MIND IN THE MAKING

FIRST BOOK TIP SHEETS
FOCUS AND SELF CONTROL
Executive Function Life Skill: Focus and Self Control

Children need this skill in order to achieve their goals, especially in a world that is filled with distractions and information overload. It involves paying attention, remembering the rules, thinking flexibly and exercising self control.

Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

**TIP:**
While reading the book to your child, you can point to your head and say:
- “Here’s my head. Where’s your head?”
Then point to the child’s head:
- “There’s your head!”
Wait for your child’s response and respond back.

**SKILL:**
Focus and Self Control includes paying attention, which calls on an Executive Function skill. Also, this back and forth interaction is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**TIP:**
For children who are beginning to remember and understand words, you can let them point first and you follow their lead.
You can ask:
- “Where are your toes?” and “Where are my toes?”

**SKILL:**
Asking questions is a good way to be interactive and help children pay attention.

**TIP:**
You can encourage your child to point to the part of the body named in the book first and then do the action.

**SKILL:**
This activity requires memory. Focus and Self Control includes remembering information so that you can use it.
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

TIP:
You can play the game as you read the book with your child. Like the game of “Simon Says,” your child is not supposed to follow the directions unless the book states: “Elmo says.”

SKILL:
Focus and Self Control includes being able to remember rules. It also includes the ability to slow down your reaction and also to pause and choose a response. Playing games and reading books that require children to remember and not go on automatic, but to exercise self control, are what promote Executive Function skills.

TIP:
Ask your child to try to remember what comes next in the story:
- “What comes after ‘walk like a cat?’ Yes, it is ‘swing a bat.’”

Showing the picture can give your child clues about the words in the book.

SKILL:
Developing Focus and Self Control takes practice. It is good to repeat this game and read the book again and again.

TIP:
In the preschool years, you can make the game more challenging by switching rules to the opposite. For example, if Elmo says: “Touch your nose,” ask your child instead to do the opposite and tap his or her toes.

SKILL:
Your child has to exercise self control when you change the rules, an Executive Function skill.

TIP:
Note that this book and game all involve children in a physical activity. As you read the book, have your child do the actions called for in the story.

SKILL:
Children learn Focus and Self Control by being active—not by sitting still!
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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

Tip:
As you read each page of Goodnight Moon, point to the objects named in the story (the red balloon, two little kittens) and ask your child to point after you.

Skill:
When you invite your child to find the objects, you are helping your child learn to pay close attention to the details in the pictures, which calls on Executive Function skills. The back and forth interaction you have with your child in reading this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
After the opening of the book, there is a tiny mouse on all of the pages with pictures in color. See if your child can find and point to the mouse. If not, point the mouse out to your child.

Skill:
Your child will not only have to pay attention to find the mouse, he or she will also have to use the skill of self control to select the mouse in the midst of everything else happening in the picture.

Tip:
Once your child has heard Goodnight Moon a number of times, stop before words that rhyme. Can your child remember that after “Goodnight, kittens” is “Goodnight, mittens?” You can help your child remember by pointing to the relevant pictures.

Skill:
When you play the rhyming and remembering game, you are not only helping your child learn to listen carefully to the sound of words, you are also promoting his or her working memory, an important aspect of Focus and Self Control.
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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

Tip:

As you read Noisy Nora, suggest things Nora could do instead of causing trouble:

• “Nora might like to read a book while she waits.”
• “Nora could think of something funny as she waits.”
• “It might be easier for Nora to wait if she sings a song.”
• “Nora might tell her parents that she needs some attention, too.”

Skill:

Focus and Self Control includes finding ways to wait even when it is hard, which calls on Executive Function skills. Getting good at waiting requires strategies, including telling people what you need. Your child can learn strategies from you and the characters in books.

Tip:

Ask your child what else Nora could do to help her wait.

Skill:

By asking your child to suggest his or her own ideas for waiting, you are helping your child to be prepared with strategies when self control is necessary. The back and forth conversation you have with your child about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

Remind your child of a time when she or he managed to wait successfully:

• “When I was on the phone, you waited for me to read your book by looking at the pictures alone.”

Skill:

When you remind your child of a time that he or she exercised Focus and Self Control, you are reinforcing the strategies that have been successful.
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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

**TIP:**

You can talk with your child about all the ways the little boy in the story cared for the carrot seed (pulling the weeds around the seed and sprinkling the ground with water, etc.) and how he kept focused on his goal even when everyone in his family doubted that the seed would grow.

**SKILL:**

Focus and Self Control includes being able to work toward a goal. Executive Function skills are driven by goals.

**TIP:**

Ask your child:

- “What did the little boy do to help the seed grow?”
- “How do you think the little boy felt when nothing came up?”

**SKILL:**

An important aspect of Executive Function skills is remembering information so you can use it in different ways. By asking your child to recall the story, you are building this capacity.

**TIP:**

You can share a story with your child about a time that you had to exercise self control to work toward a goal that was important to you. Remind the child of a time that he or she worked toward a goal as well.

**SKILL:**

It is important for children to understand that working toward a goal takes time, takes effort and takes believing you can achieve the goal.

High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from Mind in the Making by Ellen Galinsky


You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: Serve and Return and Executive Function skills.

Serve and Return, like game of ball, involves a back and forth conversation between you and your child where you listen, then build on and extend what your child says or does to promote learning.

Executive Function skills are skills you use to manage your attention, your feelings, your thoughts and your behavior to reach your goals.

They include being able to pay attention, remember information, think flexibly and exercise self control.

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By Ruth Krauss
Pictures by Crockett Johnson

In this heartwarming story, a boy plants and cares for a carrot seed. He’s certain it will grow into something wonderful, even when those around him have doubts.

You can talk with your child about all the ways the little boy in the story cared for the carrot seed (pulling the weeds around the seed and sprinkling the ground with water, etc.) and how he kept focused on his goal even when everyone in his family doubted that the seed would grow.

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You can share a story with your child about a time that you had to exercise self control to work toward a goal that was important to you. Remind the child of a time that he or she worked toward a goal as well.

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Whistle for Willie
By Ezra Jack Keats

Many children will recognize the star of this beloved book—it’s Peter from The Snowy Day! Here, he models both patience and practice as he teaches himself to whistle so that he can summon his dog.

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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

TIP:
You can ask your child:
• “What did Peter do to learn how to whistle?”

SKILL:
When your child retells parts of the story, he or she is developing Focus and Self Control by paying attention and remembering. Focus and Self Control also includes being able to practice in order to work toward a goal. Executive Function skills are driven by goals.

TIP:
We all do better at achieving our goals if they are important to us. You can ask:
• “Why did Peter want to learn to whistle?”
Wait for the child’s response and respond to that, perhaps by asking:
• “Did Willie notice Peter when he couldn’t whistle?”

SKILL:
This back and forth conversation is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

TIP:
You can share a story with the child about a time that you had to exercise self control to work toward a goal that was important to you. Or you can remind your child of a time that he or she worked toward a goal, such as throwing a ball, saying a hard word or going to a new place. By telling inspiring stories about your child’s past, you are helping your child build a “can-do” self image.

SKILL:
It is important for children to be aware that working toward a goal takes time, takes practice and effort, and takes believing you can achieve the goal.
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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

Tip:

As you read A Chair for My Mother, talk with your child about how it might feel to lose his or her things in a fire.

Rosa might have felt sad or angry, but instead, she and her family focused on creating a new home and saving for a new chair. Ask your child how it would feel to save that much money.

Skill:

The skill of Focus and Self Control is necessary as you work toward a goal. Executive Function skills are driven by goals.

When you talk about how Rosa and her family saved for the new chair, your child is seeing the value of working toward long-term goals. The back and forth conversation you have with your child about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

Ask your child about a goal he or she would like to work toward. Talk about what it might take to make it happen.

Skill:

When you help your child think of a goal that he or she is interested in achieving and discuss ways to stay focused on that goal, you are helping your child learn the skill of Focus and Self Control. Make sure you help your child think about a goal he or she really cares about, not one you set for your child.

Tip:

Share a story with your child about a time that you stayed focused on a goal and had to wait to make it come true. Share your strategies for making that happen.

Skill:

Focus and Self Control is promoted when we have strategies to help us wait, not get distracted and not go on automatic even when things are hard. Children learn through stories. When you share your story and strategies, your child is learning ways to help himself or herself in the future.
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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

**TIP:**
You can ask your child:

- “What was Tommy’s goal? How did he work toward it?”

Wait for the child’s response and respond to that.

**SKILL:**

This back and forth interaction is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**TIP:**
You can ask:

- “What were the goals of Tommy’s friends?”

**SKILL:**

Focus and Self Control includes having a goal and working toward it even when you feel like doing something else or others want you to do something else. Executive Function skills are driven by goals.
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TIP:

Ask your child to think about what Tommy did when he was told to take his box of 64 crayons home or to copy a picture?

You can ask:

• “Did that help Tommy achieve his goal?”

And continue the conversation by asking:

• “Have you ever had a time you wanted to do something different or had to wait? What did you do to help yourself wait?”

SKILL:

Focus and Self Control requires us to be able to think about things flexibly as well as not to go on automatic, but to exercise self control.

TIP:

The book ends with the fact that Tommy continued to draw and still does.

Ask the children if they notice that the character in the book (Tommy) and the book’s creator (Tomie) have almost the same name.

SKILL:

Children would enjoy looking up Tomie dePaola and finding out more about him.

Pursuing additional information requires Focus and Self Control.
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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

TIP:
Ask your child:
• “How do you think the Little Red Hen feels when the duck, the cat and the dog are too busy to help? How do you think the Little Red Hen feels getting the pizza pan, the flour, the mozzarella and the toppings all by herself? Why do you think she kept working?”
• “How would you have felt, and what would you have done?”

SKILL:
Executive Function skills are driven by goals including Focus and Self Control. This entails being persistent and continuing to try to reach goals even if others are too busy or don’t want to help.

TIP:
Ask your child:
• “What were the duck, the cat and the dog doing each time they were asked to help?”
Wait for the child’s response and respond to that, perhaps by asking:
• “Why was each of these activities important to them?”

SKILL:
If you look closely, each animal is pursuing an interest, such as the cat practicing music. A back and forth conversation between you and your child about the book is what researchers call “serve and return.” The importance of this everyday interaction to brain building is a key finding on this topic from child development research.

The Little Red Hen
Retold by Philemon Sturges
This delightful spin on a classic folktale is filled with humorous details! The Little Red Hen goes through each step of making a pizza, but do her friends help her? No. In this version, though, she finds a creative new way for them to contribute.

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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

TIP:
The objects in the Little Red Hen’s shopping wagon, cupboard and fridge provide many opportunities for asking children to remember and identify and name different objects. You can point to them and say: “What’s that?”

SKILL:
When you invite your child to find the objects in the shopping wagon, you are helping your child learn to pay close attention to details in the pictures.

TIP:
Ask your child:

• “Why do you think that the Little Red Hen was willing to share her pizza with the others, even when they were unwilling to help?”

SKILL:
This question promotes self control—children have to put aside what they might have done and take the perspective of the Hen.

TIP:
Ask your child:

• “What might the Hen have done to prevent going back to the store over and over again?”

SKILL:
Focus and Self Control includes thinking flexibly. This is exemplified when the Little Red Hen has to adapt to not having a pizza pan, then flour, then mozzarella and, finally, pizza toppings. When you talk about the Little Red Hen and her friends using Focus and Self Control, your child is learning strategies to do the same.
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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

Tip:
Sam was tired of waiting to be the Hamster Helper. Talk with your child about a time he or she was tired of waiting for something. Try to recall what he or she did to make the waiting easier.

Skill:
Focus and Self Control includes being able to wait to do something, even when it is hard. This is learning to exercise self control, an Executive Function skill. Helping your child remember what he or she did to make the waiting easier promotes this skill. The back and forth conversation you have with your child about waiting is what researchers call "serve and return." Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
Share what you do when you need to stay focused even when it is hard or when you can’t go on automatic. For example, sitting in traffic or waiting for the bus, you may sing or think about happy things.

Skill:
Focus and Self Control is promoted when you have strategies to use when you are challenged or distracted. When you share your story and strategies, you are teaching your child new ways to develop self control.

Tip:
Sam took the hamster on the field trip because he couldn’t resist sharing the experience with him. You can talk with your child about how Sam didn’t think ahead about the consequences, especially the risk of losing the hamster. Ask your child what Sam might have handled the situation differently. You can also share a time that you didn’t think ahead and how that affected you or others—for example, saying something that hurt someone else’s feelings. Share what you do now to stop and think ahead.

Skill:
Finding ways to stop and think ahead require reflecting and resisting the temptation to go on auto-pilot. Your child will learn from your experience.

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

By Katharine Kenah
In this classic bedtime story, a Sam feels he has the best seat in his classroom because he sits next to the class hamster. He yearns to show the hamster the world outside his cage, so he sneaks him along on a class trip to the science museum and then loses him in the Hamster Habitat!

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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

**TIP:**

The book says that Wilma began running and jumping as soon as she learned to walk. Moving was a strength of hers from early on. Ask your child to think about his or her unique strengths and interests. Then ask your child to think about how he or she can use these strengths to achieve a goal, even if challenges arise along the way.

**SKILL:**

Focus and Self Control is promoted when we build upon our strengths and have meaningful goals. Executive Functions are driven by goals.

This back and forth conversation you have about your child’s unique strengths, interests and goals is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**TIP:**

Ask your child what helped Wilma become the fastest runner in the Olympics. For example, after she was stricken with polio, she wanted to be able to go school with everyone else. So, she worked hard and practiced walking even though nobody ever thought she would be able to move around without the brace. When she took off her brace and walked into church, she “took her mind off her knees by concentrating on taking another breath, and then another.”

**SKILL:**

When you ask your child to reflect on Wilma’s experiences, you are helping him or her see how empowering it can be to set goals and concentrate on achieving them.
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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

TIP:
Make a list of strategies your child can use to work toward a goal he or she cares about. These strategies could include setting up practice time, getting help from others, positive self talk, taking your mind off problems, using the “power of concentration,” and remembering the goal.

SKILL:
Achieving goals depends on using specific strategies, especially if there are challenges. When you make a list of strategies with your child, you are promoting the skill of Focus and Self Control.

This back and forth conversation about strategies is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Wilma Unlimited
By Kathleen Krull

Wilma Unlimited tells the inspiring true story of how Wilma Rudolph overcame many odds—from being the "sickliest child" in her hometown with a variety of illnesses, including polio, to becoming the world’s fastest runner and winning three Olympic Gold Metals.

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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

Tip:
Zoe had a dream of playing an elegant piano, of being a prodigy and of performing at Carnegie Hall in New York. But instead, she gets a “wood-grained, vinyl-seated, wheeze-bag organ.”

Talk with your child about what Zoe did to focus on her goal of making music even when there are challenges along the way. For example, she kept thinking of quitting, but then she hears the expert player on the piano and learns from this experience.

Skill:
The skill of Focus and Self Control is driven by goals—and those goals can change over time. It is important to help children understand how goals can affect motivation and actions.

Tip:
Learning music involves practice. Ask your child:

- “What kept Zoe practicing?”
- “What kept her father learning to cook new things (from Living Room University)?”
- “Can you remember a time when you had to practice? What helped you stick to the practice and what made it hard?”

