

Parents' CLIPBOARD

ELEMENTARY LEVEL

BY THE PARENTS & READING COMMITTEE OF THE COLORADO COUNCIL, INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

Giving Kids the Write Stuff

Parents know that they should read to their children, sign them up at the library, and occasionally wrestle the remote control or joystick from their hands and replace it with a book. But reading isn't the only thing that's fundamental.

The other side of literacy is **writing**, and that's where many parents and their kids fall short. Only about 25 percent of America's kids are considered proficient writers—able to write at their appropriate grade level—and just one percent are advanced writers, according to the latest results of the National Assessment in Writing, which was administered to grades 4, 8 and 12 by the U.S. Department of Education.

It would be easy to blame television, video games, the Internet and cheap phone rates, which have made letter writing a lost art. But the fact is that many adults don't know how to teach writing to their kids or to encourage it at home.

What children need most from parents are not rules of grammar or how to write a topic sentence for a school essay, but simple encouragement to write and write often. Like carpentry, writing is a craft; the more you do it, the easier and better you get. Here are some suggestions to make writing as natural as reading around your home.

BECOME YOUR KID'S PUBLISHER. Using digital pictures of a birthday party, a trip to the zoo, or another enjoyable activity; have your child construct a short story about the picture. When they're finished, make covers out of construction paper and write the child's byline on the front. Then include their books during bedtime reading.

TELL A RELAY STORY. Sometimes kids aren't sure about what to write. Start a story with something like, "One day, our cat ran away when someone left the gate open, and we were so worried..." The child adds a sentence or two and relays the story back to you or a sibling. You can do this orally while stuck in traffic, waiting at the dentist's office, or at home. Or push a sheet of paper back and forth across the kitchen table to write a relay story. These may take silly twists and turns, but they're fun and may turn out to be worth writing down and making into a short book.

Parents can get tips on how to become partners in their students' schooling by visiting these web sites:

www.pta.org/parent_resources.html
www.nea.org www.schoolsuccessinfo.org
www.kidsource.com
www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites

SEND YOUR CHILD LITTLE NOTES. They can be put in a pocket, under a pillow, in a lunch box, on the refrigerator, for example. Encourage him to write similar notes to you and other members of your family and his friends. This may lead to using e-mail to contact grandparents, pen pals, cousins, and friends. Some internet sites publish kid's stories in online magazines written for and by children.

(See www.stonesoup.com, www.kidsnews.com, www.cyberkids.com.)

Source: *The Homework Plan: A Parent's Guide to Helping Kids Excel* by Linda Sonna.

Parents' Q&A

Q What are some easy but fun ways I can use to encourage my third grader to practice his reading and writing skills at home, especially during vacation times?

A Have your son choose from the following suggestions:

- ❖ Find a picture of a family member or a family event. Write a paragraph or two about that picture and post it on the refrigerator.
- ❖ Choose a favorite author or illustrator. Find out how many books he or she has written or illustrated by going to the public library. Keep your list and check out a new favorite book to read.
- ❖ Work on a jigsaw puzzle with family members or friends. Think about how you decide which piece goes where and ask your partner how he or she decides.
- ❖ Read a book aloud with someone and after you read one page, let him or her read the next. Keep switching and making guesses about what is going to happen in the story.
- ❖ Look through a mail catalogue today. Select five items you would like to have and find the total cost, including the shipping cost. What do you want most of all and least of all?

Source: *Family and Literacy Calendars of Ideas for Summer Months*
 For more information, visit the CCIRA web site, www.ccira.org and click on **resources** to find day-by-day literacy activities.