

To prepare for bigger challenges in high school, 8th grade students must grapple with major works of fiction and nonfiction that extend across cultures and centuries. As they work diligently to understand precisely what an author or speaker is saying, students also must learn to question an author's or speaker's assumptions and assess the accuracy of his or her claims. They also must be able to report findings from their own research and analysis of sources in a clear manner.

Skills Your Child Will Be Working

- Planning and conducting research projects that include several steps and use many credible and documented print and digital sources
- Building writing around strong central ideas or points of view; supporting the ideas with sound reasoning and evidence, precise word choices, smooth transitions, and different sentence structures
- Learning how authors support their ideas through word choice, sentence and paragraph structure, and other methods
- Analyzing where materials on the same topic disagree on matters of fact, interpretation, or point of view
- Analyzing the purpose of information presented in diverse media (e.g., print, TV, web) and evaluating its social, political, or commercial motives
- Presenting findings and claims to others, emphasizing key points with relevant evidence and sound reasoning, adapting speech to the audience and the formality of the setting, and responding to questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas
- Using strong, active verbs to create a clear picture for the reader (e.g., walk, skip, meander, lurch, limp)
- Interpreting figures of speech (e.g., irony, puns) and developing a large vocabulary of general academic words and phrases

Learning Activity to Use at Home

READING ACTIVITY

Provide lots of variety in the materials your child has to read. Make available magazines, internet resources, Graphic novels, poetry, newspapers and any other type of reading material that might interest your child. Set aside a regular time during the week to read together and model your own enjoyment of reading as much as possible. Our actions speak louder than our words so the more your children actually see you read, the more value your child will also place on reading as a part of his or her daily life. Topics read during this time can be part of a discussion during dinner time.

WRITING ACTIVITY

Provide your child with access to a word processing program on a computer or if none are available pen and paper still work. Ask your child to write a nicely organized and informative letter to a community based organization, political representative, news organization or non-profit of their interest. The letter should focus on addressing a topic that they are interested in researching, providing their opinion on an upcoming legislative issue, provide feedback or demonstrate their support for the organization's cause. Once they have completed their rough draft, proof-read, spell-check and provide suggestions. Once final send the letter and wait for a reply.

Teacher and Parent Conferencing - Topics for ongoing conversations throughout the school year with your child's teacher.

When you talk to the teacher, do not worry about covering everything. Instead, keep the conversation focused on the most important topics. In eighth grade, these include:

- Is your child reading closely and drawing evidence from grade-level fiction and nonfiction works that most strongly supports an analysis of the material?
- Is your child developing a rich vocabulary of complex and sophisticated words and using them to speak and write more precisely and coherently?
- Can your child determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; provide an accurate summary of the text distinct from prior knowledge or opinions?

Ask to see a sample of your child's work. Ask the teacher questions such as: Is this piece of work satisfactory? How could it be better? Is my child on track? How can I help my child improve or excel in this area? If my child needs extra support or wants to learn more about a subject, are there resources to help his or her learning outside the classroom?