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# “Keep Learning Alive” throughout the summer

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**L**earning doesn't have to end on the last day of school. Looking for some inspiration to keep your kids learning? Look no further! Here are some fun activities that will keep learning alive for your kids throughout the summer months.

Before heading out for a days hike with your family, consider packing play dough or model magic in your backpack along with those healthy snacks. Nature centers and local hiking trails are great places to spend an afternoon. You can polish your children's observation skills while incorporating new vocabulary into the conversation. As you stroll down the trail, encourage your children to look for objects with interesting patterns and textures like bark or rocks. Carefully pick up one of the natural objects and have your children take turns making an impression of the object in the dough. Return the object to the trail. Seal the bag to keep the dough moist or if you intend to make more than one impression. Leave the bag open to let the impression dry.

Help build vocabulary by brainstorming words that describe the object that was chosen for the impression. Provide your child with examples of descriptive words such as “brilliant, blue shell, grueling, steep terrain, and bumpy veins in the leaf.” When you return home, have the children write about the hiking trip. Encourage them to illustrate a sentence, write a story or sketch a drawing of the object and where it was discovered.

Talk with your children about all of the interesting textures, colors, and patterns in nature. Help them learn how to be respectful of their surroundings by not. Watch out for poison ivy, and critters who may be sharing the trail with you. You can use photos and sketches to make a journal entry or a family story about the day's events. Involve the whole family in the process. Children need to read and write everyday in the summer months to keep these skills fresh. Younger students reinforce sight word vocabulary when they read or write words in a meaningful context. Older children continue building their vocabularies, and reinforce spelling strategies.

Science can open doors to learning over the summer. There is a wonderful selection of science activities in *Science is Simple* by Peggy Ashbrook. You can purchase safety goggles and aprons for the children to wear while experimenting. Before you begin any science experiments with your kids, have a discussion about ways to keep safe like wearing goggles to protect your eyes.

Cooking in the kitchen is a fun way to observe science first hand. Involve the whole family in menu planning and meal preparation. Write out recipes on poster paper and help younger students read the steps of the recipe while performing the tasks simultaneously. Have another family member photograph the process.

Recently, I received a recommendation for a fun science fair project by the teacher

of one of my students. You can do this experiment too. You will need the following Diet Coke, Mentos Mints, Sprite, Regular Coke and Seltzer Water. Do the experiment outdoors because it's sticky and messy. I highly recommend that you wear a raincoat and plastic gloves. You'll need to make a cardboard tube to hold 12 large Mentos mints. If you go online, you can find step by step directions for this experiment. But, be sure to stand back because the reaction between the Mentos mints and the carbonated drink will catch you off guard.

When you do a science experiment, have one family member be the recorder and write down everyone's observations. After the experiment is cleaned up, have a discussion about the results and have them write about it. Have them draw a picture of what they observed. By asking your children to write down their observations, you are incorporating spelling and grammar simultaneously. You can encourage their writing by asking them questions such as, “Does the same thing happen each time or did different reactions occur? “What would you do differently next time?”

During summer vacation, continue those wonderful read aloud times. It's a time to relax together as a family and a time for parents to model their love for literature. It's also an opportunity to strengthen your children's critical thinking skills. Critical thinking requires a higher level of reasoning than just recalling facts. For example; recalling the main character's name is factual recall, but trying to put yourself in the main character's place or to relate how you would act in a given situation is more challenging thinking. It is important to help children of all ages reflect on what they have read. After reading a book together, talk about story plots. Ask questions such as: “Who is the main character? What traits does the main character have that you admire? Would you want to be friends with this character? Why or why not?” This kind of discussion encourages children to relate to the story in a personal way.

Sharing poetry is another way to keep reading skills alive over the summer and a way to reinforce the concept of rhyming.

*Continued on next page*

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If a child isn't able to hear rhyming words, they will have difficulty reading. Some good examples of children's poetry include: *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *The Light in the Attic* by Shel Silverstein, *Read Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* selected by Jack Prelutsky and *I'm Still here in the Bathtub* by Alan Katz. These books appeal to children and adults alike.