Skill:
Practicing requires both focus (being able to screen out distractions) and self control (sticking with something, even when it’s hard), which call on Executive Function skills. Also, this back and forth conversation about practicing is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
Sam took the hamster on the field trip because he couldn’t resist sharing. Make a list together of what you and your child do to stay focused when there are distractions. The list can include simple things, like listening to music or putting on headphones or shutting the door to have quiet or think about the goal.

Skill:
When you list strategies to use to achieve goals, you are promoting the skill of Focus and Self-Control.
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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

**TIP:**

The main character in this book, Joey, had a hard time because he was so impulsive, couldn’t pay attention and didn’t make good decisions due to ADHD and his family life. He may have struggled more than most of us, but we can learn from his experience.

Ask your child:

- “What do you think of some of the advice Joey was given to manage his behavior, such as: ‘Whenever you think of something bad, you have to quick think of something good.’ Or ‘You can never, never think of three things bad in a row or else you will feel awful?’”

**SKILL:**

**Strategies** are essential to learning the skill of Focus and Self Control. Reframing negative thoughts into positive thoughts is one such strategy.

**TIP:**

You can talk with your child about how he or she manages when wanting to be impulsive. You can recall positive examples, such as: “I know you were upset the other day, but you stopped yourself before you slammed the door. What helped you from slamming that door?” You can talk about the strategies you use to prevent yourself from going on auto-pilot, such as, taking a deep breath or exercising.

**SKILL:**

In addition to changing the way you think, other strategies to promote Focus and Self Control involve changing your behavior, such as taking deep breaths or exercising before you respond to something. To do so, you need to pay attention to your own behavior and have plans in place for how to respond if you are tempted to respond negatively. These strategies call on Executive Function skills.
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**TIP:**

Joey wanted to be able to go back to his regular classroom, get a dog and have people know he was a good kid. He had goals that were important to him.

Ask your child:

- “How did Joey’s goals contribute to his working on paying better attention and not behaving impulsively?”

**SKILL:**

Focus and Self Control—and all life skills—are promoted by working toward a goal.

**TIP:**

Joey received a lot of help from the Special Education Department, the medical doctor and his mom in achieving his goals.

Ask your child:

- “Joey had goals that were important to him. Can you think of goals that are important to you? What help can I or others provide to support you in achieving that goal?”

**SKILL:**

When we are trying to change our behavior, we all need supportive people around us. When you involve your child in thinking about an important goal and what help you can provide in achieving that goal, you are being supportive!
PERSPECTIVE TAKING
Executive Function Life Skill: Perspective Taking
Perspective Taking goes far beyond empathy. It involves figuring out what others think and feel and forms the basis for children’s understanding of the intentions of their parents, teachers and friends. Children who can take the perspectives of others are also much less likely to get involved in conflicts.

Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking

TIP:
This book provides a great opportunity to for children to learn that different animals make different sounds. With very young children, imitate the sounds the animals in the book make, such as roaring, snorting and hissing. When your child learns the words and sounds of this book, ask him or her to make the sound with you. You can also say the word “roaring,” and have your child make the sound.

SKILL:
Perspective Taking involves understanding the perspectives of others, including what they sound like. To take the perspectives of others, you have to put aside your own thoughts and feelings, which calls on Executive Function skills.

The back and forth interaction you have with your child in sharing this story is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

TIP:
On the last page of the book, children pretend to be the animals. Have your child pretend, too.

SKILL:
Pretending is an important way children learn to take the perspectives of others.

TIP:
After you have read this story, use the refrain in your everyday life, saying to your child: “[Your child’s name, your child’s name], what do you hear?”

Have your child listen for all of the different sounds around him or her, like the sounds of birds, honking horns, etc.

SKILL:
Perspective Taking is promoted by asking questions, imitating and repeating.
Executive Function Life Skill: Perspective Taking

Perspective Taking goes far beyond empathy. It involves figuring out what others think and feel and forms the basis for children’s understanding of the intentions of their parents, teachers and friends. Children who can take the perspectives of others are also much less likely to get involved in conflicts.

Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking

TIP:

While reading this book, you can talk about how the Mother Duck might be feeling and thinking. Talk about the clues you see in the book’s illustrations to understand Mother Duck’s emotions.

SKILL:

Perspective Taking involves understanding what others think and feel. To do so, you have to put aside your own perspectives, which calls on Executive Function skills.

TIP:

With older children, you can help them be more attuned to the feelings of others by asking such questions as:

• “How do you think Mother Duck felt when not all of her little ducks came back? How do you know?”

Have the children look at the Mother Duck’s expressions as fewer and fewer of her little ducks returned, and then look at her expressions in the fall and winter.

SKILL:

Looking at the faces and body expressions of the characters in books is an important way children learn to “read” the feelings and thoughts of others.

TIP:

At the end of the book, ask your child:

• “How does Mother Duck feel when all of the little ducks came back? How do you know?”
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Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking

**SKILL:**
This back and forth conversation about the book is what researchers call “**serve and return**.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**TIP:**
With older children, this book offers many opportunities for looking at the different colors of the ducks and for counting. On the last page of the book, have your child count how many baby ducks each little duck now has.

**SKILL:**
Paying attention to details promotes Executive Function skills.

**TIP:**
You can talk with your child about how he or she might feel if your child was the Mother Duck or the little ducks.

Ask your child:
- “How do you think you would feel if you couldn’t find someone you were looking for?”
- “How would you feel if you were the little ducks and left home to be on your own?”

**SKILL:**
Perspective Taking is **learned through putting yourself in another’s “shoes.”** By talking about the **viewpoints of others**—in stories and in their own lives—you are helping children learn the skill of Perspective Taking.

Five Little Ducks

**By Raffi**
Illustrated by Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey

A toddler favorite, this colorful board book features a classic counting song in which, one by one, five little ducklings leave their loving duck mother. In the end (hooray!) each returns to her, trailed by a flock of surprises.

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www.fbmarketplace.org.

You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: **Serve and Return** and **Executive Function** skills.

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**Executive Function** skills are skills you use to manage your attention, your feelings, your thoughts and your behavior to reach your goals.

They include being able to pay attention, remember information, think flexibly and exercise self control.

Find more about Families and Work Institute’s Mind in the Making at www.mindinthemaking.org.
Executive Function Life Skill: Perspective Taking

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Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking

Tip:
You can ask children questions about the ways the people in the book differ from their own experience. For example, you can say:

• “What are their clothes like? How are they different from the clothes you wear?”
• “What are their homes like? How are they different from your home?”
• “What else do you see that is different?”

Skill:
Perspective Taking is being able to understand what others think and feel. By talking about the differences your child sees in the book, you are helping your child learn about Perspective Taking because your child is learning about the perspectives and experiences of others. This back and forth conversation you have about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
You can point out the people in the book that might look differently or live differently, but draw attention to how we are all alike. For example, you can say:

• “He cries. I cry. You cry. We all cry sometimes.”
• “Even if we look and live differently from others, we all laugh.”

Skill:
When you talk about the ways that the children in the book are just like your child, you are helping him or her form a basis of understanding about the deeper similarities among people. By helping your child gain these understandings, you are promoting Perspective Taking and your child’s Executive Function skills.
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Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking

TIP:
You can ask your child questions about the characters:
• “Why do you think Piggie doesn’t like rain and Gerald the Elephant does?”

SKILL:
Perspective Taking includes figuring out what others feel and think. To do so, you have to put aside your own feelings and thoughts, which calls on Executive Function skills.

TIP:
Ask your child questions about the character’s actions and motivations:
“How did Gerald the Elephant help Piggie? Why did he do so?”

SKILL:
Perspective Taking includes understanding others.

TIP:
Ask your child about what the characters learned from their experiences in the book. You can talk with your child about how Piggie’s views change:
• “Remember when Piggie first asked, ‘How can anyone play outside with all of this rain!?!’ Then he saw the worms enjoying the rain. What did Piggie learn from the worms?”
• “Why do you think the worms were happy about the rain and Piggie wasn’t?”

SKILL:
Perspective Taking involves the self control to put aside your own assumptions in order to understand the viewpoints of others and how they change through experience.

TIP:
The writer and illustrator of this book, Mo Willems, suggests that children can read this book like a play.

SKILL:
Pretending to be different characters helps children learn to take the perspectives of others. Children will enjoy opportunities to act out this book.
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

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**TIP:**
The minnow offers a great illustration of how others have different perspectives when he hears frog’s descriptions of birds, cows and people as fish-like creatures. You can explore this concept with your child by asking:

- “Have you ever had an idea about something before you saw it? What were your ideas?”
- “How was the real thing different or the same as your ideas?”

**SKILL:**
Perspective Taking involves **learning that others may have different knowledge than you do.** To learn this, you have to **put aside what you know and take the perspectives of others**, which calls on Executive Function skills.

**TIP:**
A central concept of *Fish Is Fish* is that we sometimes want what other people have. The minnow wanted to go on land like the frog, but when he does, he discovers he can’t breathe there. When the minnow returns to the water, he discovers that his world “was certainly the most beautiful of all worlds.”

Ask your child if he or she has ever had similar experiences.

**SKILL:**
By **talking about wanting what others have**, you will help children learn about the perspectives of others.

**TIP:**
You can ask your child:

- “Why couldn’t the fish breathe on land?”
- “Are there things you can do that others can’t? How does that make you feel?”

**SKILL:**
Perspective Taking includes **learning that others can do things that you can’t.**
Executive Function Life Skill: Perspective Taking

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Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking

Tip:
You can talk about how Corduroy might be feeling in different parts of the story. For example, you can say:

- “How do you think Corduroy felt when the mother and daughter walked away from him?”
- “How do you think Corduroy felt when he found himself on stairs that moved?”

Skill:
Perspective Taking is promoted by talking about the feelings and thoughts of others. This back and forth interaction you and your child have is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
You can role play with your child:

- “Let’s pretend you are the child who wanted to buy Corduroy, but whose mother said, ‘I’ve spent too much already.’” Or, “Let’s pretend you are the guard who hears a strange noise. What do you suppose they were thinking and feeling? What did they do in the story? What else might they have done?”

Skill:
You can enhance your child’s understanding of others’ thoughts and feelings by pretending to be that person. When your child pretends, he or she has to put his or her own feelings aside, which calls on Executive Function skills.
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Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking

TIP:
You can help children understand the differences between themselves and the animals in this book.

For example, you can ask:

• “How do the eyes of a giant squid compare with your eyes? The eyes of a cat?”

• “What difference do you think it would make to have eyes of different sizes?”

SKILL:
Perspective Taking involves understanding not just others’ thoughts and feelings, but also their physical characteristics.

TIP:
You can ask your child:

• “Why do you think that each animal in the book is the size it is?”

• “Why do you think we are the size we are?”

SKILL:
Perspective Taking includes figuring out why others act the way they do. To do so, you have to put aside what you know and feel and take the perspectives of others, which call on Executive Function skills.
Executive Function Life Skill: Perspective Taking
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**Suggestion for Promoting Perspective Taking**

**TIP:**
You can ask your child:

- “How are John Henry and Joe different and the same?”
- “Why were people with different color skin not supposed to swim or eat together? How did John Henry and Joe feel about these rules?”
- “How do you think you would have felt if you lived at that time?”

**SKILL:**
Perspective Taking involves **being able to understand what others feel and think.** To do so, you have to **recognize your own views**, but also **put them aside so you can take the viewpoint of others**, which call on **Executive Function** skills.

**TIP:**
This book offers an historical view of racial relationships.
You can ask your child:

- “Why do you think the town officials filled the pool with asphalt?”
- “How did ‘the new law’ change and not change things for the two best friends?”
- “How have things changed and not changed today?”

When the town pool is filled with asphalt, Joe says that he didn’t want to swim there anyway, but John Henry replies: “I wanted to swim in this pool.”

Ask your child:

- “Why did Joe say he didn’t care about swimming in the pool? Was he telling the truth?”
- “Do you sometimes say things that aren’t really true to try to make people feel better? Does it work? Why or why not?”

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**Freedom Summer**
By Deborah Wiles

In this powerful story, two best friends are thrilled that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 allows them to swim together at their local pool for the first time. When they arrive, they learn the town has decided to fill the pool with asphalt rather than integrate it.

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Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking

**SKILL:**
This book’s story lends itself to great discussions of each boy’s perspectives in the context of a different era.

Studies have found that when people can truly understand the perspectives of others, they are less likely to get into conflicts.

**TIP:**
In the beginning of the book, the author, Deborah Wiles, talks about why she wrote this book.

You can share her story and ask children to consider her perspective as a white child who wondered about “what it must be like to be a black child my age.” The author also wondered whether children can bring about change.

You can ask your child:

- “Do you think the two boys in the book changed things by going into Mr. Mason’s store together?”

**SKILL:**
Those who bring about change are driven by goals, which involves using Executive Function skills.
Executive Function Life Skill: Perspective Taking
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### Tip:
You can talk with your child about how it would feel if something he or she wore came to life:
- “What would it feel like if your hat or t-shirt or jammies talked?”

### Skill:
You are promoting Perspective Taking when you help your child think about how it might feel if his or her clothes could talk. This back and forth conversation between you and your child is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

### Tip:
You can use the poems in this book to pretend that familiar objects have thoughts and feelings. You can ask your child what his or her shoes or swimsuit might say. Turn this into a back and forth conversation between your child’s clothes and your child.

### Skill:
Perspective Taking includes **understanding how others think and feel, even pretending about everyday objects**. When your child pretends, he or she has to put his or her own feelings aside, which calls on Executive Function skills.
Glass Slipper Gold Sandal

By Paul Fleischman

Glass Slipper Gold Sandal is much-loved Cinderella story told through the traditions of many different lands.

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Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking

Tip:

You can prompt your child to think about how the characters in the book might feel:

• “How do you think the girl felt when the stepmother tricked her by being nice then turned mean once she married her father? Why do you think the stepmother acted that way? Have you ever been tricked? How did that feel?”

Skill:

Perspective Taking includes being able to understand why people behave as they do and how their behavior affects others. Talking about what underlies the behavior of characters in books promotes Executive Function skills.

Tip:

Ask your child to pay careful attention to how the story changes when it is told in different countries, noticing the details, such as the glass slippers (in France) becoming sandals of gold (in Iraq).

• “How do the girl’s clothes change in different countries? ”

Despite the fact that the story unfolds in different countries and cultures, the plot continues.

Ask your child:

• “How did the girl manage when she didn’t have enough to eat or a good place to sleep?”

• “Why do you think the animals helped her?”

Skill:

When you help your child understand others’ attitudes and motivations, you are helping your child learn to see the perspective of others. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about the book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

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Mind in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

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Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking

Tip:
Talk with your child about how Jemmy, the whipping boy, and the Prince learned more about each other by experiencing different things in each other’s lives. You can ask such questions as:

- “Why did the Prince want to run away from a privileged life—a life that others thought would be a great life?”
- “The Prince admired Jemmy for not crying out when he was whipped. What else did he learn to admire about him when the boys were captured by outlaws? What did he admire about Jemmy when the boys were running away from the outlaws in the sewers?”
- “Jemmy hadn’t been impressed by the Prince’s character before they ran away. What happened that began to change his mind about the Prince?”

Skill:
Perspective Taking includes being able to step back from your own attitudes, thoughts and feelings in order to understand the perspectives of others. It also includes figuring out why others act and think as they do. The stories in this book offer an ideal opportunity to promote this kind of thinking, which call on Executive Function skills.

