

English

Playing with Language

- Encourage the use of word games. For example, MENSEA Word Puzzles books. Most newspapers also have a puzzle page that includes word games.
- Support the regular completion of crosswords. Find a standard that is appropriate to start with (rather than leaping in at the deep end!) and then encourage advancement to something more demanding. Crosswords are obviously available in newspapers but also in collections available from newsagents and bookshops. Once you have got going, contact The Crossword Club, Coombe Farm, Awbridge, Romsey, Hampshire, SO51 0HN (tel. 01794 524346; email bh@thecrosswordclub.co.uk; website www.crosswordclub.co.uk) who run specialised competitions that are very challenging.
- Suggest that your son writes crossword puzzles/ word games of his own.
- Play language based games as a family, such as Scrabble, Lexicon, Double Quick, Upwords, Dingbats and Wordrop.
- Have available a really extensive dictionary and a lengthy thesaurus. One way of challenging your son to use these is to get him to write a lipogram: where a passage is written without the use of a particular letter of the alphabet. For example, choose a short piece of writing of any sort, including a nursery rhyme. Get your son to rewrite it as close to the original meaning as possible, without using, for instance, the letter 's' or 'd'. If you want it to be really challenging choose 'a' or 'e'!
- Help your son investigate how language is constantly changing, eg by writing a list of new words (eg that have entered the language due to computers or discussion of environmental issues) or by writing a list of words whose meanings have changed (eg 'wicked' or 'cool'). Two texts to help with this are: *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words* (ed. Erin McKean) and *Forgotten English* by Jeffrey Kacirk.
- Play your own version of *Just a Minute* where a player has to speak for 60 seconds on a given subject without hesitation, repetition or deviation from the subject.
- Assist with arranging opportunities to hear language in range of different contexts, eg. visits to law courts, poetry readings, election rallies, council meetings, sales promotions etc.

Writing

- Look out for writing courses organised by LEAs, the National Association for Gifted Children and other organisations. The Arvon Foundation runs highly respected creative writing courses at centres in Devon, Yorkshire, Shropshire and Inverness-shire (details from www.arvonfoundation.org).
- Organise enough time, in a block, to enable sustained extended writing to take place.
- Investigate the *Young Writer* magazine, which can be ordered from newsagents or directly from Young Writer, Glebe House, Weobley, Herefordshire, HR4 8SD (tel. 01544 318901; email youngwriter@enterprise.net; website www.youngwriter.org).
- Encourage participation in writers' groups and poetry groups. Peer evaluation is extremely beneficial.

- Take advantage of contact with professional writers through festivals, special events and attendance at talks hosted by large bookshops.
- Promote healthy keyboard skills, in order to make best use of word-processing equipment and to avoid RSI.
- Search out writing competitions through school, libraries, newspapers etc. *The Times Educational Supplement* runs an annual competition called Write Away. Registration through school.
- Provide a sounding board for your son's work, in order to help him clarify the purpose of the writing, what the piece sounds like and its effect on others.
- Support redrafting. Very few writers get it right first time.
- Try to make available examples of the genre in which your son is writing – models are a useful learning tool.
- Obtain copies of the *Mini Saga* books published by Sutton Publishing. These are based on the *Daily Telegraph* competitions, where participants have to write a story with a beginning, middle and end in exactly 50 words. A good discipline!
- Suggest that your son enters the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award. This is a joint venture between The Poetry Society and The Foyle Foundation. Details from The Education Department, The Poetry Society, 22 Betterton Street, London, WC2H 9BX (tel. 020 7420 9894; email education@poetrysociety.org.uk; website www.poetrysociety.org.uk).

Reading

- Encourage your son to talk about what they are reading, especially about the puzzles or connections they find. They can do this also via a reading group, where they can share enthusiasms.
- Sometimes biographies of favourite authors can be fascinating to able readers.
- Avoid insisting that your son always read 'challenging' or 'literary' books. Sometimes they need trivial material to read, just as adults do, to relax.
- Be aware of the dangers of your son reading a book ahead of his social/emotional development. Able readers have the skills to read a book technically well ahead of their chronological age. This is fine unless the book has a social/emotional setting not accessible to the reader due to their life experience lagging behind their technical ability, when the reader will lose much of the meaning.
- Reading can involve a variety of materials. Remember non-fiction and poetry.
- To get recommendations of good children's/ teenagers' literature (and there is lots of it about) ask in your local library, where you will usually find a children's literature expert, look in your local bookshop where there are usually staff recommendations, or use Booktrust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London, SW18 2QZ (tel. 020 8516 2981/8516 2977; email Deborah@booktrust.org.uk; website www.booktrusted.com and www.booktrust.org.uk). There is a free parents' pack, a quarterly magazine, *Booktrusted News*, and the *Best Book Guide* – a valuable guide to the best in children's/ teenagers' paperback fiction. English teachers are always willing to recommend books too!
- Explore youth membership of The Poetry Society (contact details in 'writing' section above)
- Encourage experimentation with unusual and interesting books to extend the range of reading.