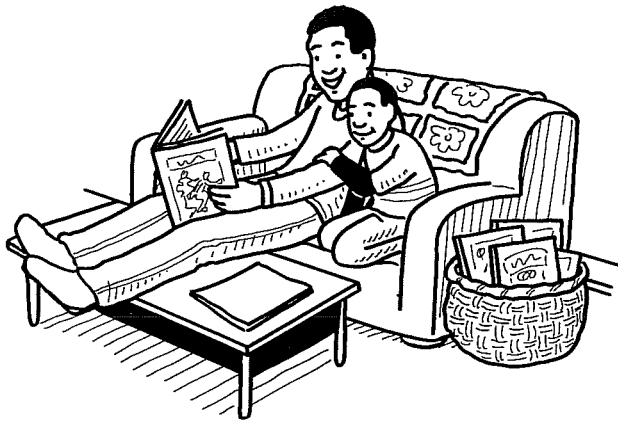
Ask your youngster to explain homework assignments to you. This will help her remember and focus on what to

do—plus, homework is a great springboard for discussions about school. If she gets stuck while she's working, ask questions to get her unstuck, rather than telling her the answers. Try: "Is there an example in your textbook that might give you a clue?" Also, check to make sure her homework is done each day, but don't correct it. Her teacher needs to see mistakes to find out what your child doesn't understand or where she needs extra help. Finally, when she studies for a test, offer to quiz her.

Set the stage

Show the entire family that homework is a priority. Together, find a spot away from distractions like the TV or siblings. It should have good lighting and be stocked with supplies (paper, pencils, calculator, dictionary). Then, let your youngster decorate a sign that says "Homework in progress. Talk to you later!" to post when she's working. *Tip:* Make sure electronic devices are silenced or in another room. If your child uses a device for homework, she should close unrelated windows and apps.





Create routines

Read aloud daily

Reading aloud to your youngster for at least 20 minutes every day is one of the most important keys to his success. Many parents read bedtime stories, but you could also read a wake-up story in the morning, hold a family read-aloud after dinner, and carry books in the car to read on the go. Choose a variety of reading materials, including fiction, nonfiction, children's magazines, and poetry.

Plan a healthy lifestyle

Routines that keep your child healthy also support academic achievement. If he is well rested, he'll be more likely to arrive at school ready to learn, so make sure he gets 9–11 hours of sleep. And good nutrition will give him the energy he needs to focus in class. Have him start each day with a healthy breakfast at home or in school. Regular physical activity—at least an hour a day—promotes good health, too. Take family bike rides, shoot baskets together at a playground, and set an example by regularly exercising yourself.

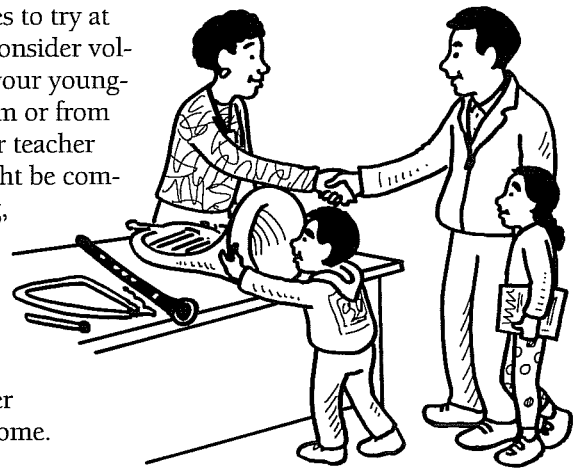
Communicate with the school

Stay in contact

Parent-teacher conferences allow you to sit down one-on-one with the teacher and talk about how to support your child's education. You can stay in touch between conferences, too, by sending notes or emails. If you have a concern about your youngster, ask for a time to meet or talk on the phone. *Tip:* It's nice to contact the teacher when things are going well, too. Sending a note about a classroom activity your child enjoyed or a positive comment she made about school is a good way to maintain a strong relationship.