Tip:
Ask your child about switching places in his or her own life:

- “Who would you most switch places with? Why?”
- “Who do you think would like to switch places with you? Why?”

Skill:
Perspective Taking is promoted by thinking and talking about your own feelings and having the opportunity to think about others’ lives in relation to your own. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.
Wonder is the wondrous story of a child, August Pullman, who was born with rare and serious facial deformities. Because he endured 27 surgeries, he was home schooled until fifth grade when he enrolls in school for the first time. Although he feels like an ordinary ten year old, he knows that ordinary kids don’t cause other ordinary children to run away screaming when they see them.

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Tip:
A child, Jack, who befriends August, says that a “kid like August doesn’t stand a chance in middle school.” Ask your child to talk about his or her responses to how the children in the story treat August.

Skill:
Discussing children’s various responses to August—from those who are openly rejecting like Julian to August’s sister, Via, who loves August but doesn’t want him to come to a play at her new school—helps children understand their own reactions to people who seem different. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
In the book, August describes the progression of his own feelings when others stare at him. When he was younger, we wore a helmet to cover his face, but now that he is older, he compares his reaction to living in drizzling rain—he has become used to the fact that he freaks some people out.

Ask your child:
• “How do you think it would feel to be stared at in this way? Do think that August’s words reflect his real feeling?”

Skill:
August knows that he is “weird looking,” commenting that if someone different looking—a “Wookie started going to the school all of a sudden, I’d be curious. I’d probably stare a bit!” By helping your child articulate how August copes, you are helping your child learn coping skills.

Tip:
The story of August’s first year in school is told by him and by five other children. One of the storytellers, Miranda, describes August’s situation like a giant lottery where you get a good ticket or a bad ticket, but concludes that, in the end, the universe takes care of even its most fragile creations. Ask your child if this statement rings true in this story. Is it just luck that August not only survives, but also thrives? What do others do and what does he do to make this happen?

Skill:
By prompting reflections about the perspectives and actions of the characters in the book—from the school principal to the teachers, from August’s parents to the other children, and to August himself—you are helping your child think about how we can help each other thrive. Reflecting in this way calls on Executive Function skills.

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COMMUNICATING
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Suggestions for Promoting Communicating

**TIP:**
This book provides an opportunity to have your child listen to what the animals in the book say.
Ask your child:
If your child says, “La La La,” you can ask what pigs really say.

**SKILL:**
Communicating involves listening to what others say.

**TIP:**
Children appreciate a sense of humor. See how your child reacts to the three singing pigs saying, “La La La!” Keep the joke going and ask your child to make up other silly things that animals might say.

**SKILL:**
As your child gets older and if she or he wants to pretend or make jokes about what animals say, enjoy the humor.

**TIP:**
You use this story to begin a conversation with your child about what your child wants to say. When your child is younger, repeat the sounds your child makes. When your child is older, you can ask:
- “What do you say when you are hungry? What do you say when you want me to pick you up?”

**SKILL:**
Communicating involves thinking about what you want to say. Use what child development researchers call “serve and return” to have this conversation—you or your child does something (serves) and the other responds (returns), back and forth like a game of ball. Watch your child’s response to the book and this question and build on what your child says (with sounds, with looks, with movements) and extend it. If your baby makes a noise “bubbba,” you can say “bubbba” back. When your child uses words, continue the conversation. This is a vitally important brain-building activity.

**Moo, Baa, La La La!**
By Sandra Boynton
This rhyming romp is a favorite of countless families. As expressive barnyard animals make the wrong sounds, children delight in correcting them. Along the way, they’ll quack, moo, neigh, baa, meow and giggle!

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Suggestions for Promoting Communicating

**TIP:**
When the book says: “Where are baby’s toes?” you can point to your baby’s toes as well as to the babies’ toes in the pictures on the pages.

**SKILL:**
Communicating centers on conversations—with sounds, with words, with movements and with facial expressions. This book provides an ideal opportunity to have many conversations with your baby.

The best conversations involve what researchers call “serve and return”—you or your child does something (serves) and the other responds (returns), back and forth like a game of ball. Use this book to watch your child’s response to the words and pictures and build on what your child says (with sounds, with looks, with movements) and extend it. If your baby says: “Aaahhh,” you can say: “Aaahhh” back. This is a vitally important brain-building activity.

**TIP:**
While you read this book with your child, you can follow the actions (“so big” and “patty-cake,” for example).

**SKILL:**
Using the words and repeating the actions on the pages help children connect words to real experience and promote the skill of Communicating. It is a step toward determining what you want to say, an Executive Function skill.

You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: Serve and Return and Executive Function skills.

Serve and Return, like game of ball, involves a back and forth conversation between you and your child where you listen, then build on and extend what your child says or does to promote learning.

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Suggestions for Promoting Communicating

Tip:
Act out what Ben is doing in the book. Take turns making faces and copying Ben’s gestures with your child.

Skill:
When you act out the ways Ben is communicating, you are helping your child make connections between words and actions. This will help your child learn new words and to understand how others communicate.

Tip:
Ask your child what Penguin is doing:
• “Why is Penguin not responding at first? Do you think Ben could have done anything to get Penguin to respond? Why or why not?”

Skill:
The skill of Communicating involves helping your child learn what he or she wants to communicate and how to communicate so others will understand. When you talk about why Penguin doesn’t respond to Ben at first, it helps your child think about what Penguin is trying to tell Ben by turning away. Your child has to put aside what he or she thinks to truly understand the perspective of Penguin, which calls on Executive Function skills. Giving your child insight into the perspectives of Penguin and of Ben helps your child learn to communicate more effectively.

Penguin

By Polly Dunbar

When Ben receives a penguin as a present, he tries to communicate with him in many different ways. Ben becomes increasingly frustrated when Penguin doesn’t respond and doesn’t respond. Finally Penguin responds when Ben needs him most!

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Tip:

Ben becomes upset because Penguin is not responding. You can share a time when you or your child was upset because someone was not listening or responding. Talk about why there was a breakdown in communication.

Skill:

By sharing stories, you are helping your child make the book relevant in his or her own life. Use what is called “serve and return” in this conversation, where—like a game of ball, you go back and forth, building on and extending what your child says and does. This conversation can help your child think about when communicating works and doesn’t work.

Tip:

At the end of the book, Ben and Penguin are communicating with each other: “Penguin said “everything.” Ask your child to talk about what Penguin finally has to say to Ben.

Skill:

Communicating includes many different ways of connecting with others. By talking with your child about different ways of communicating (through words, behavior, pictures, etc.), you are helping him or her have a deeper understanding of this skill.
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Tip:

As you read, *Bark, George*, ask your child:

- “Is George barking now? What animal does he sound like?”
- “How does George’s mother feel when her puppy doesn’t bark? What do the pictures tell you about her reaction?”

Talk about a time when you or your child didn’t understand something because the other person was speaking in a way that was foreign to you. Talk about what you did to understand that person.

Skill:

This conversation about misunderstandings will help your child understand how to overcome barriers in how we communicate. This back and forth interaction is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

Act out this story with your child. Shake your head no, laugh or act surprised with each sound George makes.

Skill:

When you use different voices and facial expressions, you are showing your child different ways to communicate. Pretending calls on Executive Function skills, because you have to put aside your own reaction and “become” someone else.

Tip:

Talk about the end of the story when George doesn’t bark, but says “hello” to the people.

Skill:

This book shares the joy and humor of communicating in different ways!
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### Suggestions for Promoting Communicating

**TIP:**
Ask your child to look at the drawings and tell the story that he or she sees. There is no wrong answer here—so listen and talk about why your child is telling this particular story.

**SKILL:**
Communicating happens even when there are no words on the page, just drawings and sounds.

**TIP:**
While you read this book, you can point out the facial expressions of the Lion and the Mouse. You can ask questions about the characters:

- “How is the Lion feeling? How is the Mouse feeling?”

These questions will help children be more attuned to looking at faces and what the faces are saying without words.

**SKILL:**
Communicating involves facial expressions. Communicating with sounds and actions can make reading fun and interactive. You and your child can make the sounds or even act out the story.

**TIP:**
Ask children why they think the Lion freed the Mouse. How did that affect the Mouse when the Lion was trapped? As the book jacket states: “even little friends can prove to be great friends.”

**SKILL:**
Communicating includes understanding how others will understand your communications. To understand the perspectives of others and how they will hear what you say, you have to put aside your own thoughts and feelings—an Executive Function skill.

**TIP:**
Looking up information on the Internet about the artist, Jerry Pinkney, can make the experience of this book an even deeper one. For example, he had dyslexia as a child and had trouble reading, so he used drawing as a way to communicate.

**SKILL:**
There are many ways to communicate—with drawings as well as with words.
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Tip:

Talk with your child about why he or she thinks the boy would rather have a pet that could run and catch and climb trees and chase strings and sleep in his bed at night. You can ask your child which type of pet he or she would want and why.

Skill:

When you talk with your child about what the boy in the story wants and needs in a pet, you are helping your child understand the thoughts and feelings of others, which is an important part of communicating. This back and forth conversation you have with your child is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

The boy in the story begins to understand that his fish is, in fact, connecting to him. As you read Not Norman, point out all the ways the boy and the fish communicate with each other. For example, the boy realizes that he should clean the “gunky” fish bowl and fill his half empty bowl. And the fish listens to the boy at school when no one else does.

Skill:

In order to communicate well, we need to take time to understand one another—especially when we are as different as a child and a fish. By drawing attention to how Norman and the boy are learning to understand each other, you are helping your child see that understanding others is the basis of good communication.

Tip:

Throughout the story, the boy plans to trade Norman “for a good pet,” but he eventually changes his mind. You can talk with your child about the importance of not making snap judgments of others.

Skill:

Effective communication sometimes involves putting aside your immediate reactions and getting to know someone else—whether that someone else is a fish or a person. This process promotes Executive Function skills.
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**Tip:**
Emily writes her teacher during summer vacation that she thinks she sees a whale in her pond, and she loves whales very much. She asks for information on whales because she thinks this whale might be hurt. Her teacher, while giving her information in a series of letters, tells her again and again that there is no way a whale could live her in pond.

Ask your child:

- “How does Emily react to her teacher’s insistence that a whale couldn’t live in her pond?”
- “How does the teacher deal with Emily’s belief that she is seeing a whale?”

**Skill:**
To understand a disagreement among others, your child has to put aside his or her own ideas and try to see the perspectives of others, an Executive Function skill. When you help your child learn how to deal with disagreement, you are helping him or her become a better communicator.

**Tip:**
Emily uses letters to her teacher as a way of gaining more information about whales. Ask your child what else Emily does to find out about whales.

**Skill:**
One of the purposes of communicating is to find answers to questions you might have. By asking your child questions and having conversations about books and characters, you are helping your child think about communicating in new ways. These back and forth conversations are what researchers call "serve and return." Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.
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Tip:
As you read Dear Mr. Blueberry, point out words that may be new to your child, like migratory or shrimplike. You can talk about what they mean.

Skill:
Using rich and diverse language promotes communicating.

Tip:
You can ask your child whom he or she would like to write a letter to. Together, plan and write a letter.

Skill:
Writing letters is fun and helps your child think about what he or she wants to say and thus to practice the skill of Communicating.

Dear Mr. Blueberry
By Simon James

During Vacation time, Emily and her teacher, Mr. Blueberry, write letters to each other about the whale that Emily sees in her small pond. It’s an engaging story with a charming blend of reality and fantasy.
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### Suggestions for Promoting Communicating

**TIP:**
When Martin Luther King, Jr. saw signs that read “WHITE ONLY,” he felt bad until he remembered the words of his mother: “You are as good as anyone.” Ask your child:
- “Why do you think these words changed the way Martin thought?”

Ask them to recall examples from their own lives where words affected them in powerful ways. Tell them stories from your own experiences.

**SKILL:**
Communicating includes realizing the **power of words to change how we understand our experiences**.

**TIP:**
Martin begins to learn this from his father and makes a commitment to use “big words.” He became driven by a goal.

Ask your child how Martin’s goal of using big words to change things did affect others’ views.

**SKILL:**
Communicating involves realizing the **power of words to change others’ views**. Martin had a goal—**Executive Function** skills are goal driven.

**TIP:**
Ask your child:
- “What actions did Martin’s words affect?”

This is a great place for helping them think more deeply about what it takes to bring about changes in our world.

**SKILL:**
Communicating involves realizing the **power of words to change what others do**.

**TIP:**
In the book, there are direct quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. Ask your child:
- “Did reading or hearing Martin’s own words feel different than reading or hearing words written about him?”

The book ends with the statement that Martin’s “big words are alive for us today.” Ask your child to think of examples where this is true.

The illustrator of this book, Bryan Collier, writes that the stained glass windows he has painted for the pages of the book tell a story—because they allow you “to look past where you are.”

Ask your child:
- “What do you think the illustrator means by this statement?”

Have your child look at and talk about the other illustrations in the book.

**SKILL:**
Communicating comes in **many forms**, from written to spoken words, from art and dance, and other forms of expression.

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**Martin’s Big Words**

By Doreen Rappaport  
Illustrated By Bryan Collier

An inspiring introduction to an American hero, this picture biography helps readers understand how Martin Luther King, Jr. used his words to motivate others and achieve nonviolent change during troubled times.

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### Suggestions for Promoting Communicating

#### TIP:

*The Storyteller’s Candle*, a story about Communicating, shares the experiences of Hildamar and her family who move from Puerto Rico to New York City during the Great Depression. Although Hildamar is surrounded by family and friends who speak Spanish, English is the language spoken in the major organizations in New York, like libraries. When Hildamar wants to go into the library, her aunt, Titi Maria, says: “We don’t speak English, and the people in there don’t speak Spanish,” and so they never went inside. Ask your child:

- “How does it feel to be around people who speak a different language than you do?”
- “If you and a friend spoke a different language, could you find ways to communicate besides using words?”

#### SKILL:
Communicating involves much more than words.

#### TIP:

When the children in the story meet a Puerto Rican librarian, Pura Belpré, everything changes. Ask your child:

- “What did Pura Belpré do to welcome the children and their families into the library?”

Talk about how you can make people from different backgrounds who speak different languages feel welcome.

#### SKILL:
Making people feel welcome is a form of Communicating.

#### TIP:
Ask your child:

- “What does the author of this book, Lucia González, say that makes you feel as if you are really in Puerto Rico?”

#### SKILL:
Communicating involves describing experiences in ways that make you feel that you are there.
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Tip:
Talk with your child about how different Emma Lazarus’ life was from the immigrants who came to the United States—they were sick, hungry and very poor, yet hoping for a better life.

Ask your child:

• “Why do you think that Emma was drawn to the immigrants?”
• “Why did others not care and think these people would ruin our country?”

Skill:
When you have conversations about characters in books, you are helping your child understand the perspectives of others, which is a very important aspect of learning to communicate well with others.

Tip:
Emma used her ability as a writer to try to change other people’s views about immigrants. Talk with your child about how Emma’s words have made a difference over time. Ask your child if she or he has ever read something that changed his or her views.

Skill:
The essence of communicating is sharing your own point of view in ways that affect others’ feelings and thoughts. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about this issue is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
When Emma prepared to write the poem, she put herself in the “shoes” of the immigrants and even of the Statue of Liberty. She asked herself: what if the statue was a real woman? What might she think and feel if she saw the immigrants “arriving hungry and in rags?”

