

Bob Weyhmuller is author of *Beyond the Bus Stop: 180 Ways to Help Your Child Succeed in School*. This handy book contains no educational jargon, just practical, hands-on suggestions that every parent can put into immediate practice. *Beyond the Bus Stop* is winner of the National Parenting Center's Seal of Approval and endorsed by the New Jersey Learning Disabilities Association.

HOLIDAY GIFTS GUARANTEED TO HELP YOUR CHILD SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

Robert E. Weyhmuller, Jr.

Ah, December! Gentle snow falls, chestnuts roasting on an open fire, sleigh bells jingling, children laughing, people singing. A time of peace and quiet reflection - NOT!

Traffic jams. Mall jams. What to buy the children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews jams. December is the most hectic month of the year, complicated mostly by that nagging question - what to buy?

How many years have you run around from store to store and mall to mall, looking to buy the latest fad gifts - Pokemon, Beanie Babies, Cabbage Patch dolls, Star Wars toys - only to find them thrown in the bottom of the closet or tossed up in the attic six months after the holiday season?

This year, focus your efforts on buying gifts that will help the student on your list succeed in school. Okay, so some of these gifts won't bring the biggest ohs and ahs, but they will be treasured, appreciated and used long after Pokemon joins the ranks of the Cabbage Patch Kids.

Give your child the gift of time. Read aloud to your child. It sounds like such a simple thing. But will reading to your child every day really help her succeed in school? The answer is emphatically, YES!

It's a fact. There's no better way to instill a love for reading in your child than by reading aloud to her. Children who are read to fall in love with books. They also develop good reading abilities earlier, become better listeners, and develop a stronger command of written language. But reading to your child every day does more than just feed the mind. It gives you and your child something special - it gives you together time.

Looking for some good books to read to your child? Here are some sources to help you.:

- * Books for Children is a booklet published yearly by the Library of Congress, available through the U.S. Government Printing Office.

- * The New Read-Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease

- * The Latest and Greatest Read Alouds by Sharron L. McElmeel

Give your child a beautiful hardbound book this holiday. Most parents cringe at the thought of spending twenty dollars for a hardbound, illustrated edition of a children's classic but will drop fifty bucks on amusement ride tickets without hesitation. The rides provide a few hours of fun but the book is treasured for a lifetime.

Buy an age-appropriate dictionary for your child. Unless your nine-year-old is reading John Milton, don't buy him a collegiate dictionary. Buy one that he can read. He'll use it more. A dictionary can be a useful tool or an object of frustration. To be a useful tool for your child, it must be easy to read with clear definitions. There are many excellent dictionaries on the market today for elementary and junior high school students. An eight-hundred-page book with full color art, fairly large text, and clear definitions will set you back about \$17.00.

Wrap-up a student assignment book and require that your child use it nightly. If your child argues that he can remember his assignments without writing them down, point out that you keep an appointment calendar and even lawyers would forget their briefs if it weren't for their secretaries.

Drug stores and office supply stores are chock-full of attractive assignment books and student calendars. Help your child select one appropriate for his grade level. Then insist he use it every day.

Hire a tutor for your child. Imagine the hugs you'll receive when your child opens an envelope stuffed with coupons good for hour-long tutoring sessions! Kidding aside, if the two of you are continuously facing off on the homework battlefield, find someone who can work with your child. This might be a high school student, an uncle, or paid tutor.

Let's face it, some people just can't work together. Sure, you love your child and he loves you, But when the two of you dig in and draw your lines on the homework front, SCUD missiles begin flying. So, whatever the reason, if you can't help your child with homework, find someone who can. Life at home will be more pleasant, and your child will come away with something other than battle scars.

Give school supplies and make sure they are available where your child does homework. Chances are your child will need to use pencils, scissors, crayons, colored paper, and rulers on a steady basis. These should be kept together, either in a desk drawer, shoe box, or other convenient location.

Homework takes a lot longer when your child wastes time searching the house for needed supplies. If possible, purchase inexpensive materials for your child's own use. (More expensive items, such as dictionaries, can be shared.) Children take pride in ownership and take better care of personal school supplies. When your child has all

needed supplies at hand, she will appreciate being able to work efficiently, and you will appreciate fewer requests to find misplaced materials.

Subscribe to an age-appropriate children's magazine. Looking for a present that will last all year? How about a magazine subscription? If you're not in tune with children's publications, ask your child's teacher or librarian. There are many superb magazines to spark your child's interest and motivate her reading. Here is a list of some of my favorites, with suggested age ranges:

- * American Girl (7-11)
- * Boys' Life (8-18)
- * Breakaway (12-18)
- * Brio (12-17)
- * Contact Kids (8-14)
- * Disney Adventures (7-14)
- * Highlights for Children (2-12)
- * Muse (8-12)
- * Seventeen (13-18)

Get your child plugged in to calculators, word processors, and electronic dictionaries. When your child uses modern technology, she is not cheating. Would you really want your secretary to use a manual typewriter or your accountant to figure your income tax returns using a #2 pencil and a big eraser?

Children need to learn basic math calculations, writing skills, and how to use reference materials. You won't get any argument on that one from me. But humans are superior to animals because they have the ability to transfer knowledge from one being to the next and from one generation to the next. In the twenty-first century, technology is knowledge. Even a one-room schoolhouse will be linked to the world through the Internet. So, teach your child how to use technology to keep ahead in school and expand horizons.

Buy your adult-child or friend a copy of *Beyond the Bus Stop: 180 Ways to Help Your Child Succeed in School*. Here's the perfect stocking-stuffer that parents will really appreciate. 180 sure-fire ways parents can help children triumph in school - one for each day of the school year. Areas covered include: reading, writing, math, conduct, study skills, and homework. Throughout the book, the author emphasizes the importance of building children's self-esteem and developing a parent-teacher partnership. This handy book contains no educational jargon, just practical, hands-on suggestions that every parent can put into immediate practice.

Robert E. Weyhmuller, Jr. is an educational consultant with 25 years experience in public school education. He is the author of Beyond the Bus Stop: 180 Ways to Help Your

Child Succeed in School (Heinemann, 1999). Awarded the National Parenting Center Seal of Approval and endorsed by the Learning Disabilities Association of New Jersey, his book is available at local bookstores, on the Internet, or directly from the publisher at (800) 793-2154. Some material in this article is excerpted from Beyond the Bus Stop with permission.

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