Participate in events

Attend literacy nights, PTA or PTO meetings, math fairs, and special events to get to know school staff and learn information that can help you help your youngster. Introduce yourself to the media specialist, the school counselor, and the music teacher. Take notes about activities to try at home. Also, consider volunteering in your youngster's classroom or from home. Tell her teacher what you might be comfortable doing, such as reading one-on-one with students or making learning center materials at home.



The power of expectations

Children pick up on what parents expect from them—and they're likely to rise to the occasion. Try these suggestions for setting and communicating high, but reasonable, expectations for your youngster.

● **State your expectations.** You can be direct ("I expect you to finish homework before you get screen time") or indirect ("When you graduate from high school and go to college..."). Communicate your expectations regularly so your child knows them.

● **Be realistic.** Your youngster will be more apt to meet expectations if they're within her reach. Say several of her report



card grades dropped. It may be more reasonable to expect her to bring them up by one letter grade rather than two.

● **Make attendance a priority.** Let your child know that you expect her to attend school all day, every day, unless she's sick or there's a family emergency. Show her that you value attendance by scheduling vacations and, when possible, medical appointments outside of school hours.

Note: If you have more than one child, try to communicate high expectations suited to each of them.

Home & School CONNECTION®

Let's Play

It takes all kinds of words—big and small—to build a strong vocabulary. Enjoy these games and activities together as you help your youngster learn sight words, opposites, and more!



Sight-word hunt

Send your child on a scavenger hunt through picture books to grow his sight-word vocabulary. (Note: Sight words are ones that appear frequently like *a*, *for*, *now*, or *and*. For a list, look online or ask your youngster's teacher.)

You'll need six sticky notes per player and several picture books to share. Write a different sight word on each note. Then, divide the notes evenly among players. Each player tries to match the words on his notes with words in a book.



Stick the notes on the pages, and the first person to get rid of all his notes wins—and reads the words aloud. Make more notes, and play again.

Antonyms and synonyms

It's easier for your youngster to understand the meaning of a new word if she can relate it to a word she already knows. Play with *antonyms* (opposites) and *synonyms* (words with the same or similar meanings) to expand her vocabulary.

Think of a word your child uses often, such as *huge*. Then, take turns rolling a die. If you roll an even number (2, 4, 6), say an antonym for the word (*tiny*, *minuscule*, *small*). If you roll an odd number (1, 3, 5), say a synonym (*gigantic*, *enormous*, *big*). How many times can you go back and forth before you run out of words?

Alliteration alley

"Josh and Jamie did *jumping jacks* in the jungle!" Sentences with *alliteration*—or words that start with the same sound—

are fun to say and let your child use letter sounds to think of new words.

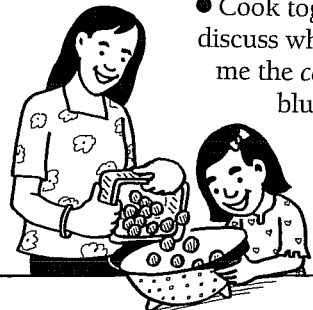
Have your youngster choose a letter (say, P). The first player gives a word beginning with the letter (*purple*). The second person adds a word that starts with the same sound (*purple pancakes*).

The next player adds another word (*peculiar purple pancakes*), and so on. A player is out when he cannot think of a new word or remember all the old ones. Words may be added in any order—at the beginning or end of the sequence or anywhere in the middle. The last person in the round gets to turn the words into a sentence. ("Purple pancakes are peculiar for penguins to prepare.")

Weave in words

The best way for your youngster to remember what new words mean is to hear them used in context. Everyday conversations offer an easy way to make this happen:

- In the car, talk about things you see, such as budding trees or tall buildings. ("Wow, look at the *buds*! It seems like just yesterday the trees were *bare*.")
- Cook together, and use new words to discuss what you're doing. ("Please hand me the *colander* so I can rinse the blueberries.")



- At bedtime, ask about your child's day and tell what happened during yours. ("I had a busy day at work—the store was *bustling* with customers. What was your day like?")

continued

The category game

Use familiar categories like sports, clothing, vehicles, and plants to help your youngster learn new words. Let her pick the categories, and then take turns calling out items that belong.