Emma’s Poem

By Linda Glaser

Emma’s Poem is the compassionate and inspiring story behind the famous poem engraved on a plaque at the entrance to the Statue of Liberty.

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**Suggestions for Promoting Communicating**

**Tip**: (continued)

Ask your child to talk about the questions that Emma was asking herself.

- “What might the immigrants be thinking and feeling when they arrived in this country?”
- “If the statue was a real woman, what might she say?”

**Skill:**

Communicating includes stepping back from our own thoughts and feelings and thinking about those we want to communicate with, which call on Executive Function skills. Asking questions helps your child practice this skill.

**Tip:**

At the end of the book, there are stories about the author and the artist. Both have had immigrant experiences in their families. Ask your child if he or she thinks these experiences made a difference in the book they created.

**Skill:**

Sharing the background of this book helps your child understand that books are written from the experiences and the passions of the author and artist.

**Tip:**

Write a poem or make up a story with your child about something that is important to him or her. You can talk about whom your child hopes will read this poem or story and how it will affect them.

**Skill:**

There are many ways to communicate; writing poems and telling stories are beautiful ways to convey messages.

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**Tip:**
Show your child each of the Chinese symbols, asking your child to guess what it represents.

**Skill:**
Helping your child understand how symbols can represent words is an important aspect of understanding how people communicate. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**Tip:**
In Chinese, some symbols go together to create words. For example, the word “good” comes from the symbol of a woman and a child together. Talk with your child about words in your own language that come from putting other words together (in English “breakfast” comes from breaking the fast—or not eating during the night before).

Ask your child:

- “Can you think of words that have been created by putting words together?”

**Skill:**
Sharing information about how language has been created to express ideas helps your child learn to think about communicating in new ways. To think about language in this new way helps you child pay attention to the details of the words he or she used on an everyday basis, which calls on Executive Function skills.

**Tip:**
Ask your child to draw pictures that represent things in his or her life.

**Skill:**
When your child practices expressing himself or herself through pictures or through words, your child is increasing his or her ability to communicate.

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At the Beach

By Anne Rockwell

A boy and his mother go to the beach where she teaches him how to draw Chinese words in the sand by showing him how the words look like pictures of what they represent. A charming portrayal of the connections between written words and their meanings.

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**Tip:**

*No Talking* is based upon Dave’s learning about Gandhi’s experience of not talking one day a week to “bring order to his mind.”

Ask your child:

- “How did not talking affect the children’s thinking and learning? What are some specific examples of this?”
- “How did not talking affect the teachers’ thinking and learning, especially the Principal, Mrs. Hiatt?”
- “If you were Mr. Burton and writing a paper on this experiment for a human development class, what would you write about? What would you conclude from this experiment?”

**Skill:**

Communicating includes being able to **reflect about what you want to communicate**. By talking with your child about what the children and adults learned about learning, you are helping your child reflect on his or her experiences with this book. This back and forth interaction is what researchers call **serve and return**. Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**Tip:**

When they couldn’t talk as they usually did and had to stick to a three-word limit, Dave, Lynsey and their classmates learned to use many new ways of communicating. Ask your child how the children communicated without using words. You can talk with him or her about all of the different ways we communicate—such as by using facial expressions, body movements and signals. Ask your child why these are important.

**Skill:**

**Effective communication includes much more than talking.** When you talk with your child about the others’ ways, it builds a deeper understanding of effective communication.
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Tip:

Before their experiment, the children and the teachers used words as a way of being in control. But they learned that not talking actually required more self control than talking all of the time. Ask your child why not talking helped them have more control than talking all of the time.

Skill:

Communicating requires self control, which develops over time and with practice and calls on Executive Function skills.

Tip:

The fifth grade boys think girls have “cooties,” and the girls think the boys have “cooties.” Dave and Lynsey are described as the king and queen of the “cootie-clingers”—they have zero tolerance for the other sex. At the end of the book, there is a “new normal” in their feelings about each other. Ask your child to talk about what led to these changed views.

Skill:

The skill of communicating requires an understanding of the other person; it requires moving beyond stereotypes to be able to figure out what someone else might think and feel.
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Tip:
It becomes clear as the story unfolds that Safer and Georges misunderstand each other’s view of the Spy Club. For Safer, it is about pretending to be courageous, and for Georges, it is a real life mystery, though he has to learn to be courageous, too. Ask your child whether or not he or she thinks it would have been possible to communicate their differences in the purpose of the Spy Club before Georges and Safer grew to trust each other.

Skill:
Honest and open communication has to be built on trust.

Tip:
Georges’ father always wants Georges to open up. He says, “So? Tell me things.” According to Georges, this is his father’s way of “asking me to pour my heart out.” But Georges holds things in for a long time, until he finally opens up and tells his father what’s going on at school and in his relationship with Safer. Ask your child how he or she feels that Georges’ father handled this situation.

Skill:
In your own back and forth conversation about Georges’ relationship with his father, you can be a good role model for open communication between an adult and a child. This back and forth interaction is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
Georges and his mother communicate to each other through scrabble letter messages. Toward the end of the book, we find out that Georges’ mother is actually ill and in the hospital. The scrabble communication between Georges and his mother was brief, but kept their connection strong. Ask your child what other ways we can communicate besides talking.

Skill:
Communicating includes body movements, reading, writing and symbols. Being able to interpret other forms of communication helps your child become a better communicator.
Communicating is much more than understanding language, speaking, reading and writing. It is the skill of determining what you want to communicate and realizing how our communications will be understood by others. It is the skill that teachers and employers feel is most lacking today.

**Suggestions for Promoting Communicating**

**Tip:**

The symbol of dots appears in this book in many ways. This symbolism includes a museum poster by Georges Seurat (for whom Georges is named) that hangs in their living room. George’s mother says a million different dots make up one gigantic picture, stressing that it is important to step back and look from afar at the big picture. His father counters that everyday details are important, too. In addition, Georges’ mother tells the story of her first plane trip using the analogy of dots. In addition, dots are part of the study of taste in school, and blue dots represent Georges’ sports team. Ask your child:

- “What do you think ‘dots’ mean in Liar & Spy? Why are they such an important part of the story?”

The names of the people in the story also reveal important aspects of their characters—from Georges to Candy to Safer to Pigeon to Dallas to Bob English Who Draws (who becomes Bob as the story continues).

Ask your child:

- “Why do you think the author has chosen these names for the characters? What kind of feeling do these names elicit?”

**Skill:**

Communicating includes the use of symbols, which adds depth to what we want to say.

**Tip:**

Safer projects bravery when he is really scared. Talk with your child about a time when he or she misunderstood a situation because he or she didn’t have all of the information. Ask your child what could have been done to find out more.

**Skill:**

Understanding what others are communicating requires self control—you have to set your own thoughts and feelings aside to truly understand others, which calls on Executive Function skills. By talking about similar situations with your child, you are offering him or her an opportunity to reflect and analyze and learn from past experiences.
MAKING CONNECTIONS
 Executive Function Life Skill: Making Connections

Making Connections is at the heart of learning—figuring out what’s the same and what’s different, and sorting these things into categories. Making unusual connections is at the core of creativity. In a world where people can Google for information, it is the people who can see connections who are able to go beyond knowing information to using this information well.

Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

TIP:
While you read this book, you can interact with your child by asking:
• “Where is the baby who was born far away?”
Point to the baby in the book, and then ask: “Where is my baby?” and point to your child.

SKILL:
Making Connections includes figuring out what’s the same and what’s different, which calls on Executive Function skills. These back and forth conversations with and without words that are triggered by this book involve what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

TIP:
You can count or touch your child’s toes and fingers. Point to the book and then to your child.

SKILL:
Making Connections is promoted by repetition and interaction.

TIP:
You can give your child three little kisses on the nose, just like in the book.
This book is an ideal one to use in your everyday interactions with your child. When you are dressing him or her, you can say:
• “I see ten little fingers and ten little toes.”

SKILL:
Making Connections among words, pictures and objects promotes this skill.
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

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**Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections**

**TIP:**

You can point to the moon and to the egg as you read the first page.

**SKILL:**

Studies show that children are more likely to learn words when you point to an object as well as say its name. Making Connections among words, pictures and objects promotes this **Executive Function** skill.

**TIP:**

You can count the number of pieces of fruit the hungry caterpillar ate each day, pointing to the fruit and using your fingers while you read. Invite your older child to point and count with you. This helps make connections among numbers, days and counting.

**SKILL:**

Making Connections involves learning what symbols represent.

**TIP:**

Ask your older child to think about the difference between the foods the caterpillar ate from Monday through Friday (all plain fruit) and on Saturday (mostly cooked food).

**SKILL:**

Making Connections involves putting things into categories.
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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

**TIP:**
You can ask your child:

- “Have you ever had a stomachache after eating lots of food?”
You can share a time when you had a stomachache, too.

**SKILL:**
Have this conversation in a way that promotes "serve and return"—you or your child does or says something (serves) and the other responds (returns), back and forth like a game of ball. Use this book to watch your child’s response to the words and pictures and build on what your child says and extend it.

Making Connections involves seeing the similarities and differences between your own and the experiences of others. You can promote this kind of thinking by asking questions.

**TIP:**
At the end of the book, the caterpillar turns into a beautiful butterfly. You can have a discussion with your child about how things change when they grow—and point out examples from his or her everyday life. If your child is interested in finding out more, you can look up pictures of caterpillars and butterflies in books or on the Internet.

**SKILL:**
When you help children look up information, you are helping them deepen and extend their knowledge.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar
By Eric Carle
This must-read book tells the story of one caterpillar’s metamorphosis as he eats many foods, spins a cocoon and emerges as a butterfly. It’s perfect for practicing counting and colors, and it’s available in a bilingual board book edition.

High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from Mind in the Making by Ellen Galinsky

You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: Serve and Return and Executive Function skills.

Serve and Return, like game of ball, involves a back and forth conversation between you and your child where you listen, then build on and extend what your child says or does to promote learning.

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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

Tip:
As you read It Looked Like Spilt Milk, point to the pictures and ask your child to name the picture:

• “What’s that? Is it a squirrel?”

Skill:
When you ask your child to think about what he or she sees, you are helping build connections between words and objects. These connections are important in understanding what the world looks like—a foundation for learning in school and in life.

Tip:
Ask your child:

• “What else could this picture be? I think it could also be a piece of a puzzle? What else do you think it could be?”

Skill:
When you and your child imagine what else the white images could be, you are helping your child learn to make unusual connections, which is the basis of creativity. This back and forth conversation you have with your child is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
You can talk about what other shapes around you look like. This can include shadows, clouds or anything else.”

Skill
When you offer your child the chance to see things in different ways, you are helping your child sort and classify information as well as think flexibly, both important aspects of Executive Functions.
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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

Tip: As you read, Not a Box, point to the outline of the box in each picture showing your child how the shape becomes part of something different.

Skill: When you point out the box shape (outlined in black) within the other objects that the rabbit imagines, you are helping your child see an object in many new ways. This builds connections between new and old information, which promote sorting, classifying and seeing that one thing can represent something else—a basic skill in learning about reading, writing, science and math in the future. All of these ways of thinking call on Executive Functions of the brain.

Tip: On each black and white page with the rabbit and the box, ask your child to guess what the box is going become. There are no wrong answers here.

Skill: When your child guesses what will happen next, he or she is developing a hypothesis, as scientists do when they create experiments. This back and forth conversation you have with your child is what researchers call "serve and return." Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.
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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

**TIP:**

You can point out that the peddler always wore his caps in the same order—on top of his own checked cap, he wore gray caps, brown caps, blue caps and then red caps. Have your child check this order on the different pages of the book.

**SKILL:**

Making Connections involves putting things into categories.

**TIP:**

Besides his own checked cap, the peddler had the same number of caps of each color. Ask your child to count them—there are four caps in each group—and then check that there are still four as the peddler walks through town and then out to the country for a nap. It should be especially fun to check these numbers when the monkeys are wearing the caps.

You can ask your child:

- “How many red caps do you see? How many blue caps?”

**SKILL:**

Making Connections involves seeing that symbols stand for real things.
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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

**TIP:**

When the caps disappear after the peddler’s nap, you can ask your child:

- “Where do you think the caps went?”

Even if your child knows the answer because he or she had heard the story before, it is still fun to play this game.

*Caps for Sale* is a great illustration of Making Connections: the monkeys imitate or make connections between what the peddler does and what the monkeys do. You can ask your child to guess what the monkeys are going to do next when the peddler shakes his hands or stamps his feet.

**SKILL:**

Making Connections involves making guesses about the future.

**TIP:**

The peddler becomes so angry that he doesn’t use the experience of seeing that the monkeys are imitating him to figure out how to get his caps back. He stumbles on the solution: when he throws his own cap on the ground, all of the monkeys throw their caps on the ground too. You can ask children if they ever became so angry that they couldn’t figure out what to do to solve a problem?

Ask them:

- “What do you do to manage feeling angry?”

**SKILL:**

Making Connections between your own and others’ experiences can provide a powerful learning opportunity.
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

**TIP:**
At every decision point—the long straight path, leading nowhere; the apple tree that needed guarding; and Harold being over his head in an ocean—Harold draws the solution.

Ask your child:
- “What would you draw if you were in Harold’s situation?”

There are no right answers here—what you want to do is promote your child’s imagination. You can offer your child a crayon and paper to create his or her own journey.

**SKILL:**
*Harold and the Purple Crayon* is a great illustration of creativity, which is making unusual connections, which calls on Executive Function skills.

**TIP:**
At the end of the book, Harold is lost and, despite his ability to draw solutions, he can’t find his way to his room. Harold is finally able to make a connection that helped him find his way.

You can ask:
- “Why do you think Harold remembered his window with the moon?”
- “What would you remember about your room?”

**SKILL:**
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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

Tip:
As you look at the pictures in Alphabet City, ask your child:

• “What are all of the things you see in this painting?”

Skill:
When you ask your child to respond first and name all of the things he or she sees, you are helping your child pay attention to details as well as promoting creativity. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about these paintings is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
You can share all of the things you see in the paintings.

Skill:
When you share what you see and then compare what your child saw with your observations, you are increasing the connections between each of your views.

Tip:
If your child hasn’t included a letter of the alphabet in his or her list, ask:

• “Do you see a letter here?”

Enjoy finding the letter together and talk about all of the words you can think of that begin with that letter.

Next look for letters in the landscapes around you—in your home and outside.

Skill:
Making Connections between letters, landscapes, sounds and words helps your child understand more about his or her language. In fact, researchers have recently found that the world’s written languages are all based on the same patterns of lines and angles and are based on these patterns in landscapes. This is fascinating because, on the surface, it seems so implausible—for instance, written languages in different parts of the world look so different, but it is true. When you ask your child to see things in different ways, you are promoting Executive Function skills.
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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

**Tip:**
Ask your child:

- “What are the ways that Kailash and Elliot are the same?”
- “Look for clues in the pictures and in their letters to each other.”

**Skill:**
When your child looks for similarities, she or he is Making Connections; that is, creating categories of things that are alike. Some of these are talked about in the story, but some you have to search for. For example, there is a bird on top of the buses that each of them takes to school. To find these less obvious similarities, your child will have to pay careful attention to details.

