

Think About It



When students wear their “thinking caps,” they come up with ideas and solve problems by asking questions, considering different approaches, and using their imaginations. Being a critical and creative thinker can help your youngster in every school subject—as well as in everyday situations at home and at play.

Encourage your child to sharpen his thinking skills with these 10 fun activities.

1. What is it? Your youngster can practice seeing things in different ways. Take turns describing everyday objects as if the other person had never seen them before. For example, he might say, “A pencil is skinny like a finger, yellow like a bus, and round like a tube.” How would he describe a book, a television, or a horse? *Idea:* Turn this into a guessing game by giving the descriptions without naming the object.

2. My own restaurant. Let your child use problem-solving skills to create an imaginary cafe. Encourage her to write and illustrate a menu. Then, go shopping together so she can price ingredients and decide what to charge to make a profit. You might pretend to be a food supplier and pose problems. *Example:* “There’s an avocado shortage! I need to charge \$1.50 per avocado instead of \$1.” Will she raise the price of guacamole or remove the avocado slice from her chicken sandwich?



3. Cutout mystery. Your youngster will have to use spatial reasoning for this project. Have each family member fold a sheet of construction paper in half and in half again. Cut out shapes along the edges. Then, trade the folded papers, and let each person draw what the paper will look like when it’s unfolded—where the cutouts will fall and what shapes they will be. Finally, open the paper. Does your child’s picture match his prediction?



4. Squiggle art. What can you do with a squiggle? Practice brainstorming and creativity, of course! Draw a squiggle on a piece of paper. Suggest that your youngster turn the paper to look at it from several angles. Now, using the squiggle, what will she draw? Or draw a few squiggles, and have her create pictures centered around a theme. For instance, she might turn each squiggle into a different robot.

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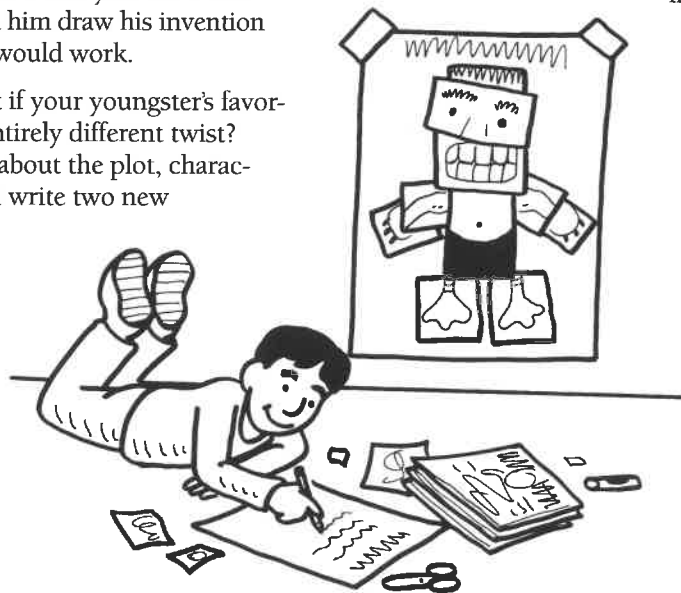
5. Map mission. Breaking down directions will help your child identify key steps, which is great practice for problem-solving. Ask him to pick a secret spot (say, a chair in the living room or a tree in the backyard). Then, he should write directions to get to it (“Go down the stairs, turn left at the hallway...”). Follow his directions together, and see if you end up in the right place. If not, how could he make them clearer?



6. Super substitutes. Considering how to replace one thing with another fosters creative thinking. For instance, what might your youngster use to brush her hair other than a hairbrush? If she likes lollipops with gum in the middle, ask what could go in the center instead. Or sing a fun song, pick out rhyming words, and think of words to replace them.

7. Improve it! Encourage your child to find new approaches by playing inventor. Have him think of items he uses in daily life and how he could design a new-and-improved version. Maybe he often misplaces his sneakers. He might dream up shoes with alarms that go off when you use a shoe-finding remote control. Let him draw his invention and explain to you how it would work.

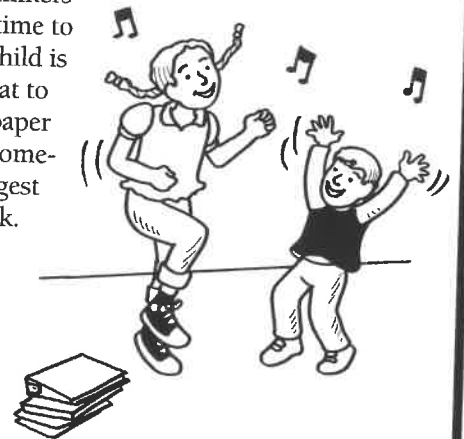
8. A brand-new tale. What if your youngster’s favorite story or book had an entirely different twist? Based on what she knows about the plot, characters, and setting, she could write two new beginnings—one that would keep the rest of the story the same and one that would change it. Or she might come up with an alternate ending, or even a sequel, that fits with the plot.



I’m stuck—now what?

Even the best thinkers get stumped from time to time. When your child is struggling with what to write for a school paper or how to solve a homework problem, suggest that she take a break.

Giving her mind a rest can refresh her and give her renewed energy to tackle her work. Plus, she may think of the answer while she’s doing something completely different! Here are ways to recharge:



- Dance to favorite music.
- Talk to a parent, sibling, or friend about something completely different.
- Get active by doing jumping jacks, marching around the room, or going up and down the stairs a few times.
- Go outside for a breath of fresh air. Walk the dog (or yourself) around the block.
- Take a bath or shower. In fact, some people say they do their best thinking in the shower!

9. Creature feature. Develop your child’s imagination and writing skills by having him make his own monster. Using old magazines and newspapers, have him cut out pieces to put together into a never-before-seen creature. Encourage him to write an encyclopedia entry about his monster—describing its appearance, habitat, and diet.

10. Crazy questions. Spur your youngster to think creatively and make predictions by asking her thought-provoking questions. For example, how would the world be different if cars had never been invented? What would her life be like if she were an insect? Together, write questions on separate index cards. Use the deck to start interesting dinnertime or car-time conversations.

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