For example, sports words might include *baseball*, *hockey*, *lacrosse*, and *football*.

If your child struggles to come up with a word, give her hints. Say the category is plants. You could ask, "What's the name of the flower Grandma showed you in her yard last week?" The last person to come up with a word that fits picks the next category.

Idea: For a bigger challenge, make the categories more specific (sports that don't use a ball, plants we eat).



Vocabulary bingo

Your youngster can match words and definitions in this bingo game.

Have each player make a bingo card with four rows of four boxes each. Use your child's spelling or vocabulary lists, and write each word in any box on your card.

Let one person be the "caller." He uses a dictionary and reads the definitions of the words, one at a time, without revealing the words. Players

cover the correct word on their cards with a bingo chip or another marker (jelly bean, marshmallow). Be the first to fill four boxes across, down, or diagonally, and yell, "Word bingo!" Then, read your winning words aloud and say what they mean.

Pickup words

Your child uses a *faucet* every day—but does she know that's what it's called? This version of pickup sticks can teach her new terms.



You'll need 24 craft sticks and a marker or pen. On each stick, write the name of a household object that your youngster might not know. *Examples:* *grater*, *ottoman*, *duvet*. To play, drop the sticks into a heap. The first player tries to pick up one stick without moving any of the others. If she succeeds, help her read the word, and give hints for where to find the item. ("We put our feet on it when we sit on the couch.") Seeing the object after learning what it's called is a good way for her to remember the word.

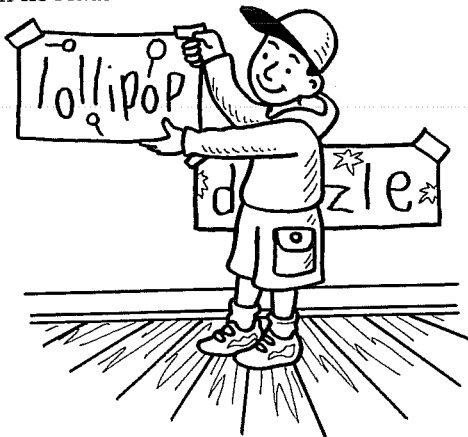
If a player moves another stick, her turn is over. Keep playing until all the sticks are gone. The player with the most sticks wins. *Note:* When no one can pick up a stick without disturbing the other ones, scatter them again.

My word wall

Stimulate your child's vocabulary and his creativity by creating a wall of words.

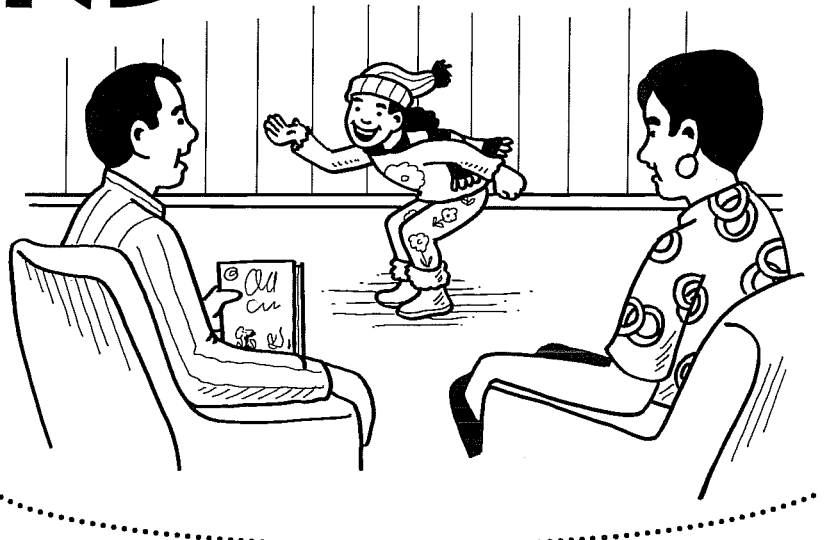
Together, look through a dictionary, and let him list words he likes. *Examples:* *dazzle*, *lollipop*, *whirl*. Read each definition together, and have him write the words in large letters on poster board. Then, suggest that he draw pictures or use stickers to illustrate the words' meanings. He might draw himself on a carnival ride and add arrows to show *whirl*. Hang the posters around his room. He will have eye-catching words to learn and enjoy!

