

# Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

February 2009

Eagle Ridge Middle School  
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## Book Picks



### ■ *The Everything Kids' Joke Book*

What is a mummy's favorite music? Find the answer to that riddle and more in this joke-filled book by Michael Dahl. Your child will learn to make up jokes, deliver punch lines, and keep a straight face.



### ■ *Bigger*

Tyler's father, a Southern soldier, doesn't return when the Civil War ends. So the 12-year-old sets out on a journey to find him. On the way, Tyler meets a young slave who changes his ideas about war, heroes, and slavery. Historical fiction by Patricia Calvert.

### ■ *Cages*

Kit feels trapped by her life. Her stepfather is an alcoholic, and she didn't get a part in the school play. When she's caught shoplifting and sentenced to work in an animal shelter, she discovers important lessons that help her cope. A thought-provoking novel by Peg Kehret. (Available in Spanish.)



### ■ *Writing Magic*

Author Gail Carson Levine takes readers on a step-by-step tour of fiction writing. She covers all the basics, such as creating a plot and using dialogue. Each chapter includes examples, explanations, and an exercise for young writers to try.



## Nonfiction family fun

Biographies... science... history... nonfiction books give children practical reasons to read. Try these ideas to get your youngster interested in reading nonfiction.

### Explore art

Ask each family member to select a biography of a famous artist. Share the books so everyone can read about the artists' lives and learn how they created art. Then, each person can choose her favorite and do an art project based on that artist's style. *Example:* Georges Seurat made entire pictures from tiny dots. Try his technique, called "pointillism," after reading *Seurat and La Grande Jatte* by Robert Burleigh.



outdoors. You might browse *Peterson First Guide to Birds of North America* by Roger Peterson, visit a park together, and use the book to identify bird species.

### Delve into history

Check out *Climbing Your Family Tree* by Ira Wolfman. Gather information from relatives (full names, dates and places of birth), add photos, and make your own family tree. Or choose a local landmark, such as a historical home or battlefield, to read about in your library's local-history section. 📖

### Discover nature

Field guides and other nature books have detailed photographs and descriptions of birds, trees, and flowers. They can introduce your child to new vocabulary as well as spark her interest in nature. Plus, they'll get the whole family

## Foolproof proofreading

Spell-check is a useful tool, but it's not a substitute for your child's careful eyes. When he types an essay or a report, help him spot misused and left-out words with these tips:

- Suggest that he take a break between writing and proofreading. A fresh look will let him see mistakes more easily.
- Print it out. Checking his writing in two formats (paper and screen) might help him find errors he'd otherwise miss.
- Make a list of problem words (their/there, its/it's). Have him scan every paper for them and double-check their use.
- Remind him to read aloud to catch errors. He can hold a piece of paper under each line as he reads to help him focus on these words. 📖



# New ways to write

Once upon a time, students used only pencil and paper for their writing. Today, children can use technology to take stories, poems, and journals to new levels. Boost your youngster's writing skills with these high-tech suggestions:

- Write a digital story. At <http://bookbuilder.cast.org> (requires free registration), your child can add pictures and sounds that are saved on his computer or choose free clip art and audio files. Have him pick a layout for each page and record himself reading his story aloud.
- Create an online poem. Suggest that your youngster write a diamond-shaped poem at [www.readwritethink.org/materials/diamante](http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/diamante) or a limerick at [http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/poetry\\_engine.htm#](http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/poetry_engine.htm#).



These Web sites define various kinds of poems and provide a fill-in-the-blank screen to help kids write their own verses.

- Keep a multimedia journal. Would your child like to turn his journal into a slideshow? Suggest that he use a free software program such as Photo

Story 3 ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)). He can choose photos and background music, write his journal entries, and—presto—he has a personal slideshow to share with friends and family. The software lets him resize, crop, rotate, and change the color of photos. ■

## Monkey around with idioms

When you say someone's nose is in a book, you mean he's concentrating hard on what he's reading—he didn't actually shut a book on his nose!



That saying is an example of an idiom, a phrase that means something different from what the individual words say.

List all the idioms you and your child can think of. If you're stuck, look online at [www.idiomconnection.com](http://www.idiomconnection.com).

Then, play a game with the sayings. Illustrate a few idioms, trade pictures, and try to guess what each other drew. For example, if you choose "It's raining cats and dogs," you might draw pets falling from the sky. For "Put your money where your mouth is," you could draw a person with a dollar bill on her mouth. ■

## Q&A Storytelling tips

**Q** I've heard that some families have storytelling nights. It sounds like fun, but I'm not sure how to get started.

**A** Storytelling exercises your child's imagination and builds his speaking skills. Choosing different kinds of stories is a good place to begin.

Try tall tales, for example. Ask each person to think of a favorite memory. Then, take turns telling a story that exaggerates what actually happened. ("The snow was so deep, we could sled off our roof.")

You can also make up myths. Everyone can think of a weather event (volcano, flood) and tell a story to explain how it came about. ("Many years ago a shark got a very bad cold. He passed it to other sharks around the world. When they sneeze, we have floods.") ■



## Other Picks MAGAZINES

■ **Blaze**  
Horse lovers can read articles, do activities, and enjoy photos of their four-legged friends. Includes interviews with riders, contests, crafts, a pullout poster of different horses, and a column "written" by the magazine's horse mascot, Blaze. [www.blazekids.com](http://www.blazekids.com)



■ **Yes Mag**  
Each issue of this bimonthly takes an in-depth look at the science behind a topic. Past issues have explored caves, kitchen chemistry, surfing, and natural disasters. Also includes experiments to try at home and current science and technology news. [www.yesmag.ca](http://www.yesmag.ca)

## SOFTWARE

■ **Britannica Word Search**  
Youngsters will build spelling and vocabulary skills with more than 500 word searches. Choose from four modes of play that let you race against the clock or find words at your own pace. Keep working your way up to harder puzzles. *Britannica Online*

■ **Mastering Middle School**  
Dozens of school subjects are covered in this program: literature, geography, pre-algebra, life science, and more. Students learn through activities, games, quizzes, and audio-books. The software can be loaded on the computer or an iPod for on-the-go learning. *Fogware Publishing*



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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