Try tape recording different members of the family reading a favorite poem aloud. Let younger children listen to the recordings while they fall asleep, or when you are taking a road trip. Younger readers can identify rhyming words or words containing short vowels.

Help children make lists of words that they encounter that are fun to say like "Higglety Pigglety Pop" for example from a poem by Sam Goodrich. Have children look up the meanings of words in a poem that they have not encountered in their reading before. For example the word, "bay" can be used to describe a place, "I saw my friend down by the bay." It can also be used in this way, "The dog kept the prowlers at bay." Children can find synonyms such as "angry and mad" or antonyms such as "delighted and dismayed."

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**"Reading different versions of familiar fairy tales is also a lot of fun. Children might enjoy creating their own version."**

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Make a family poem where each member contributes a line. Then the children can illustrate the poem and type it on the computer. Once it is published, it can be hung on the refrigerator. The children can take turns reading the poem aloud to strengthen their oral reading fluency.

Singing a rhyme that has been written to a familiar tune can also be a fun way to experience oral language and develop a younger reader's phonemic awareness. For example in the book, *The Twelve Days of Summer*, written by Elizabeth Lee O'Donnell, a poem is illustrated and can be sung to the tune of the Twelve Days

of Christmas. In this book, a girl goes to the beach with her family and discovers a sea creature called an "anemone." She sees "three jellyfish, two pelicans, and a little purple sea anemone." I recall singing this poem to my sons on a drive to the beach one summer. As I held up the illustrations and sang the story, they followed along with the illustrations and joined in singing the chorus. We later looked in a library book to learn more about real sea anemone creatures. During our vacation the boys searched for a real sea anemone but were unsuccessful.

Another fun rhyming book is *The Eensy-Weensy Spider* adapted by Mary Ann Hoberman. On one page of this charming book, "The Eensy-Weensy spider goes out to buy some shoes. 'Well, said her mama, 'Which ones will you choose?'" It is filled with delightful illustrations and engaging vocabulary! While young children can identify rhyming words and learn new word meanings, older readers can go on word hunts and find the compound words such as "waterspout" or verbs like "squeaked." For older elementary students, *Mrs. Cole Sat on an Onion* and *Other School Poems* or *The Goof Who Invented Homework* both by Kalli Dakos might do the trick to get them excited about poetry.

You can make literature personal for children by getting them to think about the story plot or asking them to put themselves in the characters place. Here's an example of how you can personalize a story for your children. After reading the story *Freckle Juice* by Judy Blume, help the children create their own recipe for freckle juice. Kids enjoy making concoctions but proceed with caution. I want to emphasize being careful because not all liquids are compatible.

*Jumanji* by Chris Van Allsburg is another book that is a perfect springboard for bringing literature to life and making the story relate to your children on a personal level. After reading the story, have the children make their own *Jumanji* game board. They make the trail, the rules, and the object of the game. This encompasses reading, writing, and lots of critical thinking as they work together to create the game.

Plays are another fun way to get children involved in a story as children recreate the

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play in their own words. They can enlist the help their friends for writing scripts and making props. Children learn to collaborate and compromise as they make decisions about their own play based on the story they read. Then, they can perform their play for the neighborhood kids.

Reading different versions of familiar fairy tales is also a lot of fun. Children might enjoy creating their own version. *The Three Little Javelinas* or *Cindy Ellen* by author, Susan Lowell are two versions of familiar fairy tales. Both have a southwestern flare and *The Three Little Javelinas* is modeled after *The Three Little Pigs* while the other *Cindy Ellen* is modeled after *Cinderella*. Both are hilarious with clever language and amusing illustrations. It's important that children understand the original story version before reading these clever alternative versions. If a reader hasn't heard the original version, the variation won't make much sense to them.

There are many learning opportunities in everyday life. No matter how your family spends their summer vacation, if the activities you choose for your children are fun, and hands-on, they will continue to learn and their summer vacation will be memorable.

