Family Activities and Reading

Second and Third Grades: Cooking a Meal

Cooking meals together is a common family activity in many households and a natural source of vocabulary learning and word consciousness (recognizing when one doesn't know a word's meaning). Families can help build vocabulary while cooking by

* Following a written recipe and drawing attention to the meaning of words and phrases. For example, a direction such as "stir in the sauce after the meat is tender" provides the opportunity to talk about words that signal temporal relationships (*after*, in this case).
* Using a recipe as an opportunity to demonstrate word consciousness. Parents can wonder aloud what a word means (e.g., "Hmm. What do you think they mean by tender?") and model the strategies they use to figure it out (e.g., Googling it, calling a friend, thinking of things previously described as "tender").

Taking advantage of these opportunities can facilitate extended conversations about word choice and language—and get dinner on the table!

Fourth and Fifth Grades: Planning for a Family Gathering

Family gatherings—from a quick afternoon visit from grandma to a birthday party—provide perfect opportunities for older children to flex their writing muscles, particularly those related to communicating via technology. Parents can try ideas like the following:

* For informal events like an impromptu cook out, parents can solicit their children's help in sending out quick invitations through text or e-mail. Both formats use the QWERTY keyboard layout, which will build familiarity and stamina for typing. Also, there are authentic reasons to consider audience in this kind of writing—Great Aunt Sue might enjoy a note signed "Love you" but be thoroughly confused by a text reading "LY"!
* For an event with more planning time, parents can work with their children to create formal invitations using websites or word processing programs. These invitations might consist mostly of text (another great keyboarding experience), but they could also include images or other types of media that can convey meaning (a skill explicitly called for in the CCSS-ELA in relation to writing explanatory/informative texts).

Family events tend to generate a lot of excitement, so children are often quite willing to help make one happen. Finding authentic ways for them to contribute that naturally require the use of literacy skills is a great way to help children experience the value of those skills.

From ASCD Express article, August 27, 2015, volume 10, issue 24, “Reading Relationships: The Power of Parents” by Kathryn Roberts and Shana Rochester