

Summertime LEARNING

By Dr. Raymond J. Huntington



In May and June, scores of newspapers and magazines around the country publish stories that recommend activities that help students continue learning over the summer. Many activities – such as reading, watching educational television and

visiting libraries and museums – are good choices that are mentioned year after year. But given the increasingly rigorous standards for grade advancement and graduation that have been put in place through the No Child Left Behind education act, I believe many students and parents may be looking for more challenging activities that can strengthen preparedness for the academic year to come.

With that in mind, I'd like to recommend several ways young people can blend learning and leisure in the long, warm days ahead.

Encourage precocious readers to reach for more challenging material. For parents of struggling or reluctant readers, goal number one may be simply finding books that are interesting enough to read from start to finish. But if your child is a strong reader, think about identifying a handful of classics that present a bit of a challenge. Many of these books are far more dense and much longer than the cleverly compelling stories that make up most successful children's literature today, but they can be quite engaging for patient students looking for a deeper reading experience. The American Library Association and the Young Adult Library Services Association offer a Web site featuring recommended books for young adults (www.ala.org/ala/yalsa). Many parents may also remember and recommend classics such as *The Call of the Wild*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Treasure Island*, *Little Women*, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and many more.

Hit the library before the video store or multiplex. While it often seems like most of the big summer movies are action-flicks or thrillers, we can usually count on a few more serious stories based on novels or non-fiction books that can truly expand a student's thinking. But instead of simply heading out to rent a DVD or buy a ticket, students should read the book first, taking time to enjoy the story and analyze the development and interactions of the characters, the evolution of the plot, the historical or emotional setting and other factors that teachers may incorporate into classroom lessons involving the mediums of literature and film.

Between the offerings in theaters, video and DVD rentals, students have plenty of interesting films to choose from. Many of the larger video rental outlets carry movie versions of the classic and well-known novels described above. More recent films, such as *Tuck Everlasting*, based on the book by Natalie Babbitt, *Holes*, from the book by Louis Sachar, and *Seabiscuit*, which was made from the non-fiction book by Lauren Hillenbrand, are also good choices. And of course *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* books

are always suitable for both ambitious readers and adventurous movie fans.

Bring other big readers into the mix. Book Clubs have enriched the reading experience for many adults, but they can be very enjoyable for children too. If your child and others in your neighborhood are avid readers, creating a forum where books can be shared and discussed can be a good way to strengthen comprehension and analytical skills.

Encourage ambitious independent learning projects. During the school year, students with an affinity for math and science can only spend so much time on their favorite subjects, but the summer months can offer many additional hours for learning and discovery and freedom to pursue special interests and challenges.

Scientifically minded students can find many exciting science-fair-type-projects through books at their local library and through Web sites that specialize in sharing this type of information. One of the most comprehensive is the *Science Fair Central* site offered by The Discovery Channel at <http://school.discovery.com/sciencefaircentral>. Another great offering comes from the American Federation of Teachers, which publishes a *Summer Learning Calendar* that can be found at www.aft.org/calendar.

Students who enjoy mathematics can test and strengthen their skills through *Figure This!* (www.figurethis.org). Created by The National Science Foundation in partnership with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering, this initiative features engaging mathematics challenges that are designed to be completed by children and families together. Using colorful animated characters and extensive "real world" applications of mathematics, the *Figure This!* challenges reinforce standards-based learning in algebra, geometry, measurement, data analysis and probability. While they tend to be fun, they're also an effective primer for the rigorous mathematics that most students will be required to master in school.

Turn to teachers and guidance counselors for imaginative, demanding projects. After spending many months with your child, teachers and guidance counselors can also be good sources of information on summer learning activities that tie into your child's interests and aptitudes. They should also be familiar with the education standards for your state and school district and the most significant academic challenges your child will face in the next grade. Talking with these educators can also give you great ideas for summertime learning opportunities that strengthen your child's grounding in "the basics" and expand horizons and expectations for the year to come. ♦

Dr. Raymond J. Huntington and Eileen Huntington are co-founders of Huntington Learning Center, which has helped children achieve success in school for 26 years. For more information about how Huntington can help your child, call 1 800 CAN LEARN.