Tip: Encourage your youngster to add new words to his wall when he reads.



TELLING AND WRITING STORIES

Get your child's story wheels spinning! With these ideas for telling and writing stories, you will spark her imagination as she builds oral language, fluency, and creative writing skills.



TALES TO TELL

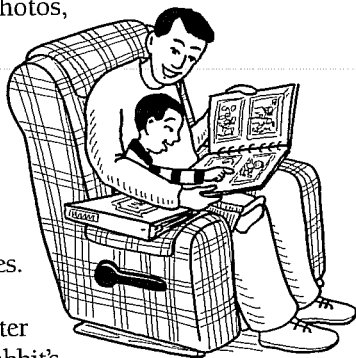
PICTURE-BOOK THEATER

Let your youngster warm up her storytelling muscles by acting out a favorite book. Start by reading the book aloud a few times. Then, have her ham it up! What voices, facial expressions, and gestures will she use to bring the characters to life? If she's reading *Go, Dog. Go!* (P. D. Eastman), she may pretend to be the skiing dog and say, "Do you like my hat?" *Idea:* Film her so she can watch and see parts she might want to change. When she's ready, she could tell her story to family members.

STORIES ALL AROUND

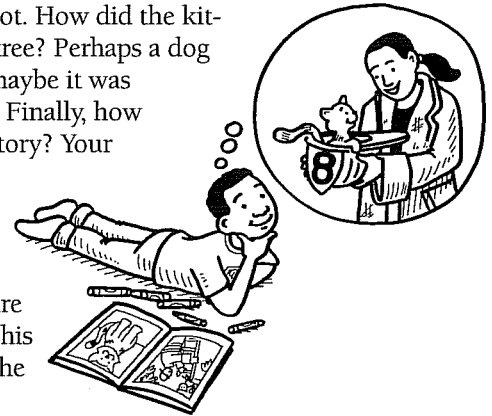
Storytelling can happen anytime, anywhere. Here are four opportunities.

1. While playing, ask your youngster to make up an adventure at his toy construction site or Lego fortress.
2. Snuggle up with family photos, and share stories about the memories they trigger.
3. Attend puppet shows, plays, or ballets, and let your child retell the story afterward.
4. Invent silly bedtime stories. Yours might feature a flying umbrella, while your youngster could tell about his stuffed rabbit's escapades in the forest.



COLORING-BOOK PROMPTS

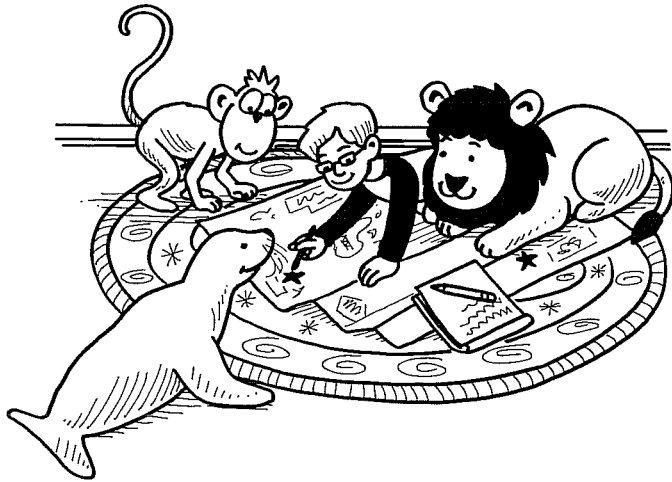
Relax together by coloring in coloring books. Then, use your pictures as story prompts. Say your child colors a picture of a firefighter saving a kitten stuck high in a tree. Whose point of view does he want to tell the story from—the firefighter's or the kitten's? How would his story change depending on which way he tells it? Next, he should imagine a plot. How did the kitten wind up in the tree? Perhaps a dog chased it there, or maybe it was looking for a home. Finally, how will he resolve his story? Your youngster may come up with a happy ending like "The kitten went to live at the fire station." As he tells his story, he can show the picture he colored.



