

THE PARENT-CHILD BOOK CLUB

CONNECTING WITH YOUR KIDS THROUGH READING

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO ORGANIZING AND
CONDUCTING YOUR FAMILY BOOK CLUB

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to make connections whenever possible. In quiet, harmonious “teaching moments,” try to reach out and bridge the gaps. Even in boisterous moments, you can look your children in the eye and make them understand that you are sharing something important and valuable.

Use your parent-child book club as a “teaching moment” to help your children connect to their past, to each other, to friends and family, and to you. Your conscious decision to strengthen your family connections, and to teach your children how to make their own connections, will benefit your child and your family through the years.

EXAMPLES OF FACILITATING CONNECTIONS IN THE BOOK CLUB

Over the years and through many parent-child book clubs, we have fine-tuned our concepts for making connections through reading and discussing. The following are ideas you can use as you think about how to prepare for your book club and structure your book club discussions.

- ❖ **Food:** Food can encourage powerful memories. Throughout our book, we encourage you to serve any foods that are served in the books you read. Even if the book doesn’t feature food or snacks, you can try to make appropriate connections. For example, if the story takes place in a foreign country, try to serve some foods from that country.
- ❖ **Music:** We have all had experiences where we hear a song and remember a significant event in our lives. Music has the power to evoke memories and moods. Try to include music in your book club sessions to

connect the characters and events in the book to other experiences in your child's life. For example, if reading a book that takes place at the beach during summer, listen to a Beach Boys song that evokes summer memories. Or listen to Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" and talk about summer and the other seasons. Always check the lyrics of any song you play to make sure they are age-appropriate. (Visit www.lyrics.com and www.lyricsonnet.com for song lyrics.)

- ❖ **Connections with Other Family Members:** Including other family members in the book club discussion can be very valuable. Even if the other family members don't usually participate in the book club, they can make guest appearances occasionally for all or part of the discussion. They can physically be present, or you can communicate via phone or email to enable them to participate. Or invite a sibling, or a parent who usually doesn't participate. For example, if the book features a grandparent as a character, you could invite or telephone a grandparent for an opinion about the story. If the book is about a person emigrating to the United States, perhaps you could interview a relative about his experiences, or his ancestors' experiences, regarding coming to America. You will see that the book club discussion will be enriched by different viewpoints and ideas.
- ❖ **Historical and Cultural Connections:** Try to connect the story you are reading to actual events and times in history and to other cultures. As described in Chapter 5, use atlases, history, art history, and science books to help the group make connections to other parts of the world. Historical timelines are very useful to help you make accurate connections between the time and events in your book and other

historical events. See Chapter 7 for suggested books and websites containing historical timelines.

- ❖ **Making Enrichment Connections:** After you have read a book, try to find any related events in your community that you could connect to that story. For example, maybe your local children’s theater is presenting a production of a book you have read. You will see the story come alive in a new way. Or, make a reverse connection deriving from an experience you have already enjoyed. For example, if your family enjoys looking at the stars or visiting museums, find a book for your book club where those activities are featured in the story.
- ❖ **An Example of an Enrichment Connection:** Our book clubs have also suggested further family enrichment and connections. One example of an amazing set of connections was our adventure reading a book from the Magic Tree House series, *Mummies in the Morning*, and then seeing the King Tut exhibit. We had actually developed a book club meeting about *Mummies in the Morning* a few years back. We re-read the book and also read the Magic Tree House Research Guide, *Mummies and Pyramids*, by Will Osborne and Mary Pope Osborne. We then visited The Franklin Institute Science Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to see the *Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs* exhibit.

The night before we saw the exhibit, the children worked on an art project from “Creativity for Kids” called, “Ancient Egypt — Mummies & More.” They created their own mummies and decorated a sarcophagus for their mummy, as well as constructed a pyramid bank. At the exhibit, they were able to connect with Egyptian history and artifacts because they had read about them,

and because they had physically created their own artifacts. The children also were interested in trying to find some of the artifacts they had read about in the study guide. We also reviewed the Institute's website where we found an excellent study guide, "*The Science of Ancient Egypt: Adding a Science Perspective to an Art Exhibit.*" This connected the exhibit to age-appropriate science activities and resources.

