

May 2020

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### What's fair?

"That's not fair!" If you hear your tween say this, take the opportunity to discuss what fair actually means. Say her brother gets to stay up late, but she can't because she has swim practice early in the morning. Point out that everyone has different needs, so what's fair for one may not be fair for another.

### Thanking teachers

As the school year winds down, encourage your child to show appreciation for his teachers. He could make bookmarks and list favorite memories or topics he enjoyed in class. Or he might fill a jar with dry ingredients to bake cookies. Simply saying thank you in person or writing a heartfelt note means a lot, too.

### A head start on next year

Get your middle grader excited about next year's electives by planning outings related to what she'll study. If she's taking woodworking, maybe your family could attend a workshop at a local home improvement store. Or look for a summer concert series if she signed up for band or chorus.

### Worth quoting

"If you have good thoughts, they will shine out of your face like sunbeams, and you will always look lovely."  
*Roald Dahl*

### Just for fun

**Q:** What's blue and smells like red paint?

**A:** Blue paint.



## Learning that fits in

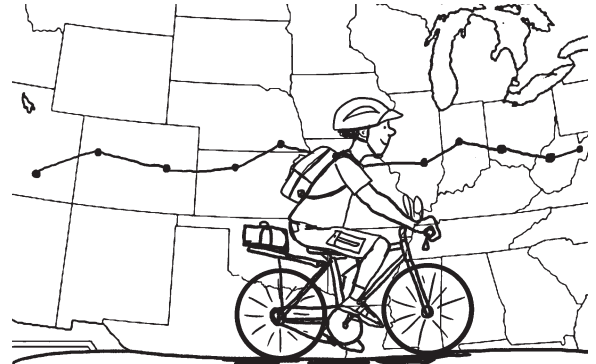
Your child's brain is like an engine. While it's revved up to learn, he can keep it running—and build on that momentum—so he's ready to go next school year. These activities will help his mind stay sharp over break.

### Explore animation

Encourage your child to watch an animated movie and then read books or websites to learn about the process behind it. He could even try his hand at animation on a site like *animaker.com*. Together, watch an animated film that you enjoyed as a child—he may be surprised by how much animation has changed since you were his age.

### Go the distance

How far can your middle grader bike, rollerblade, run, or walk this summer? Suggest that he record his distance each time and track his progress on a U.S. map. At the rate he's going, how far will he "travel" by summer's end? *Example:* If he bikes 12 miles a week for 12 weeks, he would



draw a line to a spot that's 144 miles away. Where could he go if he added two miles a week?

### Analyze product reviews

If your child is in the market for something new (tent, basketball, headphones), have him read reviews to identify comments that are most helpful. For instance, buyers might include pros and cons of the product. Or they may give information about themselves to help put their opinions in context. ("I am an experienced camper who has tried many tents.") Your tween can use the information to decide which product he prefers. 👍

## Safely home alone

As your child gets older, there will be times when she's home by herself. Whether that's now or later, it's never too early to start talking about household safety. Here's how.

1. Make sure your tween knows not to answer the door unless she can see who's knocking—and it is someone you've agreed she can let in.
2. Show her where you keep the first-aid kit, and explain how to use what's inside.
3. Go over which household appliances your middle grader may use and how to operate them safely.
4. Have your child put emergency contacts in her phone or post a list on the refrigerator. Point out that she should always keep her phone or your landline receiver charged. 👍



# Talking to your tween

Does the phrase “mum’s the word” remind you of your middle grader? Tweens tend to share less information with their parents as they become more independent. Consider these strategies for staying close.

**Vary the approach.** Your tween may be more likely to open up if you talk while doing something else. Invite her along on errands and chat as you drive. Or talk during a walk or run. If you need to discuss a sticky topic (say, she got a zero for a missing homework assignment), give her a heads-up rather than diving right



in. (“Let’s set aside a time to talk about grades. Do you want to chat while I cook dinner or before bed?”)

**Keep it light.** Regular, casual conversations may make heavier discussions easier. If your child is laughing at a video, ask her to show it to you. Mention good news you hear about her favorite celebrities.

(“Her latest movie got great reviews!”) Also, bring up little

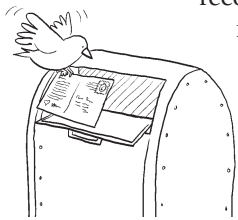
things that happen in your day, like being happy about a compliment from your boss. She may respond by telling you something about her day, too. 👍

## Micro writing

Tweets, texts, instant messages ... tweens may not realize it, but all that writing in short bursts lets them practice choosing words carefully and being concise. Help your child practice micro writing offline with these ideas.

**Postcard review.** Encourage your tween to mail a postcard with a book recommendation to a friend or relative.

In the small space available, he’ll need to concisely make his case for why the person should read the book.



**Q & A**

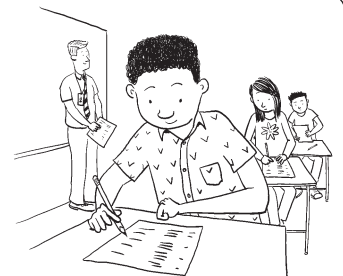
## Prepare for final exams

**Q** My son has final exams for the first time. How are these different from other tests, and how can I help him do his best?

