

November 2008

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### Election time

Your child may not be old enough to vote, but she's old enough to learn about the process. Explain how people decide on a candidate, and encourage her to read articles and check Web sites to form her own opinions. Take her with you when you vote on Election Day, and then watch the results on TV together.

### Write it right

It's fast and fun to use shorthand words for text and instant messages. But remind your youngster to use proper English for schoolwork. Have him proofread assignments to make sure he didn't lapse into IM-style writing, such as shortened words (*thru*), slang (*gonna*), or missing punctuation (*dont*).

### To-do list

Ever feel like your to-do list limits family time? Use it as a springboard for spending time together. For example, ask your child to help you find a recipe, shop for groceries, or prepare a room for overnight guests. She'll feel important, you'll get more done—and you'll both feel more connected.

### Worth quoting

"Happiness is where we find it, but rarely where we seek it."

J. Petit-Senn

### Just for fun

**Q:** Why did the computer keep sneezing?

**A:** It had a virus!



## Excited to learn

Middle graders learn more when they're having fun. Motivate your youngster to practice math skills, explore the world, or nurture his creative side with activities like these.

### Crunch numbers

Your child can play with sports statistics and practice problem-solving and math skills at the same time. A basketball lover might calculate his favorite players' shooting percentages. A football fan could use game stats to develop a rating system and predict who will make the playoffs.

### Go globe-trotting

Help your middle schooler learn more about geography with this game. Take turns closing your eyes and touching a random spot on a globe or world map. Ask him to find the longitude and latitude, and encourage him to research the place at the library or online (try [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook)). For a country, he might find its capital, the language spoken, and its population. If his finger lands on an ocean or a lake, he can look up information about its size and weather patterns.

### Spark creativity

Get your child's imagination flowing while he learns organization and planning skills. Give him a camera or video recorder, and ask him to make a photo collage or movie based on a theme. For autumn, he might snap pictures of colorful trees, fields of corn, and baskets of apples. A film could show your family raking leaves or planting bulbs in a garden. 👍



## Conference success

Meeting with teachers is an important way to support your child's education. Make the most of parent-teacher conferences with these tips:

▲ Get your middle grader's input before you go. Perhaps there's something she'd like you to ask her teacher or news she wants you to share.

▲ Start off on the right foot. As the conference begins, say something positive about the teacher or the school.

▲ Create a plan to solve any problems. Include steps that your youngster, the teacher, and you will take. Review the plan with your child. Contact the teacher in a few weeks to see how it's working. 👍



# Savvy consumers

Glossy magazine ads, flashy television commercials ... today's youth are surrounded by pressure to buy. Teach your child to understand and analyze the information coming her way. These lessons can help her become a smart shopper.

**Lesson:** Pinpoint subtle messages that advertisers send to attract consumers.

**Activity:** Cover up brand names in ads. See if your middle grader can guess what they're selling. She may be surprised by how much they focus on attractive models or funny situations rather than on the products. Ask her what



image the company is portraying (example: "Good-looking and popular people drink our soda").

**Lesson:** Gather information that has been left out of ads.

**Activity:** Advertisers may omit details that could affect your decision to buy. When your child points out an ad for something she'd like, suggest that she find out what else she needs to use the product. For example, a new computer game may require additional memory or a software upgrade. Show her how to learn more (call a store, do an Internet search). 👍

## Q & A

### Handling cheating

**Q** My daughter Carrie came home with a zero on an English paper. When I questioned her, she admitted that she had copied a paper from an older student. What should I do?

**A** Start by asking your daughter why she cheated. If she didn't have time to do the paper, she may need to cut back on socializing. If the work seemed too hard, discuss ways she can get help. Then, make sure she understands that it's wrong under any circumstances to pretend someone else's work is her own.



Talk to Carrie about the consequences of cheating. First, she will have to work very hard to bring her grade up because of the zero. Second, if it happens again, she could fail the class or be suspended.

Finally, explain that even if she doesn't get caught, cheating doesn't give her teacher—or herself—a true picture of what she can do. 👍

## Parent to Parent Listening skills

During a recent dinner with my sister's family, I noticed that my son Nicholas didn't seem to be listening to the conversation. He often interrupted and didn't always answer when someone asked him a question.

I decided to talk with him about how to be a good listener. I reminded him that he should face someone who's speaking to him. He should wait for the other person to stop speaking before he responds. If he doesn't understand what is being said, he can ask the person to explain.

We've been practicing with small talk at home. I still remind Nicholas to look at me when I'm speaking—but he has been interrupting less, and I don't have to repeat myself as often. 👍

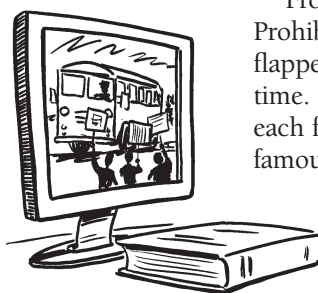


## Quest for history

Imagine meeting famous figures or witnessing moments that changed history. Here are two examples of interesting times your child can learn about.

### Civil rights movement

Many heroes emerged during the struggle for equal rights. Your youngster may enjoy *Freedom Riders* by Ann Bausum. It's the true story of people who risked their lives to help end segregation,



inspiring others to join the 1960s movement. Suggest that your child visit [www.cnn.com/EVENTS/black\\_history/travel/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/EVENTS/black_history/travel/index.html) for a virtual tour through civil rights history.

### The Roaring Twenties

From the stock market crash and Prohibition to Louis Armstrong and the flappers, the 1920s were a fascinating time. Consider throwing a party where each family member dresses up as a famous person from that period and tells what they did. Check out *The Roaring Twenties* by R. Conrad Stein, or visit [www.1920-30.com](http://www.1920-30.com) for ideas. 👍

### OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ideas that promote school success, parent involvement, and more effective parenting.

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