

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

October 2008

Strawberry Knoll Elementary School
Kristin Pierce, Reading Specialist

Book Picks

■ Peak

Climbing is 14-year-old Peak Marcello's passion.

When he's caught scaling a New York skyscraper, he's sent to Thailand to live with his mountaineer father. Will he wind up being the youngest person to climb Mount Everest? A survival adventure by Roland Smith.



■ The Tree Is Older Than You Are

This collection of poems and stories, selected by Naomi Shihab Nye, makes ordinary events like climbing a tree or playing marbles seem magical. Spanish or Mayan language versions are printed side-by-side with English, inspiring youngsters to try translating the words. Paintings by Mexican artists illustrate the pages.



■ The Babysitter's Handbook

Harriet Brown's guide introduces youngsters to the business of babysitting. It includes first-aid tips, snack ideas, games, and tricks for handling tantrums and bedtime. A valuable resource for kids who want to be babysitters as well as for those with younger siblings.

■ Olivia Kidney

Olivia is unhappy in her new apartment building full of cranky residents. What's worse, she's teased at school and has no friends. But when she loses her key, she meets her neighbors and takes off on fantastic adventures. The first in the Olivia Kidney series by Ellen Potter. (Also available in Spanish.)



Writing: Spice it up

A pinch of adjectives, a sprinkling of verbs, a dash of detail... just as a cook seasons food to add flavor, a good writer spices up his work with interesting words. Give your child these recipes for putting some kick in his writing.

Add a drop of imagery.

Help your youngster paint pictures with his words. First, have him close his eyes and picture what he wants to describe. Then, ask him to name adjectives that come to mind. A lake, for instance, might be *crystal clear, shimmering, and peaceful*. He can use those words to write about the water.

Whip up some action. Strong writing needs specific verbs. Have your child choose a verb in his story and brainstorm 10 words that could replace it. For instance, *walk* might become *march, jog, or shuffle*, depending on the action. *Example:* A character who is scared might *tiptoe*. For more possibilities, he



can look up the verb in a thesaurus or at www.m-w.com/thesaurus.

Fold in some facts. Where does his story take place? Your youngster can learn what it's really like there by looking up the setting (country, time period) in Web sites, magazines, or maps. If possible, take a field trip. For a tale set in the woods, you might go on a hike together. Along the way, have him jot down details that will bring his story to life. ■

Support for reading

As your youngster gets older, there are lots of great ways to share reading. Here are some ideas:

- Set aside time for reading each day.
- Talk about what you're reading.
- Visit the library regularly.
- Borrow or buy a variety of books—fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and biographies.
- Encourage your child to read menus, catalogs, and instructions.
- Play board games or computer games that involve words.
- Use brochures and Web sites to research family outings.
- Keep the television off and the reading lights on at least part of every evening! ■



Meet the author

Help your youngster get to know some authors, and her interest in reading their books will grow! Try these ways to get acquainted.

In person

Find out if any author appearances are planned at your local library or bookstore. Your child can hear a writer read aloud, get a book autographed, and have a chance to ask the author a question. Help her think of one in advance, such as, "What kind of stories did you write when you were little?"



www.authoryellowpages.com, or use a search engine (example: type "Louis Sachar official site" into www.google.com). Your youngster can also watch video interviews with authors like Meg Cabot or Cornelia Funke at www.bookwrapcentral.com/childrens.

Online

Kids can learn lots about authors from their Web sites. Your child might see what book a writer is working on, what her childhood was like, and even how to contact her. Find authors' sites at

Print

Remind your child to look at the back cover or the pages at the beginning or end of a book. She'll find a short biography and a list of other titles by the same writer. Reading about an author's background will give your youngster insight into why he writes about certain topics. ■

Q&A Smooth reading

Q: My daughter Jasmine takes a long time to read school assignments. How can I help?

A: Children may read slowly when they're struggling with the words. To understand text, your daughter needs to read whole sentences smoothly, rather than one word at a time.

One way to do this is to have Jasmine practice reading a section of text for several days. You might pick out a passage about something she likes, such as ballet. Time her to see how many words she reads in one minute. Then, encourage her to practice re-reading the section, and time her again three days in a row. Challenge her to beat her record, and then switch to a new passage.

As the words in each section become familiar, Jasmine will be learning to read more smoothly. ■

Parent 2 Parent

The chat box

Between football practice, dance lessons, and errands, we spend a lot of time in the car. I realized this would be a great time for family conversation.

My son Kevin told us about the "chat box"—a shoebox his friend's family fills with things to talk about. They clip newspaper articles, jot down quotes, or print e-mails. During dinner, one person pulls something out and reads it. Then, each family member makes a comment or asks a question.

We created our own chat box to keep in the car. Recently, Kevin shared a letter from school about recycling, and we got into a discussion about preserving our resources. We've had some great conversations on the road, and, even better, our children are learning to express their thoughts aloud. ■



Other Picks

MAGAZINES

■ KIDS Discover

How much blood is in the human body? How many languages are there in the world? From the American Revolution and ancient Greece to the brain and weather, *KIDS Discover* is filled with everything kids need to know about science and history. 800-825-2821

■ Kahani

This magazine, whose title means "story" in Hindi, focuses on South Asian culture in North America. It features current events, short stories, book reviews, and original artwork. A recent issue included a fiction story about a turtle rescue and an article on global warming. www.kahani.com



SOFTWARE

■ Sandscript

Better spelling and vocabulary skills are more than just a wish in this game. Help the genie get back his powers by using definitions and unscrambling letters to reveal the words. www.playfirst.com/game/sandscript

■ Reading Blaster Ages 9–12

Put reading comprehension skills to work and solve a mystery. Six citizens of Bizarroville have disappeared while visiting Dr. Dabble. Players travel through his spooky mansion reading for details, using clues, determining main ideas, and drawing conclusions to find the missing characters. *Knowledge Adventure*



OUR PURPOSE

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

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