**Tip:**
Ask your child:

- “What are the ways that Elliot and Kailash are different?”
- “What do you think it would be like to live in India, compared with where you live?”

**Skill:**
In looking for differences, your child is paying attention to details. For example, Elliot wears the same striped shirt in all of the pictures, but Kailash wears different shirts. Your child is remembering what is alike and different, and thinking flexibly. All of these call on Executive Function skills.
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Tip:

You can ask your child:

- “Why do you think that these boys become best friends, even though they have never met?”
- “Think about your own friends. In what ways are you ‘same, same, but different?’ How do you think these similarities and differences affect your friendship?”

Skill:

Making Connections between letters, landscapes, sounds and words helps your child understand more about his or her language. In fact, researchers have recently found that the world’s written languages are all based on the same patterns of lines and angles and are based on these patterns in landscapes. This is fascinating because, on the surface, it seems so implausible—for instance, written languages in different parts of the world look so different, but it is true. When you ask your child to see things in different ways, you are promoting Executive Function skills.
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I Am Different! Can You Find Me?

By Manjula Padmanabhan

This inventive, interactive book is a global celebration of differences! Children learn to say “Can you find me?” in 16 different languages as they hunt for the object in each picture that is different from the others.

Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

**TIP:**

Help your child look for clues to find the one picture that is different: is it a different color, a different shape or a picture that is reversed? The answers are in the back—but don’t look too quickly. Struggling a little makes this game more fun.

**SKILL:**

I Am Different! Can You Find Me? offers many different opportunities to make connections. Making Connections involves finding out what is different and what is the same in each of the pictures, which calls on Executive Function skills.

**TIP:**

On each page, read the question: “Can you find me?” in English or in your native language. Then read it in the language on the page.

**SKILL:**

Your child is learning to make connections between words in his or her native language and the other languages in the book.

**TIP:**

Ask your child:

- “Why do you think that there are pictures of stars on the page when the language is Hebrew?”

**SKILL:**

Making Connections includes learning what symbols represent.

High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from Mind in the Making by Ellen Galinsky


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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

TIP:
Explain that many words that have become part of the English language originate from activities or objects that are important in other countries, such as the words “hula” or “ukulele” in Hawaiian.

SKILL:
The book helps children make connections between words from different languages that are used in English.

TIP:
Find a map so you can show children where each of the countries mentioned is located. At the back of the book, there are also a few gestures from sign language that your child might like to learn.

SKILL:
Making Connections between your own and others’ experiences can provide a powerful learning opportunity.
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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

TIP:
Help your child talk about what the weather is like in each community in this book.

SKILL:
On the Same Day in March offers many different opportunities to make connections. Making Connections can involve finding out what is different and what is the same in the weather in different parts of the world, which call on Executive Function skills.

TIP:
Ask your child to compare “the sun’s sly smile” in Paris with the sunlight sparkling on the market in Dakar and the sunlight dazzling on the sand in Barbados. Have him or her look at and discuss the sun, the clouds, the rain and the wind in various parts of the world on the same day.

SKILL:
On each page, there are words and pictures that describe the weather. Making Connections involves helping children figure out what is going on in these pictures.

TIP:
Ask children to connect their own experiences to some of these descriptions, such as a snow fort in Alberta, Canada that has melted into a “dragon-shaped patch in someone’s backyard.” Ask them to describe what melting snow or fog looks like.

SKILL:
The language in this book uses poetic images to describe the weather, which exemplify beautiful ways of Making Connections.
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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

**TIP:**
Ask your child to think of images that describe the weather he or she is experiencing now—what does it remind your child of?

**SKILL:**
By having this conversation, you will help children make connections.

**TIP:**
Use the map to trace the weather across the world. A “Note from the Author” in the back of the book provides further information.

**SKILL:**
Making Connections between the map and the descriptions can provide a powerful learning opportunity.

On the Same Day in March
By Marilyn Singer

Journey to the Arctic, India, Kenya and beyond with this rich picture book. It helps children see that the weather in one part of the world might be very different from that in another part of the world—even on the same day. Great for comparing and contrasting!

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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

Tip:
As your read *The Pot That Juan Built*, take the time to talk with your child about the natural materials Juan uses and how one thing can turn into something else.

Skill:
When you observe and discuss the different materials used in creating pottery, your child is making connections between old and new information. These connections help your child classify information in new ways, which is important to learning.

Tip:
Talk with your child about things in the world that were created from other things. It could be the cereal that comes from corn or a wooden chair that comes from a tree.

Skill:
When you help your child discover what the everyday objects in the world are made from, you are giving him or her a deeper understanding of the environment and how natural materials are used. These connections can spur more questions about what’s the same and what’s different in the original object and what it becomes.

Tip:
Reminiscent of *This Is The House That Jack Built*, this book begins with the pot that Juan built and works backwards to share the steps in natural pottery making. Before you turn each page to reveal the next step, you can ask your child:

- “What do you think is going to come next in the book?”

After you or your child read the poem, look at the text on the facing page to learn more about the process of pottery making.

Because the poem is repeated and elaborated upon in the book, see if your child can remember the words.
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Skill:
Predicting what comes next and asking your child to repeat and remember the words of the poem promote paying attention to detail, remembering, analyzing information and anticipating, all of which call on Executive Function skills.

Tip:
At the end of the book, there is an historical “Afterword,” which discusses the impact of Juan’s discovery on his village of Mata Ortiz, transforming it from an impoverished community to a community of world famous artists. Share stories you know about how people have transformed communities and helped them thrive.

Skill:
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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

Tip:
As you read *What Do You Do With a Tail Like This?*, ask your child to guess what each body part does and match it to the animal before you turn the page.

Skill:
When you ask children to come up with their own ideas, they are creating new connections between new and old information.

Tip:
Ask your child:

• “In what ways do animals use their noses in similar and in different ways?” Their ears? Their eyes? Their mouths? Their tails?”

Skill:
In asking your child to look for similarities and differences, you are asking him or her to form larger categories, looking at information in new and creative ways, which promotes Executive Function skills.

Tip:
Ask your child:

• “In what ways do animals use their noses in similar and in different ways? Their ears? Their eyes? Their mouths? Their tails?”

Skill:
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*What Do You Do With a Tail Like This?*
By Steve Jenkins

*What Do You Do With a Tail Like This?* is an interactive book exploring the amazing things animals can do with their ears, eyes, mouths, noses and tails.

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Find more books and materials on the First Book Marketplace, a resource available exclusively to educators and programs serving children in need. [www.fbmarketplace.org](http://www.fbmarketplace.org).

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Executive Function Life Skill: Making Connections

Making connections is at the heart of learning—figuring out what’s the same and what’s different, and sorting these things into categories. Making unusual connections is at the core of creativity. In a world where people can Google for information, it is the people who can see connections who are able to go beyond knowing information to using this information well.

Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

Tip:

Ask your child:

• “How do some of the other animals you know use their noses and other parts of their bodies?”

Skill:

When you expand the conversation, it is an opportunity to make connections for your child, promoting thinking about his or her experiences in new ways. This back and forth interaction is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

What Do You Do With a Tail Like This?

By Steve Jenkins

What Do You Do With a Tail Like This? is an interactive book exploring the amazing things animals can do with their ears, eyes, mouths, noses and tails.

High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from Mind in the Making by Ellen Galinsky

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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

Tip:

Lowji convinces the exhausted Landlady Crisp to get a cat because a cat will keep mice out of the apartment house; to get goats because goats will eat the grass that needs mowing; and to get a dog because a dog will keep burglars away. How did this happen—since Landlady Crisp was very opposed to pets? Lowji made connections between pets and helping get work done from his experiences in Bombay.

Talk with your child about other animals that can help us rather than create more work for us. Ask your child:

• “If you had been Landlady Crisp, do you think you would have been convinced by Lowji’s arguments for getting animals to help her? What other reasons might she had wanted animals?”

Skill:

When you ask your child to analyze a character’s motivations and actions, you are helping your child see connections between feelings and behavior. For example, you might point out that the landlady was lonely since the death of her husband. This back and forth conversation about Lowji’s arguments and Landlady Crisp’s motivations is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

Even though Lowji has learned English in his Bombay school, he makes new connections to slang expressions as he discovers America, such as “lemony fresh” for smelling clean; “on the house” for not costing anything; and “on the fritz” for being broken. These expressions may or may not be familiar to your child. Ask your child:

• “What are some other slang expressions we use that someone coming to America might not understand?”

• “What else does Lowji learn that is different? For example, the school schedule is different, as is shopping (no stalls, no one is haggling over prices at All-Mart)”? 

Lowji Discovers America

By Candace Fleming

When Lowji discovers that he and his family are moving to America from India, the one silver lining is his dream of becoming a pet owner. But his new apartment has a rule: “No Pets”—that is, until Lowji convinces his overworked landlady that pets could help her get her work done.

High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from Mind in the Making by Ellen Galinsky


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**Skill:**

When you help your child think about others’ experiences with American everyday life, you are helping your child think about others’ perspectives and helping your child make new connections in how we express ourselves and live.

**Tip:**

Lowji misses his best friend in India, Jamshed, and it is hard at first, especially during the long summer vacation. Talk with your child about Lowji’s efforts to make friends, including the fact that some of them are adults (Ironman), some are kids who make fun of him, and one is a mysterious person in the park. Ask your child:

- “What are the most effective things that Lowji does in making new friends?”

**Skill:**

When you ask your child to analyze a character’s motivations and Many of the strategies Lowji uses to make friends call on Executive Function skills—such as being patient, trying to put himself in the shoes of the boys who tease him to see what might impress them, and focusing on clues in the park to see who is leaving handprints and footprints.
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Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections

**Tip:**

Miranda and Marcus have a conversation about time travel and common sense. Talk with your child about these statements, “Einstein says common sense is just habit of thought. It’s how we’re used to thinking about things, but a lot of the time it just gets in the way.” Ask your child if he or she can think of a time that he or she saw a different way or if this book helped him or her see things differently as the story unfolded.

**Skill:**

When you talk about different views and new ideas you are helping your child make connections between new information and old information; this promotes learning. When your child can make unusual connections, this promotes creativity.

**Tip:**

There are many instances throughout the book that Miranda makes new connections between what she thought and what actually happened as well as what she thought was or was not possible. The laughing man actually was a time traveler to save her friend Sal from getting killed by the car; the notes were actually the laughing man, not a bad guy; and all of the clues in the notes lead up to the ending. Talk with your child about who he or she thought were writing the notes and what the notes meant. Did he or she suspect the laughing man?

**Skill:**

When you have conversations with your child about initial thoughts and new thoughts based on new information, you are helping him or her be aware of the learning process and how connections are made. When we are aware of how we are thinking, we can learn additional ways to process information.

Note: Since *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline D’Engle is so important in *When You Reach Me*, your child might enjoy reading it and talking with you about the connections between the two books.
CRITICAL THINKING
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions.

Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

Tip:

This story invites children to figure out what things go together or to categorize, such as hats go on heads. The clues to figure out where things go or to categorize are in both the drawings and the word “oops.” When the turkey puts the clothes on in the wrong way, you can ask your child:

• “Where should the hat go?”

With a very young child, you can answer the question yourself; with an older child, he or she can answer. If your child wants to have fun and play with where the clothing should go, that’s fine. You can say:

• “Hats should go on heads, but you can put them in other places for fun.”

Skill:

This back and forth interaction is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these back and forth everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

You can ask your child:

• “What happens when the turkey puts the coat on his face?”

• “Will the turkey be able to see, to walk, to keep his tail feathers warm?”

Skill:

Critical thinking promotes the search for valid and reliable knowledge.

Tip:

Once your child knows the rhythm of the story, ask your child to search for answers with you. Show the picture and ask: “Where should the ‘oops’ go?” Then you can point to picture of the turkey as a source of information.

Skill:

In order to think critically, children need to be observant. This story invites children to figure out where things go or to categorize them, which calls on Executive Function skills.
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking

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Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

The Runaway Bunny can be read on many different levels. With a young child, you can tell the story in your own words, pointing out how the Mother Rabbit has to keep problem solving—figuring out ways to find her runaway bunny. We use Critical Thinking in problem solving, which is an Executive Function skill.

With older children, Critical Thinking can be promoted by encouraging your child to be curious and think about what they think and believe. You can ask questions that promote Critical Thinking about the rabbit’s decisions and actions. For example: You can ask questions about:

- How much the Mother Rabbit cares: “Why do you think the Mother Rabbit will do anything to find her bunny?”
- Imagination: “Can rabbits really fly? How do you know?”

This back and forth interaction is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Critical thinking involves being observant. Ask your child to find the bunny in all of the color pictures, such as in the flowers. For those children who know the author Margaret Wise Brown’s book, Goodnight Moon, ask if they recognize the cow jumping over the moon drawing in the room with the fireplace.

You will notice that this tip promotes two brain development principles: Serve and Return and Executive Function skills.

Serve and Return involves a back and forth interaction between you and your child. Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). It is important to listen and then to build on and extend what your child says or does and to keep this going for as long as your child is interested.

Executive Function skills are skills you use to manage your attention, your emotions, your intellect and your behavior to reach your goals. They are at the core of the Seven Essential Life Skills. They include focus, working memory, cognitive flexibility and self control. When children are older, these skills include reflecting, analyzing, reasoning, planning, problem solving and evaluating.
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Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking

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Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

Tip:

Ask your child:

- “Do you think the Ted that Eddie finds in the woods would fit in Eddie’s bed? Would he fit in your bed? Why do you think that?”
- “Would Eddie’s bear Freddie fit in Eddie’s bed? Would he fit in your bed? Why do you think that?”

You can use an exaggerated and dramatic voice when you ask these questions and ask your child what clues he or she is using to respond to you?

Skill:

You are asking your child to think about size when you ask these questions—how big or small the bears Ted and Freddie are compared with child and the alive bear. You are promoting your child’s curiosity, skill in making predictions, and thinking carefully about information to test those predictions, all aspects of Critical Thinking, an Executive Function skill.

Tip:

After your child has read Where’s My Teddy? several times with you, you can ask what comes next before you turn the page. You can use the rhymes in the book as prompts for guessing.

Skill:

When you ask your child to recall what comes next, he or she is using his or her working memory. Critical Thinking involves being able to remember previous experiences and information and apply it to the current situation.

Where’s My Teddy?

By Jez Alborough

Where’s My Teddy? is a story about a little boy looking for his lost Teddy in the dark and scary woods and meeting up with a big Bear, who has his own Teddy.

High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from Mind in the Making by Ellen Galinsky


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Tip:

Both the big bear and Eddie are sad when they lose their Teddy and scared when they come upon each other. Ask your child to recall losing something and think about how that made him or her feel.

Skill:

How we feel affects how we think. Helping your child identify feelings, helps in Critical Thinking. It also make it clear that pursuing something you want can make children feel afraid. This back and forth conversation you have about feelings is what researchers call "serve and return." Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

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**Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking**

Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for **valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions.**

**Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking**

**Tip:**

Have your child predict what will happen each time the mouse asks for something new.

**Skill:**

Critical thinking centers on being curious and seeking to understand **cause and effect**, which call on **Executive Function** skills.

**Tip:**

The boy in the story has to figure out how to find what the mouse needs and how to clean up the mess this search is causing.

Ask your child:

• “What would you do if you were this child?”

**Skill:**

Even though this book is imaginary, it promotes **problem solving**, which is key to Critical Thinking.