**A** Finals typically cover material from the entire semester or school year. And an exam grade is usually worth a higher percentage of your child’s overall grade than a score on a regular test.

Have your tween set aside time to complete any review packets the teacher gives him. Also, encourage him to look at the table of contents in each textbook. He may find that chapters he studied earlier in the year aren’t as fresh in his memory. He should spend extra time studying those topics and ask his teacher about anything he doesn’t understand.

Finally, suggest that your child plan study sessions with friends. You might offer to host the group at your home or drive them to the library. 👍



**Mini-autobiography.** Challenge family members to write Tweet-sized autobiographies. You’ll need to weigh every word to sum up your life in 280 characters or less.

**Today’s headlines.** Suggest that your middle grader write five headlines that could appear in a news recap of his day. *Example:* “A muddy start: Morning dog-walk mishap.” 👍

## OUR PURPOSE

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

Resources for Educators,  
a division of CCH Incorporated  
128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630  
800-394-5052 • rfeustomer@wolterskluwer.com  
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**Parent to Parent**

## Nature: A natural mood booster

Our daughter Avery was diagnosed with depression. After a recent therapy appointment, she shared something interesting that she learned: Enjoying nature can improve people’s mental health, whether they have depression or not. So we decided that our whole family could benefit from appreciating nature more often.

We found a nearby nature center with creeks, woodland trails, and a butterfly garden. It was very peaceful, and Avery seemed content there. A

ranger even gave us a tour of the garden and pointed out the flowers that butterflies prefer. On the way out, we noticed a sign asking for teen volunteers for children’s summer programs, and my daughter decided to sign up.

Avery seems hopeful about the summer. She’ll be spending time in nature—while helping others and gaining volunteer experience. In the

meantime, we’ve been taking regular walks at our regional park, and we’ve planned a camping trip for Memorial Day weekend. 👍



COVID-19 SPECIAL EDITION:

# Learning Activities for Tweens and Teens

Keep your children learning and safely occupied while they're not in school and can't hang out with friends. This guide features tween- and teen-friendly activities and challenges, including a bingo card on the back.



**Editor's note:** Guidelines are changing rapidly. Make sure to follow all local, state, and federal laws and recommendations on social distancing and other practices when using these ideas.

## Creative writing

Motivate your child to enjoy writing with these suggestions.

**Free write.** Encourage her to set a timer for five minutes and write anything she wants (even if she begins with, "I'm not sure what to write..."). Your tween will probably get on a roll, and she just might want to keep writing when time's up!

**Share responses.** Have family members take turns posting a random topic of the week on the refrigerator. *Examples:* "Predict a 22nd-century technology trend" or "Do you think people should eat only 'breakfast foods' for breakfast? Why or why not?" Everyone writes a response to the topic, and you can share them at the end of the week.

## A stellar vocabulary

Hearing and using new words frequently can make them a permanent part of your teen's vocabulary. Try these strategies for helping him learn new words.

**Play.** Use words from his schoolwork in family games. Have your tween write each word on a separate index card. For example, if he's studying sound and light in science, you could play Pictionary with words like *wavelength* and *prism* or act out *frequency* and *reflection* in a game of charades.

**Search.** When your middle grader comes across a new word in a novel, suggest that he jot it down. Then, he can be on the lookout for the word in magazines and newspapers. He can also listen for it in conversations, on TV, and on the radio—he'll learn to understand the word in a variety of contexts.



## Real-world math

Showing your teen how math relates to her own life—or to things she cares about—is one of the best ways to motivate her to practice. Here are ideas.

**Figure out financing.** Maybe your teenager wants to buy a used car. Have her compare financing plans. Then, she could create a spreadsheet showing the final cost based on different interest rates and the term (number of months) for repaying a loan.

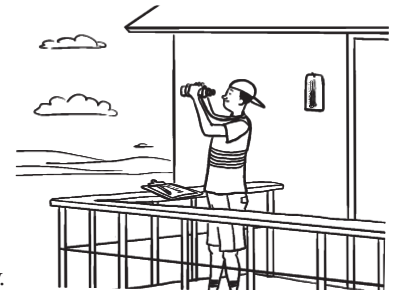
**Explore careers.** Perhaps she's dreaming of being an architect or a fashion designer. There's a lot of math in those fields, along with many others. Encourage her to sketch her dream house and use art materials and math tools to build a model to scale. Or she might design a skirt and then figure out how much it would cost to buy the materials to make it.

## Everyday science

Spark your middle or high schooler's interest in science by letting him see how it relates to his life. Share these tips.

**Watch the weather.** Have your child observe clouds and read forecasts in the newspaper for a week. Can he predict the weather? *Example:* "The clear sky tonight probably means cooler temperatures in the morning. In the afternoon, temperatures will rise, and the barometric pressure will drop, so there's a chance of evening thunderstorms."