ABC STORY

For this family storytelling activity, let your child print each letter of the alphabet on a separate index card. Shuffle the cards, and stack them facedown. The first person takes one and begins a story based on that letter. For X, she might say, "One day, a boy discovered a magical xyllophone." Lay the card faceup on the table. The next person draws a new letter, places it beside the first, and continues the story. For H, she could add, "The boy got on his horse to carry the xyllophone to town." Keep going until you've used 10 cards. The last person wraps up the tale. Then, choose a new letter, and start another story.

continued



STORIES TO WRITE

MAP ADVENTURES

Save maps from places you visit like the zoo, a state park, or a museum. When you get home, your youngster can write a story about his trip and use the map to keep it in sequence. First, have him trace his route with a crayon and add a star for each place you stopped. On a zoo map, he may star the petting zoo, the giraffe exhibit, and the lion's den. Next, ask your child to dictate or write a sentence or two about each stop. Remind him to use sequence words (*first, then, next, last*) to make his story flow well. "First, we stopped at the petting zoo. The goats smelled funny, and their coats were scratchy." Help him read his story aloud, pointing to the map for reference.

CHARACTER COMBOS

Suggest that your youngster write a "mash-up" story—combining characters from two different books. For instance,

she might have Amelia Bedelia throw a birthday party for Fancy Nancy. When your child has a rough draft, she can draw pictures to go with it. Encourage her to look at her drawings for details she could add to improve her tale. Perhaps she'll change "Amelia put icing on the cake" to be more descriptive: "Amelia put swirly pink icing on the three-layer cake." After she reworks her story, staple her pages and illustrations together to make a book.

MISSING PIECES

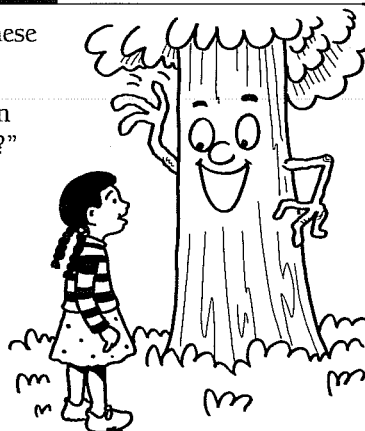
Laugh out loud—and help your youngster practice using parts of speech—with this silly Mad Libs-style game. Let him think of a story idea (an underwater adventure, a cookie theft). Then, each of you write your own fill-in-the-blank story on the topic, replacing each noun with a blank labeled *person, place, or thing*. Example: "One morning, _____ (*person*) woke up and got ready for his trip to _____ (*place*). When he arrived, he saw purple _____ (*things*) glowing in the water." Without giving away your stories, ask the other person to supply a noun for each blank ("I need a person's name, now a place," and so on). Trade papers, and read the funny tales aloud. *Idea:* Write new stories, leaving the verbs (action words) or the adjectives (describing words) blank.



FINDING INSPIRATION

Spark your youngster's imagination with these ideas for starting stories:

- Together, write 10–20 "what if" questions on slips of paper. Examples: "What if trees talked?" "What if butterflies were as big as cars?" Store the slips in a clean plastic jar. Your child can choose one when she wants to write.
- On walks, take turns dreaming up tales about things you see along the way. Maybe an invisible elephant dented that mailbox on the corner, for example. Help your youngster write the stories down when you get home.



- Mix up the cards from a *Memory* game. Have your child pick three at random—say a fish, an ice-cream cone, and a tricycle—and weave them into a story.

- List and number six problems that could make a good story. Examples:

1. Mysterious noise
2. Lost key
3. The grass turns blue

Let your youngster roll a die and write a tale matching the number she rolled (roll a 1, and write about a mysterious noise).

