



THE FAMILY TREE

RAISING GOOD READERS AND WRITERS

If you are not already, you soon will be in full swing ready for a new and exciting school year. Every parent wants to support their child and be involved their child's school. Sometimes, parents underestimate just how important they are in setting the stage for learning at home *and* in school. At The Family Tree, we know that you, as a parent, are your child's first and most valuable teacher, and that you continue to play an important role throughout his/her lifelong learning process. With this in mind, we have found there are so many fun and inventive ways to encourage your youngster's reading and writing skills, while creating special family memories you will both cherish along life's way. Here are a few ideas:

Family Scrapbooks (for children ages 3 and up)

All youngsters enjoy remembering happy times, and an ongoing family scrapbook is a excellent way not only to capture them, but also to expand your child's reading and writing horizons. Of course, you can always go out and buy a readymade scrapbook. But, you might want to exercise your little one's ingenuity a bit more by making your own, using these easy directions:

All you will need is a collection of photographs and other mementos of special family events, vacations, and school activities; a sheet of foamboard (you can get it at any office or art supply store); 15 – 20 sheets of 11" x 17" construction or art paper; a hole punch; a glue stick; wallpaper or fabric scraps; decorative felt, glitter, stickers, etc.; crayons, markers, or paints; and a yard of colorful grosgrain ribbon.

Using the foamboard, cut two scrapbook "covers," measuring 11" x 17". Help your child decorate them with wallpaper or fabric scraps, glitter, felt, stickers, etc. Punch two holes along the short sides, approximately seven inches apart. Do the same with your construction/art paper sheets and line them up between the covers as filler pages. Finish the book by binding the book together with ribbon.

Once you have made the basic scrapbook, use photos, mementos, felt, stickers, glitter, markers, and anything else you have on hand to help your child create and decorate "memory pages," with an accompanying written description of each one. Be sure to leave room for extra pages, so you may continue updating your scrapbook in the years to come.

Family Cookbook (for children ages 6 and up)

Cooking and baking are wonderful shared activities not only for promoting quality time, but also for helping school-aged children learn how to read and follow directions.

If you and your youngster enjoy being in the kitchen together, a family cookbook is a great way to immortalize these culinary adventures.

Follow the scrapbook directions to design a special cookbook of cherished family recipes you and your child can create as a team. Include favorite recipes of everything from simple snack items to holiday cookies and candies. To make the project even more memorable, prepare each item together, having your child print the recipe steps on a 5* by 7* note card, as you go. (This will be a long-term project.) You may have to help younger children who are not yet advanced enough in their spelling and writing skills.

Once you have prepared your recipe cards, organize them by categories (such as snacks, desserts, casseroles, etc.) and affix them to the cookbook pages. Finish it off by decorating each page with your child's original artwork, using whatever materials you have on hand. Pull out the cookbook often, having your child read from the recipe directions as both of you prepare the food.

A Family Birthday Club (ages 4 and up)

Some of our most cherished mementos are the homemade cards we receive from the children in our lives. A Family Birthday Club offers a marvelous avenue through which to build upon your youngster's reading and writing skills, while encouraging thoughtful behaviors and fostering special family traditions.

Help your child create a Family Birthday Club chart, using poster board and markers to record a list of family member birthdays, along with special notes about each individual's hobbies and/or favorite past-times. (For example, grandpa loves to garden and grandma enjoys relaxing by the ocean). Post it in a prominent location. As birthdays arise, have your child create original greeting cards, complete with personalized written messages. Help him/her address the envelopes and mail them at the local post stop.

Family Reading Hour (all ages)

With the hustle and bustle that seems to go hand and hand with today's family life, finding the time to relax together can be a challenging task. We suggest setting aside a family reading hour each day (or at least several times a week), when everyone sits down together - away from TV, homework, housework, and other distractions - and reads aloud.

Take turns choosing and reading from books, magazine articles, and short stories that everyone enjoys. For older children, you can even tie family reading to science and social studies units they are studying in school - i.e. dinosaurs, plant life, the Civil War, etc.