**Tip:**

Once your child knows the story, you can ask what comes next when you re-read the book. Your child will use his or her memory to recall the order and the items the mouse requests, while having fun! And adults will enjoy this story where the energetic and enthusiastic mouse wears out the child (just like energetic and enthusiastic children can wear out adults).

**Skill:**

Critical Thinking includes being able to **remember previous experiences and information and apply this knowledge to the present.**
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

**Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking**

Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions.

**Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking**

**Tip:**

You can ask questions that will help your child make predictions or come up with theories to predict what causes different things to happen. For example, you can ask:

- “What do you think it means when the egg jumps?”
- “What do you think will happen if the baby bird leaves the nest without his mother?”

**Skill:**

Critical Thinking promotes cause and effect thinking, which calls on Executive Function skills.

**Tip:**

As the baby bird encounters each animal and object, you can ask your child if he or she thinks that’s the baby bird’s mother, and ask why or why not.

**Skill:**

The baby bird uses problem solving—an aspect of Critical Thinking—to try to find his mother, but because he has just hatched, he doesn’t have very much prior knowledge and has to rely on information from the other animals and objects.

**Tip:**

Ask children to share an experience of losing something and trying to find it. Once they tell their story, ask them what clues they used. What worked for them in finding the lost person or object?

**Skill:**

Helping children analyze their problem-solving process and how well it worked helps them become more adept at Critical Thinking.
Tip:

As each mouse, in turn, tries to find out what the strange Something is, ask your child:

- “What do YOU think the strange Something is?” Why?”

Be sure to help your child look for clues in the pictures to help him or her think through answers to your questions.

Skill:

Asking questions and pursuing clues involves looking carefully at details and making predictions from the information in the book and what your child already knows, all aspects of Critical Thinking. This back and forth conversation you have is what researchers call "serve and return." Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

There is so much information in the pictures and the words that you can explore with your child. For example, the mice who have already explored the strange Something all group together on the left and the returning mouse explains his or her findings only to those who haven’t looked themselves. You can ask your child:

- What colored mice have already explored the Something? What mice haven’t?”
- “In this picture, how many mice still have to look?”
- “What day of the week will the next mouse go out to try to find the answer to what the strange Something is?”

Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions.

Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

By Ed Young

One day, a strange Something appears by their pond. Each day, a different blind mouse runs to the pond to find out and report the findings to the other mice. They disagree, until finally one of the mice explores the whole Something and comes back to report the truth. This book is a visual delight and a page turner.

You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: Serve and Return and Executive Function skills.

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**Skill:**

In this conversation, you are helping your child pay attention to many details—color, number, days of the week, etc. **Paying careful attention to clues is important in finding answers to something you don’t know.**

**Tip:**

At the end of the book, there is a Mouse Moral: “Knowing in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole.” Ask your child:

- “What do you think the Mouse Moral means? Did you ever think you knew something, but it was only part of the answer?”

Share a time when you had a similar experience of thinking you knew something because you only had partial information.

**Skill:**

The Mouse Moral is a great description of Critical Thinking—of making sure that you are searching for **valid and accurate information by seeing the whole picture.** This process calls on **Executive Function** skills.

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**Seven Blind Mice**

By Ed Young

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The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking

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Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

Tip:

As you read What Can You Do with a Paleta?, ask your child:

• “What else do you think the children are going to do with their paleta? What would you do? Why?”

Share what you would do and why.

Skill:

Asking questions and thinking about answers is a good way to promote Critical Thinking. Exploring the reasons behind what you do helps your child use and synthesize information. This back and forth conversation is what researchers call "serve and return." Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

This book presents a great deal of information about life in the barrio and includes Spanish words interspersed in the English section. Ask your child:

• “What do you know about life in the barrio from reading this book? How do you know that? How is life there different or the same as life where you live?”

Skill:

Asking your child to gather information about the context of a story helps her look at what is around her more carefully—how adults and children dress, what they do during the day, what their relationships are like. This process of careful observation is an important aspect of Critical Thinking.
What Can You Do with a Paleta?
By Carmen Tafolla

What Can You Do with a Paleta? is the fanciful story of all of the things one can do with an icy-cold pop made from all natural ingredients—you can paint your tongue and scare your brother, you can make new friends or use it to cool off, and “you can lick it and slurp it and … gobble it all down.” A wonderful story of a Mexican tradition.

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Tip:
Ask your child why it might be a hard decision for the girl to choose between strawberry and coconut paleta. Talk about a time when your child and/or you had a hard decision and the steps used to make a decision.

Skill:
Calling attention to the decision-making process and helping children apply it in their everyday lives promote an understanding of the steps we use to solve problems, all important aspects of Executive Function skills.

Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

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**Grace for President**

By Kelly DiPucchio

When Grace runs for President in her school’s mock election, she learns she can only win if some of the boys vote for her. This is an empowering and fun story about the electoral system, hard work, independent thinking and using fair judgment.

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**TIP:**

*Grace for President* begins with Grace’s observation that there are no women on the poster of Presidents and asks: “Where are the girls?”

Ask your child:

- “Why do you think that Grace noticed that there has never been a woman President and others didn’t bring it up?”

“Have you ever noticed something that no one else has mentioned?”

Ask your child to share his or her stories and point out how important it is to pay close attention to what is going on.

**SKILL:**

In order to think critically, children need to be observant.

**TIP:**

Grace and Thomas select very different slogans, promises and strategies to try to win this election. Ask your child to compare these slogans, promises and strategies and to guess which would work and which wouldn’t and why.

**SKILL:**

Critical Thinking centers on understanding cause and effect, which draws on **Executive Function** skills.

**TIP:**

Thomas calculated that all of the girls would vote for Grace and all of the boys would vote for him. If he had been paying closer attention, he might not have made this assumption.

Ask your child to look for clues in the book’s illustrations that indicate Thomas’ theory might have been wrong. Here’s a hint: ask your child to look for Sam in the illustrations.

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**Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking**

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Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

**SKILL:**
Critical Thinking involves testing your theories or hypotheses about cause and effect to see if they are valid and accurate.

**TIP:**
Ask your child:

• “What problems did Grace and Thomas encounter in running for President? How did they solve them? What do you think of their solutions?”

**SKILL:**
Problem solving is key to Critical Thinking.

**TIP:**
This book presents a great opportunity to understand the electoral system in the United States. Comparing the story in this book to children’s memories of recent or current elections will help them think critically about the history they are experiencing.

**SKILL:**
Critical Thinking includes being able to remember previous experiences and information and apply this knowledge to the present.

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### Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

**TIP:**
Nate the Great understands that to be a detective, everything counts, and he has to look for clues everywhere. For example, he notices that Annie likes yellow.

Ask your child:
• “What else does Nate the Great notice?”

**SKILL:**
In order to think critically, children need to be observant.

**TIP:**
Ask your child:
• “What theories does Nate the Great develop to find the missing painting?”

**SKILL:**
Critical Thinking centers on developing theories or hypotheses—proposed explanations based on evidence that can be tested.

**TIP:**
Ask your child how Nate the Great tests his theories or hypotheses. Include what questions he asks (such as if there are any trapdoors or secret passages in Annie’s house) and how he conducts experiments to test his theories (such as digging for the picture in Annie’s yard).

**SKILL:**
Critical thinking involves testing theories by asking questions and conducting experiments.
**Nate the Great**

By Marjorie Weinman Sharmat

Nate the Great is on the case! With dry humor, this classic early chapter book introduces readers to a boy detective, tracking clues, interviewing suspects and finding whatever’s missing. It’s a delightful introduction to noir for growing readers.

High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from *Mind in the Making* by Ellen Galinsky


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**TIP:**

Ask your child:

- “What problems did Nate the Great encounter as he tried to solve the mystery? How did he solve these problems?”

**SKILL:**

**Problem solving** is key to Critical Thinking, which calls on Executive Function skills.

**TIP:**

Nate the Great finally solves the mystery by remembering what happens when you mix colors.

Ask your child if they have ever solved a mystery by remembering valid and accurate information.

**SKILL:**

Critical Thinking includes **being able to remember previous experiences and information and apply this knowledge to the present**.

At the end of the book, there are a number of suggested activities. Your child might enjoy some of these. Remember to point out the times he or she is using Critical Thinking skills in these activities or in other things your child does.

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The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

**Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking**

Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for **valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions**.

Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

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TIP:

Ask your child:

- “What problems did Nate the Great encounter as he tried to solve the mystery? How did he solve these problems?”

SKILL:

Problem solving is key to Critical Thinking, which calls on Executive Function skills.

TIP:

Nate the Great finally solves the mystery by remembering what happens when you mix colors.

Ask your child if they have ever solved a mystery by remembering valid and accurate information.

SKILL:

Critical Thinking includes **being able to remember previous experiences and information and apply this knowledge to the present**.

At the end of the book, there are a number of suggested activities. Your child might enjoy some of these. Remember to point out the times he or she is using Critical Thinking skills in these activities or in other things your child does.

You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: **Serve and Return** and **Executive Function** skills.

**Serve and Return**, like game of ball, involves a back and forth conversation between you and your child where you listen, then build on and extend what your child says or does to promote learning.

**Executive Function** skills are skills you use to manage your attention, your feelings, your thoughts and your behavior to reach your goals.

They include being able to pay attention, remember information, think flexibly and exercise self control.

Find more about Families and Work Institute’s *Mind in the Making* at www.mindinthemaking.org.
Edgar Allan’s Official Crime Investigation Notebook

By Mary Amato

Edgar Allan’s Official Crime Investigation Notebook begins with the theft of a fish in his fifth grade classroom and a poem left as a clue. Other thefts and mysterious clues follow, that Edgar, often in competition, sometimes in cooperation with his classmates, become passionate about solving.

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Tip:

Edgar is careful about how he gathers information about the disappearance of Slurpy (the fish) and other stolen items. He observes, interviews people, asks questions, takes notes, and develops theories. Talk with your child about the process Edgar used to try to solve the mystery:

• “What clues did Edgar use to try solve the mysterious disappearance of so many things from his classroom? What clues did his classmates use?”

• “Their teacher Mrs. Herschel reminds the children that a shoe print near the crime doesn’t mean that the shoe print belongs to the criminal. Which clues were most effective? How about Edgar’s conclusion that eyeballs never lie?”

• “Can you step back and describe the process the children used to solve the crime?

• “Who did you think the thief was as you read this book? Why?”

Skill:

When you talk about the character’s actions in solving the mystery, you are pointing out the decision-making process used to gather information to think critically, including creating and testing theories, which call on Executive Function skills.

Tip:

Mrs. Herschel says. “I suggest we keep our minds open. Use your powers of observation. Consider all of the possibilities. Remember the culprit is sometimes the opposite of who you’d expect.” Talk with your child about a time he or she thought something was one way and then—after getting more information—came to a new conclusion.

Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking

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**Skill:**

By connecting your child’s personal experience to the lessons from this book, you are reinforcing the importance of seeking more information to get the best results. This is very important in Critical Thinking, which is the **search for valid and accurate information.** The back and forth conversation you have with your child is what researchers call “**serve and return.**” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**Tip:**

In the beginning of the book, Edgar doesn’t feel very good about himself. He writes, “I am a failure. I am giving up.” By the end of the book, much has changed—he feels, “THIS IS THE LIFE!” And he writes that even his older brother looked at him with respect. Ask your child:

- “What led to Edgar’s changed feelings?” How do you feel when you try something really hard and keep going?”

**Skill:**

The pursuit of knowledge can affect our feelings about ourselves. Talking with your child about why **self-directed learning can be so powerful** broadens his or her understanding of learning.

**Tip:**

The teacher Mr. Crew writes, “A Poem is a Gift.” He also makes the point that “every poem is a mystery waiting to be solved.” By the end of the book, the children are writing and appreciating poetry more. Ask your child:

- “Did this book affect your views about poetry?”

This book is written on many different levels. The names of the characters have meaning, for example Edgar Allen is named after a famous poet. Take a look at the bonus mystery questions at the end of the book and enjoy them with your child.

**Skill:**

**Answering one question often leads to pursuing other questions.** You are helping your child understand this through your discussion with him or her.
Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions.

**Tip:**
The search for clues about the suitcase was partly prompted by questions from the children at the Tokyo center, such as what it would be like to be an orphan or to be sent away from your friends. Ask your child:

- “When you first heard about Hana, what questions did you have about her and her experiences?”

**Skill:**
Critical Thinking is promoted by **asking questions and then seeking the answers.** This back and forth conversation you have with your child is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**Tip:**
There were many times when Fumiko Ishioka, the museum director, faced obstacles in her search for Hana’s story. She didn’t know where to turn next for clues or whom to ask when so many were unable to help her. She was concerned that she didn’t have enough time in Hana’s hometown, Nove Mesto and in Prague. Ask your child:

- “What kept the museum director going, even when she faced challenges? Why was it so important for her to pursue this goal?”
- “Have you ever had a goal that seems unreachable and yet you succeeded? What did you do and what did others do to help you?”

**Skill:**
When you talk with your child about what it takes for the museum director to find answers to her questions, you are helping your child understand that Critical Thinking requires the **ability to pursue clues by thinking differently, be focused and not go automatic to get the answers.** Executive Function skills are driven by goals.
Tip:

The Museum Director took a chance in writing Hana’s brother in Canada. As she wrote to him, “Please forgive me if my letter hurts you by reminding you of difficult past experiences.” In doing so, she shared her larger purpose of letting the children in Japan know about Hana as a person by his sharing “anything that feel close to you and Hana, to understand what prejudice, intolerance, and hatred did to young Jewish children.” She told him that she wants all children in Japan to learn about the Holocaust. Ask your child:

- “What the Museum Director’s approach a good one?” Why or why not? What would you have done to raise a painful issue with someone in the hopes of uncovering the truth?”

Hana’s Suitcase contains many original photographs and documents, including the Museum Director’s letter to Hana’s brother. Ask your child:

- “Did seeing what happened many, many year ago through these documents and photographs make a difference in your feelings and thoughts about this story?”

Skill:

Sometimes the pursuit of valid and reliable information leads people to deal with difficult emotional issues (think of the detective shows children may have watched). Understanding how to manage those situations is a part of pursuing Critical Thinking—just as it was for the author of this book to tell Hana’s story in a way that makes it come alive.
TAKING ON CHALLENGES
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Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges

TIP:
You may want to share a time you asked for help or recall a time when your child needed help to do something challenging.

SKILL:
This gives young children ideas about how to take on challenges and promotes this skill.

TIP:
As you read the story, enjoy the rhymes.

SKILL:
Rhyming promotes the skill of Communication. Thinking of words that sound like other words promotes the skill of Making Connections.
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### Executive Function Life Skill: Taking on Challenges

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**TIP:**

Children can learn from the characters in this book. For example, ask your child about all the things that Baby Llama does to try to wait for his Llama Mama. You can point out that Baby Llama has a comfort toy, a little llama.

**SKILL:**

Taking on Challenges involves finding ways to deal with challenging times or problem solving, which calls on Executive Function skills.

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**TIP:**

Baby Llama goes from being lonely to fretting to being sad to being angry and, finally, to being scared.

Ask your child to recall times when he or she experienced any of these feeling. You can ask your child:

- “What do you do when you are scared or doing something difficult?”