How to Navigate Nonfiction

Exploring a nonfiction book is like going on an expedition. There are places to visit, sights to see, and fascinating things to learn. Before your youngster embarks on her next nonfiction journey, suggest she chart her course with these tips and ideas.



Choose a destination

With fiction, your child starts at the beginning and reads to the end. But for nonfiction, he might jump around to look for specific information. Browsing through the table of contents will help him decide where to look. For example, if he's researching tornadoes in a book on extreme weather, the table of contents may steer him to a chapter titled "Mighty Twisters."

Idea: Before your youngster picks out a book, encourage him to jot down notes about what he wants to know. He could write, "Everyday life on a submarine," and then compare the tables of contents in various books to find the best fit.

Take a shortcut

Sometimes all your child wants is one specific fact. For a STEM research paper, perhaps she needs to know about the design of the sails used on Viking ships. A book's index will guide her to that information fast. It lists topics in alphabetical order, along with their page numbers. Your youngster

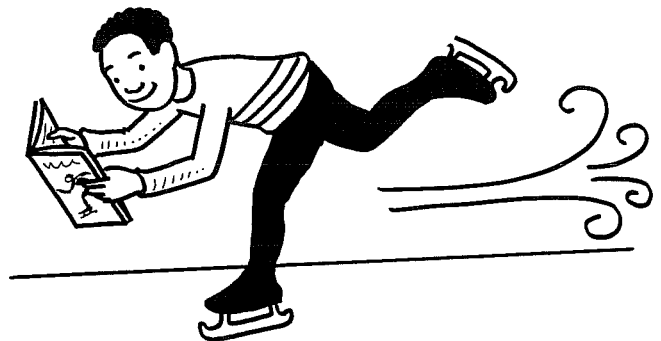
would flip to the index of a book about Vikings, skim down the entries to find *ships*, then to the sub-listing *sails*, and turn to the pages listed.

Idea: Practice using an index together by going on fact-finding missions. Browse a nonfiction book with an index, and name a fact covered. For instance,

you could ask her to find information on solar flares in a book about the sun. It's your child's mission to use the index and locate the fact. Then, let her send you on a fact-finding mission.

Follow an itinerary

Authors use headings and subheads (often a word or a short phrase) like signposts to guide readers to the text they want to find. Your youngster can read them first and jump to



the sections that interest him. If he wants to learn how to become a competitive speed skater, he might skim a biography of his skating hero to find headings and subheads about how that skater trained.

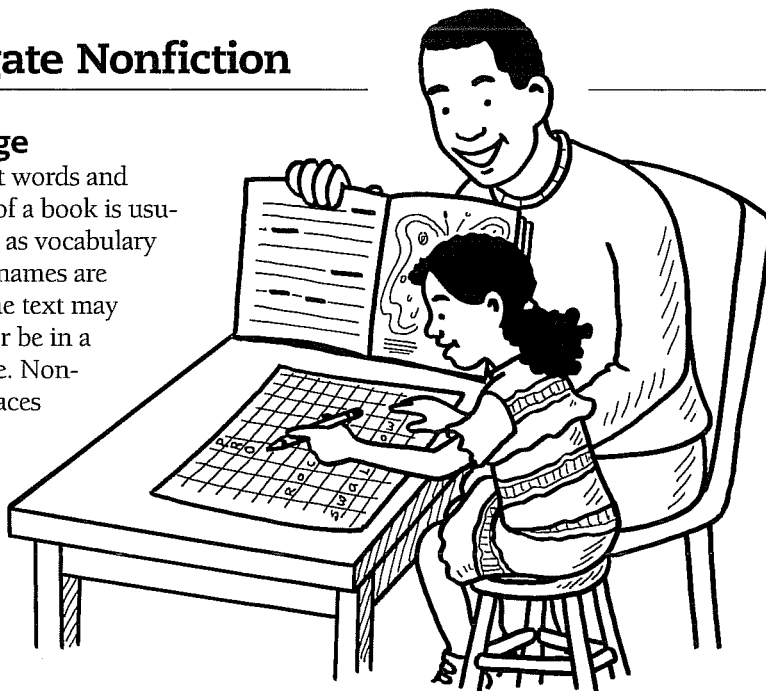
Idea: Recommend that your child make fact cards using headings and subheads. He could rewrite them as *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, or *why* questions on separate index cards. Then, have him answer with the facts he learns as he reads. For a report on Florence Nightingale, he may turn a "School days" subhead into "Where did Florence Nightingale go to school?"

