

BOOK CHATTER MATTERS

What are good questions to ask your child when you're reading to her? It depends on how developed her vocabulary is. According to a recent study of 4-year-olds, conducted by researchers at the University of Otago in New Zealand, kids with a relatively small vocabulary make the most significant gains from descriptive questions about the illustrations ("What is Max wearing?"). Those with more advanced skills, who know a larger number of words, benefit from questions asked after the reading is finished ("How did Max feel?") and those that relate the themes of the book to their own lives ("Do you ever feel that way?").



Tailor your questions to your child

Homework Overload?

If you think your child spends more time doing homework than you did as a kid, you may be right. Recent research at the University of Michigan, comparing students in 1981 to those in 1997, showed an increase

of more than 100 percent in the amount of time that children ages 6 to 8 spent on homework. In those 16 years, study time increased from 9 minutes to about 24 minutes a day.

Some possible reasons: The "back to basics" trend; a focus on preparation for standardized tests; and a response to pressure from parents to prepare kids for an increasingly competitive world.

Parents' Views

The "right" amount of homework can be a

question of parental perspective. "I got a call from a parent saying I wasn't giving enough homework," says Lily Eskelsen, who teaches at Orchard Elementary School, in West Valley City, UT. "Two weeks later, another parent complained that there was too much!"

Both the National PTA and National Education Association recommend that children in grades K-2 receive 10 to 20 minutes of homework each school day. But actual homework policies are up to the school district and individual teachers and can vary a great deal.

How to Help

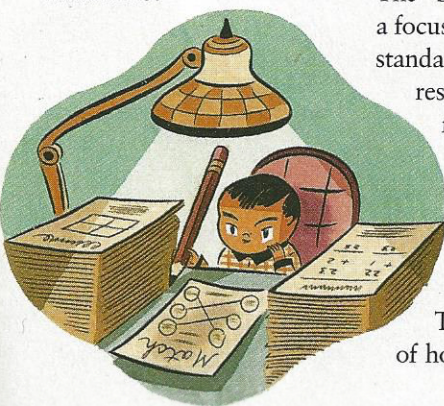
Most researchers and educators agree that homework lets kids learn time management and study skills. It also shows them that what they learn in school has application in real life. To support your child's homework efforts successfully, try playing these roles, suggests Harris Cooper, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at the University of Missouri at Columbia: **STAGE MANAGER:** Make sure your child has a quiet, well-lit work area.

MOTIVATOR: Be positive about homework.

ROLE MODEL: If your child is reading, read too. If she's doing math, balance your checkbook. **MONITOR:** Watch your child for signs of failure and frustration.

Also, don't hesitate to ask the teacher how much time homework should take. If she says 15 minutes but your child is spending 45, get a reality check from the other parents: If all the kids are working longer, let the teacher know.

—MICHELE LYNN



especially one that has real children doing real things, such as going to the zoo or a park," says Donald Shifrin, M.D., a Seattle pediatrician and a member of the AAP's committee on communication. Or parents can make their own videotape of themselves or a sibling reading favorite stories aloud. Two advantages to videos: They allow you to regulate what your child sees, and you can pause a tape at any time and have him view it in segments.

Watching a video or a TV program is more active when you point out

what's happening or encourage your child to dance and sing along. Dr. Hogan recommends the old-standby shows, "Sesame Street" and "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," as well as those that promote reading, such as "Reading Rainbow" and "Wishbone." And whenever possible, say experts, parents should watch television with their child. "That way," says Dr. Shifrin, "they can emphasize the lessons or information offered and relate it to their child's life."

—HELEN CONDES