**SKILL:**

Taking on Challenges elicits many different emotions and provides opportunities to learn how to master them. When you talk with your child about this book, your back and forth conversation is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

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**TIP:**

At the end of the book, the Mama gives Baby Llama a message: “Mama Llama’s always near, even if she’s not right here.” This is a message you can use with your child at naptime, at bedtime or other times when you are apart.

**SKILL:**

Knowing that others are there for you is very important in learning the skill of Taking on Challenges.

When your child tries something hard, point this out to him or her, reminding your child about the book: “You were scared just like Baby Llama, but you managed it!”

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*Llama Llama Red Pajama* by Anna Dewdney

Anna Dewdney's adorable llama toddler and mother face bedtime worries and separation anxiety in this well-loved picture book. Told in rhyme, this story offers the reassurance that a loved one is “always near ... even when she's not right here.”

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**Suggestsions for Promoting Taking on Challenges**

**TIP:**
Ask your child how Owen feels when his family (pushed by the nosy neighbor) tries to get him to give up his beloved comfort blanket, Fuzzy.

**SKILL:**
Taking on Challenges elicits many different emotions and provides opportunities to learn how to master them.

**TIP:**
Owen comes up with his own strategies for coping with the neighbor’s advice: he hides his blanket at night to escape from the Blanket Fairy, and he rubs his blanket in the sandbox and dirt to get rid of the vinegar smell. Ask your child:

- “What other ideas do you have about how Owen might have dealt with these efforts to get him to give up his blanket?”

**SKILL:**
Problem solving calls on **Executive Function** skills.

**TIP:**
Ask your child how he or she feels about his mother’s solution of turning his blanket into handkerchiefs. What other ideas does your child have for dealing with this issue? Sometimes people offer advice that is not so good (as the neighbor Mrs. Tweezers does). Ask your child to recall a time when someone suggested a solution that wasn’t a good idea.

**SKILL:**
Often in taking on challenges, others can be helpful in suggesting solutions.

**TIP:**
Share a time with your child when you did something that was challenging. You can talk about what happened, how it felt and what you did.

**SKILL:**
Children learn Taking on Challenges from **examples and role models**.
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**Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges**

**TIP:**
Ask your child:

- “What helped the clown and the other dolls and toys continue to try to find solutions to get the train to the children, even when other engines refused to help?”

Ask your child to recall a time when things weren’t working, but he or she continued to try hard. Ask what difference that made.

**SKILL:**
**Taking on Challenges** includes being able to **press on, not avoiding or simply coping with difficulties**.

**TIP:**
Ask your child how believing you can do something difficult helps make it possible to succeed.

**SKILL:**
Children learn **Taking on Challenges** from **examples and role models**. Children can learn from the Little Blue Engine as a role model and her saying: “I think I can—I think I can—I think I can.”

**TIP:**
You can ask your child:

- “What was the goal that the little train and the dolls and toys had?”

It is also good to point out that the goal was very important to all of them.

**SKILL:**
**Having a goal** is important to **Taking on Challenges**. **Executive Function** skills are driven by goals.

This book was written a long time ago and includes some stereotypes, such as the helpful train is a female train and the unhelpful trains tend to be male. Ask the children what might be different in this story if it had been written today.
Executive Function Life Skill: Taking on Challenges

Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are willing to **take on challenges** (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.

**Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges**

**Tip:**

Brontorina knows in her heart she is a ballerina but others think she is too big and doesn't have the right shoes. Talk with your child about how Brontorina may have felt when she ran into these obstacles. Ask your child:

- “How do you think Brontorina felt when she was told she was too big to dance and she didn’t have the right shoes?”
- “What does Brontorina say to Madame Lucille that convinces her to give the dinosaur a chance? What did Clara and Jack say?”

**Skill:**

Taking on Challenges includes **trying things that are hard and often requires the support of others**. By asking your child how it feels to be turned down and what can be done to change people’s minds, you are helping your child understand how to overcome challenges in his or her own life. This back and forth conversation you have with your child is what researchers call “**serve and return**.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**Tip:**

In the end, Brontorina’s ballet teacher decides to meet Brontorina’s needs by finding space that is big enough for her to dance. Talk with your child about how sometimes major obstacles can be overcome with a shift in thinking.

**Skill:**

Taking on Challenges includes **exploring options and resources to help you achieve what you want, something by changing the way you think about it**. This involves cognitive flexibility, an important part of Executive Function skills.
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Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges

Tip:

Share a story with your child about a time you decided to pursue a dream you had and what you had to do to achieve it. As the book says, “It all began with a dream.”

Skill:

You can be a role model to your child in overcoming challenges by sharing your dreams and strategies.

By James Howe

Brontorina, the dinosaur, dreams of becoming a ballerina so she approaches Madame Lucille’s Dance Academy. In this charming story of friendship and support, there are many challenges to face before Brontorina’s dream can come true.

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TIP:
Ask your child:
• “How does Trixie feel when she realizes that Knuffle Bunny is missing?”
You can also ask children if they noticed that Knuffle Bunny was missing before Trixie comes to this realization. Here’s a hint: you can see the bunny in the window of the washing machine.

SKILL:
Taking on Challenges elicits many different emotions and presents opportunities for children to learn to manage them.

TIP:
You can ask your child:
• “What were some things Trixie did when she was challenged with trying to tell her daddy about the missing Knuffle Bunny? What else might she have done? What did her daddy do to try to find the bunny?”

SKILL:
Taking on Challenges involves finding ways to deal with challenging times. Sometimes it takes trying many different strategies, which Trixie did when she tried to communicate without words. When you communicate with your child about this story, the back and forth conversations you have is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

TIP:
You can talk with your child about how important Knuffle Bunny is to Trixie, and that’s why she tried so hard to tell her Daddy without words that her bunny is missing. You can point this out to your child.

SKILL:
Having a goal is important to Taking on Challenges. Executive Function skills are driven by goals.

TIP:
This story can serve as an example of how challenging times offer opportunities to grow. It is through dealing with this situation that Trixie learns to say her first words. You can be a role model in helping your children learn this, too, by sharing a story about something that was challenging to you and the strategies you used to deal with it.

SKILL:
Children learn about Taking on Challenges through examples and role models.

Knuffle Bunny
By Mo Williams
Hilarious and relatable, Knuffle Bunny is the story of a pre-verbal toddler—who loses a beloved toddler—and her father—who has no idea what she’s upset about. It’s a very funny story about universal experiences and feelings.

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### Horton Hears a Who!

**TIP:**
Ask your child:
- “How does Horton feel when no one believes that there are small persons on a speck of dust? How does he cope with his feelings?”

**SKILL:**
Taking on Challenges elicits many different emotions and presents opportunities for children to learn to manage them.

**TIP:**
Ask your child:
- “What does Horton do to try to save Who-ville? How does he deal with the taunting and actions of others who endanger Who-ville; the exhausting journey in following the black-bottomed bird that ‘tattered his toenails and battered his bones;’ the search in the patch of clovers ‘a hundred miles wide;’ and his own capture? What keeps him going?”

Ask your child what would keep him or her going if your child was in Horton’s place.

**SKILL:**
Taking on Challenges involves finding ways to deal with challenging situations.

**TIP:**
Ask the children if they find the refrain in this book (“A person’s a person, no matter how small”) inspiring? Can they think of another time when “special words” helped them or others respond to challenge? What were those words?

**SKILL:**
Having a goal is important to Taking on Challenges. Executive Function skills are driven by goals. You can talk with your child about how important it is to Horton to save Who-ville.

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Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges

Tip:

Even though Ping is an experienced gardener, he cannot seem to get the seed to grow. Talk with your child about all the different things Ping did to try to make the seed grow.

Skill:

Facing challenges, like the Emperor’s Proclamation, requires putting in effort and trying different strategies. This back and forth conversation with your child is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

Ping was ashamed to bring the empty pot to the Emperor. His father said, “You did your best and your best is good enough to present to the Emperor.” Even with his Father’s support, he hung his head in shame when facing the Emperor. Ask your child:

• “Can you think of a time when you tried hard, but you didn’t achieve the results you wanted. What helped you?”

Share a story of an experience of yours that where you didn’t achieve what you wanted but others helped you deal with it.

Skill:

Taking on Challenges includes having people who believe in you and support you. When you share your stories you are helping your child understand that asking for and accepting help is a part of being able to Take on Challenges.
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Tip:

The result of this contest was unexpected because Ping was honest. He didn’t know the Emperor was testing the children’s character by giving them seeds that had been cooked and wouldn’t grow.

Ask your child:

• “Why is it important to tell the truth?”

Skill:

Taking on Challenges requires courage; telling the truth is a courageous thing to do.

Note: You will enjoy looking carefully at the illustrations in this book and talking with your child about what they tell you about life in that long-ago Chinese kingdom.

The Empty Pot

By Demi

In a kingdom where everyone loved flowers, the Emperor was very old and had to choose a successor. He issued a proclamation to the children of the land. He would give each of them a flower seed and, “whoever can show me their best in a year’s time, will succeed me to the throne.” Ping worked hard, but despite his usual skill with flowers, nothing grew. Sadly, he had to face the Emperor with an empty pot. This beautifully illustrated book is both charming and inspirational.

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Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges

Tip:

Jenna turns to four women for help in finding jingles for her dress so she can dance. She doesn’t want to take so many jingles that each of the woman’s “voice isn’t heard” but just enough to make one row from each. Ask your child:

- “What do you think of Jenna’s solution? Why did it work for Jenna and for each of the four women?”
- “What might have happened if Jenna had asked one of the woman for all of the jingles she needed?”

Skill:

One of the most effective way of problem solving and Taking on Challenges is finding solutions that work for all involved. This back and forth conversation you have with your child is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

When Jenna took jingles for each of the women, she told them that she would dance for them. In addition, in Jenna’s Muscogee culture, it is common for a family to honor a new dancer by “small giveaways,” gifts to others (not to the new dancer) in her honor. The Author states in the back of the book that these giveaways are meant to show humility. Ask your child:

- “What do you think of these ideas of giving back?”

Skill:

Taking on a challenge generally involves the support of others. In Jenna’s culture, there is a giveaway tradition of doing things for others in return. This calls for self control, an Executive Function skill.
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Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges

Tip:

There are many references to the Muscogee culture in the book. Ask your child to pick out some of them. You can also note them too, such as the way the times of day and night are described or the importance of the number four. Jenna needed four rows of jingles and went to four women to help. This number is seen as sacred, representing four seasons, four directions, four colors of people, four stages of life.

Ask your child:

• “How were Jenna’s traditions and cultures important to her in solving her problem”

Skill:

Support for Taking on Challenges comes not just from family and friends but from culture and tradition.
Executive Function Life Skill: Taking on Challenges

Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are willing to take on challenges (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.

Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges

Tip:

Mrs. Frisby does a number of very scary things to save her family. Talk with your child about who and what helped her, asking:

- “What did Mrs. Frisby do to face her feat and have the courage to go visit Mr. Ages, to fly on the back of a crow, to visit an owl as in the darkness of his tree home, to find the rats of NIMH, and to put sleeping powder into the cat Dragon’s dish?”

- “Think about a time when you tried something that was scary. What helped you do it?”

Skill:

Mrs. Frisby did more that cope with stress—she proactively took on things that scared her. This story can inspire your child to think about his or her own strategies for the skill of Taking on Challenges, a skill that calls on Executive Functions of the brain.

Tip:

When Mrs. Frisby was upset, she remembered something her husband had once said to her: “All doors are hard to unlock until you have the key.” Ask your child,

- “What do you think that Mr. Frisby meant by this saying? What did Mrs. Frisby have to figure out in order to save her family?”

Skill:

Taking on Challenges involves problem solving. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about problem solving is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Executive Function Life Skill: Taking on Challenges

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Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges

Tip:

Mrs. Frisby was able to get help from others because she or her husband had helped them? She freed the crow, who then helped her fly, for example. What other ways did Mrs. or Mr. Frisby help others, who, turn, helped her? On the other hand, the rats—who had been helped by Mr. Frisby—did nothing to help Mrs. Frisby until she came to them.

Skill:

It usually takes the support and help of others to try difficult things. But receiving help often comes from those you have helped. It is important for children to understand the role that giving and receiving help can play in taking on challenges.

Tip:

Most of the rats want to leave the comfortable life they have created under the farmer’s rosebush because they don’t want to live by stealing anymore—a realization they came to when they were at NIMH. Yet, one of the rats Danner asks, “What is stealing: “Is it stealing when farmers take milk from cows, or eggs from chickens?” Ask your child:

• “When you do think the rats were stealing? Where they stealing when they took garbage from the markets, tools from the Toy Tinker’s truck, or supplies and food from the farmer and his family?”

Skill:

This book raises complex moral issues, which are important to discuss with your child, especially as you help your child decide what is morally acceptable behavior in Taking on Challenges.
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Executive Function Life Skill: Taking on Challenges

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Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges

Tip:
Talk with your child about Willy’s goals in entering the race. You can point out how important it is to him to save his grandfather’s life and keep their farm. His grandfather has always said, “Where there’s a will there is a way.” Talk about what Willy’s will was and how it helped him persevere.

Skill:
Life is full of stresses and challenges, but Willy has unusual responsibilities for a 10-year-old. Yet rather than give up or cope, he proactively tries something risky—entering the race and competing against Stone Fox an adult champion racer—because so much depends on his winning.

Tip:
Everyone told Willy, “Sell the farm. That is the only answer.” he felt discouraged, but still told Searchlight, “We’ll do it, girl. You and me. We’ll find a way.” He kept looking for solutions. Finally, the people who told him to sell the farm begin to support him, saying “win that race tomorrow.” Ask your child:

• “How much did having the support of others matter to Willy?”

Skill:
Relationships and support are important when in Taking on Challenges. This back and forth conversation you have about support is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.
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Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges

Tip:

Willy felt like a winner before the race even though the odds were against him, especially since his opponent Stone Fox had never lost a race. Ask your child how Willy’s feelings of being a winner—as well as his knowledge and experience with the route and skill in racing—helped him during the race.

Skill:

Taking on Challenges includes knowledge, skill and practice but mindsets matter too, including believing in oneself. As Willy tells Stone Fox, even after he has slapped him for trespassing into his barn, “I gotta win. If I don’t, they’re gonna take away our farm. So I will. I will win.” These all call on Executive Functions, which are driven by hard work toward goals.

Tip:

Right before the finish line—with Stone Fox right behind Willy and Searchlight, Searchlight suddenly dies. Stone Fox stops the other racers and waits for Willy to carry Searchlight over the finish line so they win. Yet Stone Fox was also racing for a noble cause—to buy back the land that was stolen from Native Americans. Ask your child:

• “How did you feel when Searchlight died?”
• “Some say that both Willy and Stone Fox were winners because they each did the right thing. What do you think of this idea? What would you have done if you were Stone Fox?”

Skill:

When you talk with children about their feelings and about how the situation felt to different characters in the story, you are helping them to see others’ points of view and to think of how they might face their own challenges in the future.
SELF-DIRECTED, ENGAGED LEARNING
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**TIP:**
This fun-filled book of lifting flaps that reveal surprising animals hiding in everyday places is all based on the goal of finding Spot.

**SKILL:**
One of the principles of promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning is helping children set and then work toward goals. **Executive Function** skills are driven by goals.

**TIP:**
You can play a similar game with your child, saying: “Where are you? There you are!” As your child gets older, you can make the game more difficult.

