

What's News—

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Dad Clips, Kids Read!

IN THIS AGE of easy, enticing images on video screens, it probably shouldn't surprise us that for some children today, a "good book" is about as exciting as a "nice piece of fruit." But that's no reason to give up hope.

As luck would have it, I've stumbled on a technique that seems to encourage reading — at least it works with my two sons. I started it five years ago when they were ages 8 and 11, and capable if somewhat unenthusiastic readers. It's easy. Basically, it involves a pair of scissors and a decent newspaper or two (*indecent* ones would probably be more fun, but that's a whole separate issue). In our house the papers are *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*.

As a compulsive clipper, I am always cutting out all kinds of articles. Even more compulsively, I mount them neatly on clean sheets of white typing paper. This requires a little extra effort — especially with large photo spreads from the *Times* — but it actually is relaxing. And the result looks much more appealing than scraggly scraps of newsprint.

One morning, after the boys had left for school, I decided to try an experiment: I scattered a bunch of these clippings randomly across the kitchen table. No note, no explanation, no explicit invitation to read. That night, when I got home I saw that the clippings had definitely been rearranged. Some were even missing — later to be found by the television or in the boys' rooms.

Amazing.

Unwittingly — yet willingly — the boys allowed themselves to become engaged with the written word. Why? Because they wanted to find out more about a basketball tournament, a new movie, life at the mall and the demise of some prehistoric reptiles.

So, maybe reading wasn't so boring after all.

This technique travels well, too. On long car trips, we now include a thick folder of clippings along with the salty snacks, beverages and audio equipment. Everybody always finds at least one arti-

cle of interest, something to read silently or aloud, something that might even lead to interesting conversation — another minor miracle when you're dealing with adolescents!

There's no claim here of any major miracles. It's simply a matter of broadening the boys' reading repertoire by making room for good nonfiction. In their English courses at school, the major emphasis is on fiction. I want them to see other forms of superb prose, from the likes of John McPhee, Anna Quindlen, Edna Buchanan, Tom Wolfe. The writing in the *Journal* is particularly good: fresh, lucid, interesting to read. For children who are learning how to write, it's some of the best writing to read.

What kinds of clippings work best? Anything connected to your children's interests, your interests or basic human interest. More specifically:

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Movie reviews are always good. The more opinionated, the better. Sometimes it's interesting to compare two different reviews of the same film, especially after your children have seen it and have critiques of their own.

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Book reviews also have potential, particularly if the books are those your children might be interested in reading (based on Frederick Klein's review in the *Journal*, we got *Newton at the Bat*, a fascinating collection of essays about sports).

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Topics being discussed at school can spark an interest in related news coverage — and the reverse is equally true. My wife clipped a *Times* story about the last Rodney King trial; it discussed Fourth Amendment rights, which our son was studying at that exact moment.

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Op-Ed essays are often entertaining and provocative; likewise, "Letters to the Editor."

You'll know it when you see it. You know what will interest your children. And don't be surprised if an occasional odd article sparks some interest you'd never expect. After all, that's one of the most exciting things about reading: the accidental discovery that kindles genuine excitement. — *Richard Holt*