



Imagine Schools
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Region

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Parent Education Guide

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

School Development:

Common Core State Standards: What Do Parents Need to Know?

Parent Choices:

Tips for Middle School Parents

Character

Development:
working together to
build character

Academic Growth:

Reading Comprehension
Balls & Determining the
Importance in
Nonfiction

School Development:

Common Core State Standards: What Do Parents Need to Know?

Written by Kathleen Dial, Imagine South Lake

Last year, the state of Florida began implementing new state standards for education. In fact, 48 states all across the country are implementing these new standards called Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The state of Florida will have full implementation of these standards by the year 2014-2015.

CCSS align student expectations for learning in states across the nation. Where there were once gaps in education and lack of consistency, there is now high and rigorous standards from state to state.

How does that impact your child in the classroom? A shift in instruction that takes place with Common Core State Standards centers on College and Career Readiness for all students. Children in grades K-12 are being held to more rigorous educational standards, asked to think at deeper levels, and taught to apply their learning in real world situations. In the classroom, this may look like teachers focusing more on informational text, integrating literacy into all subjects or even spending time writing in math class to explain their thinking about how they solved a problem. The CCSS hold teachers more accountable for ensuring that all students are making learning gains toward mastery.

How can you help your child master these new standards? The National PTA has set up a website and handouts for parents of every grade level with tips and tricks for helping your child. Visit

http://www.pta.org/common_core_state_standards.asp to learn more and to read and download *The Parents Guide to Student Success*.



Determining Importance in Nonfiction

With the Shift to common core and non-fiction text, many students need to understand the importance of nonfictional reading. Below you will find some strategies that will help identify themes and main ideas in subject-area passages.

- Think of facts, questions and responses to write down as you read.
- Remember that reading nonfiction takes time and you may need to reread for understanding.
- Reading fiction is like watching a movie and reading Nonfiction is more like a newscast or a slide show.
- Stop often to ask yourself if what you are reading makes sense.
- Nonfiction reading is reading to learn something the vocabulary might be difficult, so be sure to look up words you don't know!

They are easy to make, the kids love to use them, and they make learning fun! At our recent reading curriculum night, we had a 'comprehension beach ball' making station, and it was a huge hit! The ability to make learning at home fun is so easy, and only costs a 97 cent beach ball, and a sharpie marker.

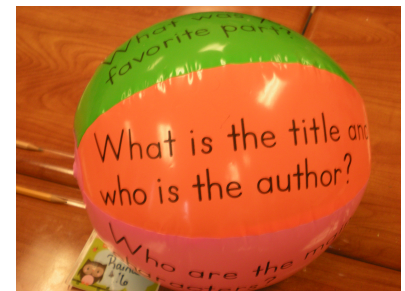
Great prompts to add to your comprehension ball include:

- *Describe the events of the story/chapter.
- *Describe the setting and characters.
- *What do you predict might happen next? Why?
- *If you could change anything about the book/chapter, what would it be?
- *What was your favorite part?
- *Were you able to make any connections to the book?
- *Were there any parts that were confusing?
- *Describe what you visualized as you read?
- *Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or Why not?

COMPREHENSION BALLS

Written by Jimmy Menard, Imagine Town Center

Many of you probably have your child read every night for 20-30 minutes (or maybe more!). How can you be sure that they are comprehending their book and not just reading the words? Easy. Ask them about what they are reading. Prompt them to give you details from the question, and ask them questions to make sure they can understand not only the vocabulary but the context. It can be as simple as asking them to list the events that happen in the story in order, or you can ask them about their personal reaction to the chapter or book that they are reading. The more we interact and discuss reading with our children, the higher the chance they will see reading as something that is valued at home and school. After sitting all day in class, and at home at night doing homework, students need to get up and move around a bit. That is why I love using reading comprehension balls.



Tips for Middle School Parents

Shared by Kristen Rossheim, Imagine Town Center

Middle school can be a confusing time, for parents and their kids. Your child is becoming more independent yet still needs your support as much as ever. While you may decide to allow your child more independence in some areas, be sure to stay actively involved in your child's schooling and friendships. Research shows that children whose parents are engaged in their education are more likely to achieve academic and social success. Here are some tips for getting involved in your child's middle school learning experience.

1. **Get to know the teachers.** It's a good idea to meet each of your child's teachers. Ask about their expectations, homework policies, testing days, etc. Ask about the best way to get in touch if you have questions or concerns.
2. **Find a place for yourself at your child's school.** Unlike in the lower grades, middle school classrooms don't need extra adults on hand. But you can volunteer in other ways. Being in the school is a great way to get a feel for what goes on there.
3. **Do behind-the-scenes work.** If you can't be in school during the day, ask teachers and other school personnel to pass along some work that you can do on your own time.
4. **Volunteer to chaperone school activities.** You'll meet other parents, school staff, and your child's classmates.
5. **Go to school meetings and events.** Attending concerts, plays, assemblies, meetings, and other activities is a good way to become familiar with your child's school community.
6. **Talk to your child about school.** Ask specific questions to draw out your child. Ask "How do you think you did on the math test?" "Did Mr. Phipps say anything funny today?" "What games did you play in PE?"
7. **Give your child a quiet place to study and do homework.** Find an area in your home that is free of distraction where your middle schooler can study and complete homework. Be available to help if your child has a question.
8. **Check your child's homework, but don't do it for her.** Offer to check math problems, proofread written papers, and look over spelling words. If you find a mistake, point it out to your child and help her figure out the correct answer.
9. **Post a family calendar in a central place.** Write down important school dates, including parent meetings, due dates for projects, and tests. Encourage your middle schooler to add to the calendar and to check it daily for organizational purposes.

DonorsChoose.org is a site that helps teachers write and fund mini-grants for use in the classroom or at the school. These grants can be for anything from technology to carpets, books to glue sticks and anything in-between. Teachers even write grants to help fund a field trip or class trip. So check it out - fund a project or help you teacher to write one!

DonorsChoose.org is a nonprofit that connects public school teachers with people who want to support classroom learning.

Positive character development in our schools is not a nice add-on in the curriculum – it is a crucial aspect of a quality school. We at Imagine Schools believe that a school must cultivate a culture of character in order to be a successful learning community.

So what do we mean by the word character? Kevin Ryan and Karen Bohlin in their fine book, *Building Character in Schools*, provides an historical definition that leads to our present understanding of the word character:

The English word *character* comes from the Greek word *charassein*, which means, “to engrave,” such as on a wax tablet, a gemstone, or a metal surface. From that root evolved the meaning of *character* as a distinctive mark or sign, and from there grew our conception of character as “an individual’s pattern of behavior...his moral constitution.”

So one’s character reflects a pattern of behavior or our moral constitution. Our moral constitution is developed by observing those who are around us: parent(s), relatives, teachers, coaches, neighbors. It is from this observation that we begin to develop habits of character. And our character shaped by what and how we give to others, how we serve others in our school and in our community.

It is only possible to work together parents and teacher to build character with our students!

Unity

*I dreamt I stood in a studio,
And watched two sculptors there.
The clay they used was a young child’s mind,
And they fashioned it with care.*

*One was a teacher—the tools she used,
Were books, music, and art.
The other, a parent—working with a guiding hand,
And a gentle loving heart.*

*Day after day, the teacher toiled
With a touch that was deft and sure.
While the parent labored by her side,
And polished and smoothed it o’er.*

*And when at last, their task was done,
They were proud of what they had wrought.
For the things they had molded into the child,
Could neither be sold nor bought.*

*And each agreed they would have failed
If each had worked alone,
For behind the teacher stood the school,
And behind the parent, the home.*

- Author Unknown