

Bring Learning Home!

Baking cookies and washing dishes may not sound educational. But did you know they're just two of many daily activities that can get your kids excited about learning and teach basic skills?

It's true! Just a little involvement on your part can turn the most routine parts of your day into nuggets of discovery to help your children succeed in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies.



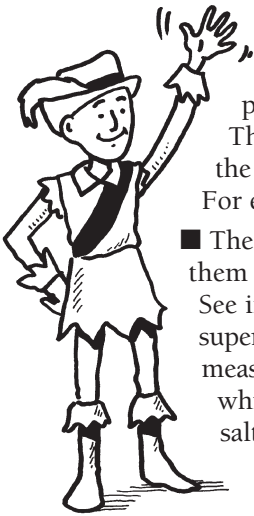
Reading

■ Try this game when you're in the grocery store. Have your youngsters find five words or numbers that they can read on products or signs and jot them down. *Examples: frozen peas, sale, oranges, 25, Friday.* Then, challenge them to make up a sentence with all the words: "On Friday, Mom bought 25 oranges and frozen peas on sale."

■ Some families have regular family reading nights. Why not take it a step further and have a family *performance* night?

Encourage your children to read a short poem or story and act it out for the family. They may even want to dress up like one of the characters and add a simple prop or two. For extra fun, serve popcorn and drinks.

■ The next time you cook with your kids, put them in charge of reading the recipe aloud. See if they can follow each step (with your supervision). For instance, an older child could measure flour and butter into a mixing bowl, while a younger one could add a pinch of salt and stir. Besides getting practice reading and following directions, your youngsters will get a kick out of being the "boss" of the recipe—and eating the results!



Writing

■ Encourage your children to write simple notes for you to read. They can write about what they did during the day ("We went on a field trip to the post office") or leave a

personal message ("I liked the strawberries you put in my lunch box"). *Note:* Try writing back—your kids will probably start leaving you even more notes.

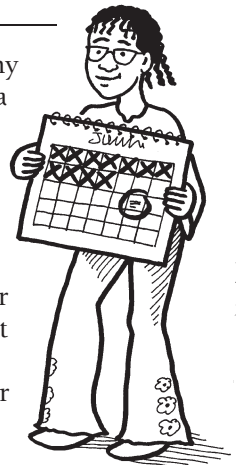
■ Play "restaurant" the next time you plan a meal. Have one child pretend to be the restaurant owner and write out a menu with choices of protein, vegetables, desserts, and drinks. Another child can be the waiter and write down what everyone orders. This is fun role-playing, and it's great writing practice too!

■ Keep pencils and a notepad in the car. To exercise your youngsters' writing skills and imaginations, make up a story together. Start with a sentence such as "Once upon a time....," and let each child take a turn adding the next sentence and writing it down ("I won a trip to Africa"). This is great for times when your kids keep asking, "Are we there yet?"

Math

■ When children begin wondering how many days are left before their birthdays, take out a colorful calendar, and have them count the days. For older kids, you can sneak in multiplication practice by asking them to count the number of weeks left and multiply by seven to figure out the total number of days.

■ This quick dice game is a fun way for your youngsters to practice basic addition—and it can be played almost anywhere. Have your kids take turns rolling a pair of dice. A player gets 1 point for each throw. If the numbers on any throw add up to 3 or 10, the player



continued



across the table by gently blowing through the straw. Encourage them to try blowing through the straw from different angles (from the top or one side or the other) to see which way makes the packet move the fastest. *Tip:* Remind your youngsters to stay in their seats and keep their voices low.

■ Who knew washing dishes could be fun? Next time, enjoy this creative water experiment with your children. Have them fill a bowl with water and sprinkle ground pepper on the top. The pepper floats because of a property of water known as *surface tension*. Then, have them add a drop or two of dish soap in the center. What happens? The pepper will sink because the soap breaks the surface tension. *Idea:* Let your youngsters experiment with other liquids, such as food coloring or cooking oil.

gets an extra point. If the numbers total 2 or 9, he gets no points for that throw. The one with the highest total after three rounds wins.

■ To help your kids get a feel for distances, ask them to estimate how many steps they need to take to get somewhere. *Examples:* from the kitchen to their bedrooms, from the front door to the car, from the front yard to the stop sign on the corner. They may be way off with their first estimates, but they'll get closer with practice.

Science

■ Take a few minutes and go on a nature scavenger hunt together. Have each person look for as many of the following items as they can find in 10 minutes: 3 different flowers, 2 leaves of different shapes, something yellow, 2 kinds of seeds, 1 feather, 2 types of rocks, something shiny. Whoever finds the most items before the time is up wins.



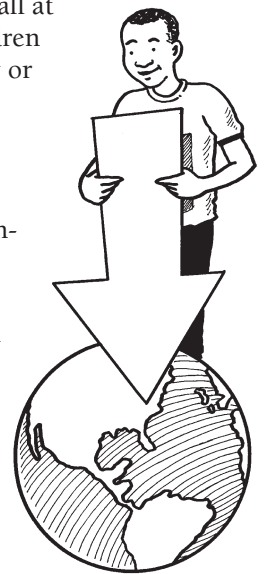
■ You're waiting for food in a restaurant, and your kids are getting antsy. The solution? Try this aerodynamics activity. Give each child a straw and a salt or sugar packet, and challenge them to move the packet

Social Studies

■ Hang a U.S. or world map on a wall at home. Whenever you or your children read or hear about a foreign country or a different part of the United States, see who can find it on the map first. You might even mark the locations with small sticky labels. Your kids will learn a lot about geography without even realizing it!

■ Looking for a way to bring history alive for your youngsters? Start with your own family. The next time you get together with older relatives, encourage your children to ask questions about their lives. *Examples:* Where did you grow up? What games did you play when you were little? What foods did you like to eat? How did you keep your house warm? How did you travel? Your kids will get a kick out of comparing their own lives to the way their relatives lived.

■ Challenge your children to think about how landscape and weather affect what children do for fun in other parts of the country. *Example:* A child who lives in Minnesota (where there are cold winters and lots of lakes) might enjoy ice skating or fishing. A youngster in southern Florida (with plenty of sunshine and beaches) probably enjoys swimming and looking for seashells.



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