**Solve "mysteries."** Encourage your teen to keep a log of questions he thinks of and look up answers. Maybe he'll do research to learn how GPS works or why roller coasters rely on gravity.



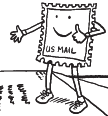


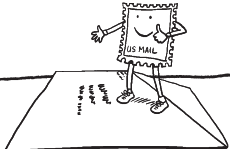






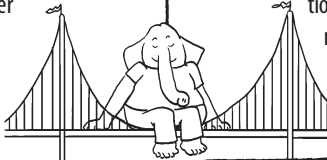


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## Middle Years • High School Years

**Instructions:** Do the activities on this bingo card in any order you choose. When you get five in a row (vertically, horizontally, or diagonally), you've earned BINGO. Keep going until you've completed the entire card—that's Super BINGO!



B	I	N	G	O
<p>Start a "quarantine journal." You might write about silver linings (fun video chats, comfy clothes) or acts of kindness (neighbors sharing supplies, volunteers making masks).</p> 	<p>Solve this math puzzle:  <math>\bullet + \bullet + \bullet = 90</math>  <math>\bullet + \heartsuit + \heartsuit = 60</math>  <math>\heartsuit + \star + \star = 25</math>  <math>\bullet \times \heartsuit \times \star = ?</math>                      Now make up more puzzles like this for family members to solve.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Answer: 2,250</i></p>	<p>Make a meal plan for the week. Find dinner recipes that use ingredients you have on hand. Share the plan with your parents, and offer to cook some of the meals for them—especially if they're busy working.</p> 	<p>Ask grandparents and other older relatives to recommend novels they enjoyed as teenagers. Download e-book versions from the library. When you finish a book, call the relative who suggested it, and discuss it.</p>	<p>Choose several board games, and mix and match the boards and playing pieces to invent a new game. Write down the rules, and teach your family to play.</p> 
<p>There are more than 1,000 words in the word <i>celebration</i>. See how many you can list. (Use the letters in any order.) <i>Examples: clarinet, earlobe, linear.</i></p> 	<p>Engineer a mini-golf course on poster board. Arrange straws to make borders, and add obstacles like plastic cups and bottle caps. Glue everything down, then use a pencil to putt a marble through the course.</p>	<p>Film yourself reading aloud your old picture books (or children's e-books from the library). Share the videos with younger cousins and other little ones you know.</p>	<p>Brainstorm a list of hobbies you'd like to try. Maybe you've always wanted to learn to garden, sew, perform card tricks, or use sign language. Choose one, and get started.</p> 	<p>Write a letter to each of your teachers. Tell them what you like best about their classes, and share a little about how it's going at home. Also, ask how they're doing—and thank them for all their hard work!</p> 
<p>Create themed playlists. <i>Examples:</i> Feel-good songs, songs with an animal in the title, 80s songs. You might ask friends to do the same, then share your lists.</p> 	<p>Make a magic square. Draw a grid with 5 rows and 5 columns. Write the numbers 1–25 in the squares so that each row, column, and diagonal adds up to 75.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FREE SPACE</b></p> 	<p>Use a 4-ft. piece of yarn to form various shapes (hexagon, square, triangle). Lay playing cards inside each shape so that no cards overlap. Which shape holds the most cards?</p>	<p>Hold a family quiz show. Call or email relatives, and ask them to share facts about themselves. Turn the facts into questions ("Who ran the Boston Marathon?") and host your show via video chat.</p> 
<p>Create a photo exhibit using a free app like Google Photos or Slidebox. Choose a theme, take pictures, and share with family and friends. <i>Theme ideas:</i> water, hobbies, the color yellow.</p> 	<p>Set up a chain reaction. Use household objects like building blocks, paper cups, dominoes, ramps, and balls. Can you make the reaction last for one minute? Three minutes?</p>	<p>Cut out pictures of objects from magazines and catalogs. Glue each one on a separate sheet of paper and staple the pages together to make a book. Write a pretend headline for each one.</p>	<p>Play Solitaire. The version that's familiar to most people is called Klondike Solitaire. Look online for variations, such as Clock Solitaire or Pyramid Solitaire.</p> 	<p>There are about 7.5 billion people on Earth. If the population grows 1% annually, how many people would there be in 2050? What would the population be in 3000?</p>
<p>LOL! Make a slang and text-speak dictionary for your parents. Put the entries in alphabetical order. Include definitions and sample sentences using the terms.</p>	<p>Give your memory a workout—and amaze people. Memorize all the state capitals, U.S. presidents, or elements of the periodic table.</p> 	<p>With permission, clean out and organize one closet, drawer, cabinet, or shelf in your home. Be sure to take before and after pictures—you may be inspired to keep cleaning!</p>	<p>Build bridges with craft sticks. Search online for "types of bridges." Can you design a suspension bridge, a truss bridge, and a cantilever bridge?</p> 	<p>Lift everyone's spirits. Collect positive news articles, and glue them into a scrapbook or on poster board. Display the collection for family members to read.</p>

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