After the exhibit, we viewed "*Stars of the Pharaohs*" at the Institute's Fels Planetarium that presented information about how the Ancient Egyptians used astronomy to design calendars, construct huge buildings, and tell time, thereby connecting the King Tut exhibit to astronomy. Finally, at the Institute's Tuttleman IMAX Theater, we saw an IMAX movie called "*Mummies: Secrets of the Pharaohs.*" The movie enabled us to learn more about the mummification process and its ramifications for modern medicine. (Another IMAX movie was also being shown, "*Mysteries of Egypt*"). The museum also offered an Egyptian dinner that would have further made connections to the theme.

During our dinner outside the museum, the children did enjoy Egyptian sticker books ("*King Tut*" sticker book from Dover Publications) and Hieroglyphic Alphabet Decoders, further extending our experience. Also, at the exhibit gift shop, we bought the book *Inside the Tomb of Tutankhamun*, by Jacqueline Morley and John James, which we read when we returned home. This multi-faceted approach, combining reading books and viewing the exhibit, creating related projects, learning about Egyptian achievements, and connecting the stars in the Egyptian sky to the stars in our night sky, enabled all of us to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the topic.

This happened to be an extraordinary experience with many connections. However, you can always try to find ways to make similar connections as you forge your own family experiences.

- ❖ **Connection Questions:** When we are participating in a book club discussion, we ask the group about any connections they see. We inquire about connections to ourselves and our families, our school friends and teachers, our past experiences, and our future dreams. We specifically ask whether the book and its characters remind us of any other books, movies, or other people in our lives. We never know what the group will answer, so it is sometimes very illuminating to hear the answers and ensuing discussion. We are always delighted when we hear the words, “that reminds me of...,” because we know that introduction will lead to an interesting discussion.
- ❖ **Connecting While Reading for the Book Club:** Reading for the book club presents an amazing connection opportunity. Reading with your children can create a powerful emotional connection as you experience a book together. For children in the four-to six-year-old age range, you will most likely be reading to the children at the younger end of the range, while the five-to six-year-olds may be able to read by themselves or to you. Children in the six-to nine-year-old range, especially at the older ages, will be able to read to themselves, but they may still enjoy reading to you and having you read to them. In addition, older children may enjoy reading to younger children. Whatever the reading level of your child, it’s still beneficial to read the story together to make those connections, and also to ensure that the children comprehend the book.

➤ ***When to Read***

Certain reading times work better for different families. Reading before bedtime is always a favorite. Other times to read could include at bathtime, during dinner or other meals, and during any quiet moment in your day. If your older children enjoy reading by themselves, you could sit with them and read your own book while they are reading their book. Being together concentrating on a shared activity will ensure that you are making valuable connections.

➤ ***Active Reading***

When reading together, you may want to read actively and discuss the book as you go along. Ask your children to predict what will happen next in the story, why characters are behaving certain ways and why they make certain choices, and what your children would have done in similar situations. Some children prefer to just listen as the story goes along, and then you can discuss the book at the end. In either case, try to engage your children in a discussion when it is fresh in their minds.

➤ ***Family Reading Nights***

We enjoy “family nights” where we have certain rituals on certain nights. For example, one night might be “family reading night” where we may read a book during dinner, or everyone can talk about a book they are reading or just finished reading. Other family nights we enjoy include “family movie night” and “family game night.” Any special family night engages family members and helps us deepen our sense of connected-ness.

➤ ***Family Reading Journals***

Keep reading journals to record the books you have read together as a family. Or each person in the family could keep his own journal to record books read and thoughts about the books. We write and draw in the journals, and note any special thoughts we have at the moment. Keeping a “book club reading journal” is also a wonderful way to keep track of all the reading progress your group has made. Other family journals that we enjoy include: “beach journals,” “tree journals,” “stargazing journals,” “pet journals,” “vacation and travel journals,” “nature journals,” and “special moments journals.” Making family journals part of your life will ensure that you have a record of all the special moments your family has experienced together.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this book, we will show you how to simply and easily make connections through reading and discussing books together. In Chapter 2, we discuss the practical aspects of getting started with your book club, including setting goals and ground rules for your meetings, and other logistical considerations.