continued

Learn the language

Spotting the important words and phrases within a section of a book is usually easy. Keywords, such as vocabulary terms, dates, places, and names are designed to stand out. The text may appear in **bold** or *italic*, or be in a different color or font size. Nonfiction uses various typefaces as a way of saying, “Look at me! I’m important!” For instance, if your youngster is reading about the International Space Station, she could look for the keyword *orbit* to learn the path the station travels.

Idea: Turn keywords into crossword puzzles for each other to solve. Arrange the words into a hand-drawn grid on graph paper, or make one online at abcya.com/crossword_puzzle_maker.htm. Then, use facts from the text as clues. If a keyword is *proboscis*, your child might consult the book and write “the long, thin tube that forms part of a butterfly’s mouth” as the clue. When your puzzles are complete, create blank versions, swap, and solve.



subject he enjoys like karate or cooking. Have him hunt for graphics—how many kinds can he find?

View the exhibits

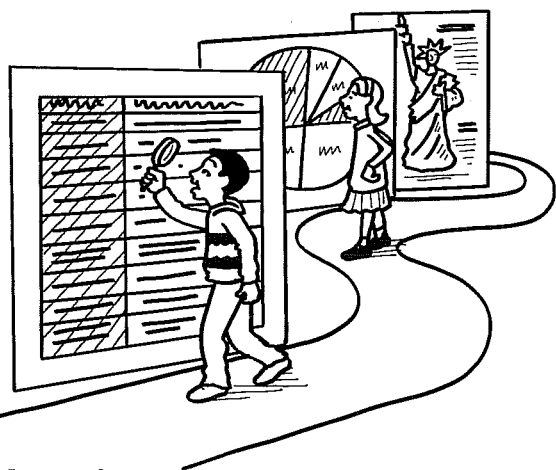
Encourage your youngster to look closely at illustrations in nonfiction books and also to read their captions. Together, they provide explanations that will improve her understanding of the material. For example, a photo may illustrate how gears work, while the caption explains the different parts shown.

Idea: Organizing family photos gives your child a chance to think about captions. Gather photos, and collaborate on writing captions that explain the pictures, adding names and facts that will bring them to life.

Take a side trip

Sidebar are mini-articles related to the main text. They hold fascinating facts, anecdotes, or activities. In a book on magnets, your youngster may find a sidebar with instructions for a magnetic-poles experiment to try at home.

Idea: When your child reads nonfiction about a favorite subject, challenge him to create sidebars that could be in the book but aren’t. For a book about writing fiction, he might dream up a sidebar of fun writing prompts or one with clever ways to remember grammar rules.



Go sightseeing

Diagrams, maps, graphs, charts, and time lines are graphics that make up the “scenery” in a nonfiction text. They’re not only interesting to look at, they pack a large amount of information into a small space. For instance, your youngster may interpret data in a sports almanac graph to compare the popularity of baseball in various countries. Or he could examine a diagram of the Statue of Liberty to understand how the pieces were assembled.

Idea: Let your child explore how graphics are used in nonfiction with a treasure hunt. Start with library books about a

Extra! Extra! Read more about it!

Nonfiction books may ignite your child’s passion for a topic. Encourage her to check the back pages for these “extra” features that offer ideas for additional things to read.

● **Source list.** Articles, books, and papers the author cited.

● **Bibliography.** Books the author used for research.

● **Further reading.** A recommended list of books, magazines, and websites about the same subject.

● **Author’s biography.** Titles of the author’s other books might be found here (or in a list at the front of the book).