**SKILL:**
Another principle of promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning is to elaborate and extend what children do. Where’s Spot? is based on the game of hide and seek. The saying: “Where are you? There you are!” interaction is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**TIP:**
This book is about a trustworthy relationship—a mother dog searching for her puppy to make sure he eats dinner. You can talk about all of the ways that families take care of their babies.

**SKILL:**
Another principle of promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning is establishing a **trustworthy relationship** with your child.
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

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- Help children practice, synthesize and generalize.
- Help children become increasingly accountable.
- Create a community of learners.

I Can Do It Too!
By Karen Baicker

I Can Do It Too! shares a child’s joy in being able to do things that her family members can do—like pour juice, get dressed and kiss “ouches” goodbye. It is a tribute to what it feels like to become more independent.

Tip:
Play along with your child, going back and forth, as you read the book, copying the actions in the book.

Skill:
Self-Directed, Engaged Learning is built upon trustworthy relationships and positive interactions. Even if your child is too young to do the actions that the book describes, you can point out what she or he can do.

Tip:
Add new actions to the story. For example, you can say to your child:
- “I can touch my nose. Can you?”
Once your child touches his or her nose, then respond by saying, “You can do it too!” Continue with more actions and ask your child to suggest things for you to do that he or she copies.

Skill:
Self-Directed, Engaged Learning includes elaborating and extending on what children do. Pay attention to what your child is most interested in and can do. Include those in the back and forth actions you create, based on this story. This interaction is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
Look for something in the book that your child would like to learn. You can practice it with him or her and use the encouraging words from the book.

Skill:
Self-Directed, Engaged Learning is promoted when we help children practice what they know and work toward new goals. Executive Function skills are driven by goals.

High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from Mind in the Making by Ellen Galinsky

Find more books and materials on the First Book Marketplace, a resource available exclusively to educators and programs serving children in need.
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My Five Senses

By Aliki

Aliki explains the human body’s five senses in this picture book with sparse text and gentle illustrations. Caregivers can appreciate the real world examples and use of repetition to make concepts clear.

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Suggestions for Promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning

TIP:
This book is a great way to teach children about bodies and how to become more aware of what’s around them. There are many opportunities to involve your child with the activities in this book. When the child in the book says: “I see with my eyes,” you can ask:
• “What is that child seeing? What do you see now?”

SKILL:
One of the principles of Self-Directed Engaged Learning is involving children socially, emotionally and intellectually, which is likely to happen when children use many different senses.

TIP:
You can ask your child what he or she most likes to smell, to taste, to see, to hear and to touch.

SKILL:
Another principle of promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning is to elaborate and extend what children do.

TIP:
As your child goes through his or her day—dressing, eating, playing, taking a bath, etc.—you can ask:
• “How many senses are you using? Which ones?”

SKILL:
Still another principle of promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning is helping children practice, synthesize and generalize, thus using Executive Function skills. This back and forth conversation you have about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.
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**The Snowy Day**

By Ezra Jack Keats

In this endearing classic, a boy named Peter awakens to find his world transformed by snow. With sled in hand, he sets out on his own to explore a winter wonderland. Children readily relate to Peter’s curiosity and desire for independence.

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**Suggestions for Promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning**

**TIP:**

You can have a conversation with your child about Peter’s experiences and how he had fun on his own playing in the snow.

Then elaborate and extend this discussion to your child’s life, asking: “What are some things you enjoy doing alone?”

**SKILL:**

Self-Directed Engaged Learning is **self-directed**! We don’t always have to interact with others or be entertained by technology. The Snowy Day is a great example. This back and forth conversation you and your child have about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

**TIP:**

Peter’s goal is exploring the snow.

Ask your child:

• “What are the many ways that Peter learns about the snow?”

You can ask your child about something he or she would like to explore. You can also share an experience when you learned something through exploring.

**SKILL:**

One of the principles of promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning is **helping children set and then work toward goals**. **Executive Function** skills are driven by goals.

**TIP:**

Peter brings some snow into the house and then it disappears.

Ask your child:

• “What happened to the snow in Peter’s pocket?”

You can set up an experiment to show your child what happens when we leave something icy in a warm house by putting an ice cube onto a wash cloth and seeing what happens to it over time.

**SKILL:**

By doing so, you are **elaborating and extending** what your child has learned from the book, and thus strengthening your child’s learning.
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- Help children become increasingly accountable.
- Create a community of learners.

Skill:
Self-Directed, Engaged Learning is being involved socially, emotionally and intellectually. When you read the book with your child, taking turns, you are serving as a role model as a learner and involving him or her in ways that will promote Executive Function skills.

Tip:
You can make this book fun by following the directions either before or after your child, taking turns and learning from one another.

Skill:
By helping your child ask and answer questions, you are promoting your child’s engagement in learning. This back and forth interaction is what researchers call "serve and return." Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:
As you read Press Here, talk about the concepts he or she may not know or may not know yet, like left and right. Give your child hints on how to remember these concepts, such as: “Make an L with your finger and thumb on your left hand,” or “You write with your right hand.”

Skill:
Helping your child elaborate and extend what he or she knows and transfer this knowledge to new situations are fundamental to learning.
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Tip:

Ask your child:

- "What can we do to make the world more beautiful?"

His or her ideas don’t have to be planting flowers like in *Miss Rumphius*. For example, you can suggest that smiling or laughing can make the world more beautiful.

Skill:

Self-Directed, Engaged Learning involves **helping children apply knowledge**. When you ask your child to apply the ideas in the book to his or her own life in new ways, you are promoting this skill. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about the book is what researchers call "serve and return." Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

Miss Rumphius had goals—to see the world and to live by the sea. Ask your child to think of a goal that matters to him or her now. Ask your child to begin to make plans to achieve that goal. In a back and forth conversation, you can also share a story of a goal you had and how you made it come true.

Skill:

One of the key principles of promoting Self-Directed, Engaged Learning is to help children **set and then be accountable for goals**. Executive Function skills are driven by goals. Sharing your own stories is another way to help your child understand the importance of goals.
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Tip:
You can ask your child:

- “Have you thought about a faraway place you would like to visit?”
- “Have you seen a picture of that place? What did you like about it?”
- “What do you think it would be like to visit or live there?”

See if you find additional information about that place in a book or on the Internet? What can you learn about this place together with your child?

Skill:
Self-Directed, Engaged Learning includes using your imagination. It also involves elaborating and extending children’s learning. When you encourage children to want to know more, you are helping them become learners for life.

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By Barbara Cooney

This is a story that spans the generations, beginning with a child named Alice Rumphius who wants to live like her grandfather—going to faraway places and living by the sea. Her grandfather tells her there is a third thing she must do: make the world more beautiful. Following in her great aunt’s footsteps, little Alice has similar dreams.
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**TIP:**

Pauline and her little brother John-John have a goal to have a lemon-limeade stand, even though it’s winter. Nothing stops them from working toward their goal—including their parents’ warnings that nobody will want cold drinks in the middle of winter.

Ask your child how important it is to have goals, even goals that other people say are undoable. Have them think about their other experiences as well as the story in this book.

**SKILL:**

One of the principles of promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning is helping children set and then work toward goals. Executive Function skills are driven by goals.

**TIP:**

When the children don’t sell much, they come up with many new marketing ideas. Ask your child what else might Pauline and John-John have done to sell their lemon-limeade.

**SKILL:**

Another principle of promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning is to elaborate and extend what children do.

**TIP:**

Ask your child:

- “What did Pauline and John-John learn about money from this experience?”
  - Include how much they spent and how much they earned.

**SKILL:**

Still another principle of promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning is helping children practice, synthesize and generalize.

**TIP:**

You can share a story or ask your child to share a story about a time he or she had fun and worked well with someone else.

**SKILL:**

The brother and sister created their own learning community by working together and learning from each other.

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**SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING SELF-DIRECTED ENGAGED LEARNING**

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Dinosaurs Before Dark

By Mary Pope Osborne

In the first book of the popular Magic Tree House series, siblings Jack and Annie discover a book that can take them to other places and times—in this case, to the time of the dinosaurs—where they learn about science and history through their adventures.

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Suggestions for Promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning

**TIP:**

While reading this book with your child, you can ask questions about what the children are experiencing. For example, you can ask:

- “How do you think the characters are 'seeing' the Pteranodon fly? Does imagining help you when you are reading books?”

**SKILL:**

One of the principles of Self-Directed Engaged Learning is **involving children socially, emotionally and intellectually**. Books can create an imaginary world where you are fully engaged.

**TIP:**

Ask your child:

- “How are Jack and Annie learning about the prehistoric world? How do they use a book, their own experiences and their past knowledge? How do they figure out how to survive the Tyrannosaurus Rex? How do they discover how to get home again?”

**SKILL:**

One of the principles of promoting Self-Directed Engaged Learning is the importance of **elaborating and extending knowledge**. As you help your child understand the process of **problem solving**, you are promoting their **Executive Function** skills.

**TIP:**

Ask your child if he or she thinks Dinosaurs Before Dark is a good story. Why or why not? Ask him or her to think about what makes a story really good.

**SKILL:**

**Storytelling** is a good way to help children learn.

**TIP:**

You can ask your child about something he or she loved learning and what your child wants to learn next.

**SKILL:**

Truly engaged learning is **self-directed**. When Jack and Annie say they can't wait to go back in the woods to see what happens next, it shows how involved they are.
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Tip:

You can ask your child about the relationship between Mr. Baker and Harry:

- “Why do you think they are friends? What do they have in common? How are they different?”
- “Do you have someone special who makes you feel excited about learning?”

Skill:

Learning is furthered through trustworthy relationships, which Harry and George certainly have, even though they are from different generations and backgrounds. When you discuss this friendship with your child, you are helping him or her understand the importance of relationships to learning.

Tip:

Ask your child to think about how Mr. Baker may have felt in going to school and learning to read at his age.

For example, say to your child:

- “Mr. Baker says that not knowing how to read is something that must be corrected. Do you think his attitude helps him learn to read? What helps you deal with learning something that is hard?”
- “Mr. Baker is a drummer. When he sounds out the letters, his fingers fly across his knees. Do you think that drumming helps him read? What helps you learn to read?”

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Skill:

Learning involves challenges. When you help your child think about how the characters in the story deal with challenges and relate that understanding to his or her own experiences, you are promoting both attitudes and skills that will help your child address other learning challenges in the future. This back and forth interaction is what researchers call serve and return. Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

Tip:

Mr. Baker has a learning goal—learning to read. You can share a story about a goal you once had in learning something new. Your experiences will be inspiring for your child.

Skill:

Self-Directed, Engaged Learning includes helping children set goals, work toward those goals and be accountable for achieving those goals. Executive Function skills are driven by goals. When you share your experiences about your own goal-setting, you are, in a real sense, creating a learning community with your child.
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Home at Last
By Susan Middleton Elya
Ana Patino’s family moved to the United States from Mexico when she was eight and her twin brothers were babies. Papa goes to work at a canning factory; and Ana goes to school, where she is one of two non-English speaking students. Her mother runs into problems because she does not speak English. Ana suggests her mother could learn English, but her mother says it’s impossible, until she finally agrees to try.

High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from Mind in the Making by Ellen Galinsky

You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: Serve and Return and Executive Function skills.

Serve and Return, like game of ball, involves a back and forth conversation between you and your child where you listen, then build on and extend what your child says or does to promote learning.

Executive Function skills are skills you use to manage your attention, your feelings, your thoughts and your behavior to reach your goals.

They include being able to pay attention, remember information, think flexibly and exercise self control.

Find more about Families and Work Institute’s Mind in the Making at www.mindinthemaking.org.

Suggestions for Self-Directed, Engaged Learning

Tip:
Ask your child how it feels not to understand what others are saying—have your child recall an experience when this happened to him or her. Then talk with your child about why it was meaningful for the Patino family to learn English.

Skill:
Self-Directed, Engaged Learning is working toward relevant and meaningful goals. Executive Function skills are driven by goals.

Tip:
Ask your child to recall an experience when he or she had to learn something that was hard. What helped him or her do this?

Skill:
Learning involves dealing with challenges. When you help your child relate the story to personal experience with overcoming challenges, you are promoting both attitudes and skills that will help your child address other learning challenges in the future. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.
Executive Function Life Skill: Self-Directed, Engaged Learning

It is through learning that we can realize our potential. As the world changes, so can we, for as long as we live—as long as we learn.

- Establish a trustworthy relationship with your child.
- Help children set and work toward their own goals.
- Involve children socially, emotionally and intellectually.
- Elaborate and extend children’s learning.
- Help children practice, synthesize and generalize.
- Help children become increasingly accountable.
- Create a community of learners.

Suggestions for Self-Directed, Engaged Learning

Tip:

Naima wanted to do things that boys in her village could do but weren’t acceptable for girls, like making money to help her family and drive a rickshaw. But Naima begins to find that change is coming. As the woman owner of the repair shop tells Naima, “Things are changing whether people around here like it or not. These days a woman who wants to start her own business can borrow money from our women’s bank. We decided to put our money together and help each other.”

Ask your child:

- “Can you think of a time when you wanted to do something that wasn’t accepted practice? How did that feel?”

Tell your child about some of the things that weren’t accepted practice when you were growing up and that you helped change.

Skill:

Self-Directed, Engaged Learning is furthered when children and adults have meaningful goals of their own that they pursue. Executive Function skills are driven by goals.

Tip:

Naima was an artist. Eventually, she was able to use this strength to learn new skills to make money and repair the rickshaw she crashed by helping a new woman business owner paint damaged rickshaws. You can talk with your child about his or her strengths and how your child can use these strengths to learn more and achieve goals.

Skill:

Self Directed, Engaged Learning includes building on individual strengths. This back and forth conversation you have about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

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Tip:
Ask your child to talk about what each of the children in the book—Noah, Ethan, Nadia and Julian—was particularly good at. How did these strengths help them become a team that worked and learned well together?

You can make a list with your child about his or her strengths. You can also talk about how these strengths may be used to work toward goals.

Skill:
Children are more likely to be engaged learners if the learning builds on their strengths.

Tip:
Julian’s father says, “The Souls have all returned from a journey.” He goes on to say each of the children found something on their journeys.

Ask your child:
- “What do you think Julian’s father means by that statement? What did each of the children find?”
- “How did these journeys lead them to become friends?”

You can talk about how finding things in common can help build trustworthy relationships. Ask your child what he or she looks for most in a friend and why. Share your thoughts, too.

Skill:
Each of these children was involved in a meaningful personal learning journey—a journey that promoted their Executive Function skills. This kind of deep learning is most likely when children can learn from people whom they trust—both children and adults.
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Tip:

The children could answer some of the questions asked in the Academic Bowl because they had had meaningful experiences where they had learned this information. For example, Nadia learned about the Sargasso Sea from rescuing turtles.

Ask your child:

- “How do you learn best?”
- “Which question would you like to be asked in an Academic Bowl? Why?”

You can share a time when you learned something and then were able to use it. You can also ask:

- “What do you think Mrs. Olinski meant when she said, ‘... sometimes to be successful, you have to risk making mistakes?’”

Skill:

Self-Directed, Engaged Learning is promoted through real experiences and through opportunities to use the knowledge we have gained. It involves making mistakes and learning from them, too. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about this book is what researchers call “serve and return.” Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.