



# MAKE "BORING" Books Better

Your child's textbook can be a launchpad for innovative, independent learning.

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**T**extbooks can be useful. But they aren't always perfect. The information they contain may be outdated. Or, they might not provide enough detail. In addition, the book's writing may be dry and unappealing. Use these tips to expand the scope of your child's textbooks, and also allow him or her to build on the text on his or her own terms.

#### **To Enhance Language Arts Skills:**

**Grow a Glossary.** Make sure your child understands every word in her textbook. Most books provide glossaries. But they often only include words specific to the subject (astronomy, colonial, photosynthesis). When your child finds any word that she doesn't understand, have her define it on an index card or in a digital document.

**Get Closer to the Source.** Textbooks have to cram a lot of facts into a small space. Therefore, they gloss over interesting details. Books may reduce speeches to quotes. They may crop panoramic photos to thumbnail-sized pictures. Use the library and the Internet to get a more complete feel for the material.

#### **To Boost Math and Science Skills:**

**Picture This.** Encourage your child to visually organize difficult information. Have him create pie charts, line graphs, bar graphs, maps, Venn diagrams, and time lines. These are all useful ways to manage lots of information.

**Create More Problems.** Challenge your child to write and solve math questions modeled on the toughest in the chapter. Making her own advanced problems will help her use her knowledge beyond the comfort zone of the text.

#### **To Build Social Studies Skills:**

**Unlock Time.** Keep up to date with current events. Every textbook is out of date, whether it was published ten years ago or just yesterday. New presidents are elected, galaxies are discovered, and countries are created. Read newspapers, magazines, and news websites to stay in the know.

**Seek the Smaller Voices.** Find primary texts such as speeches. Or, look for diaries from "faces in the crowd." These are people who were not major historical figures, but were present at the time of important events. Although the Dear America series is fictional, it offers a compelling window to the past, with the added appeal of kid and teen characters.

#### **To Foster Artistic Skills:**

**Find Art in Life.** Make connections between art and life. Have your child find artistic representations of time periods or beliefs. Listen to jazz to understand the mood of the 1920s. Look at old posters to experience war propaganda.

**Make a Scrapbook.** Have your child create a scrapbook of information that reflects his curiosity. For example, an interest in math may lead to algebra. A love of cats may lead to research about Egyptian symbolism.

Learning doesn't have to stop with the vision of the textbook author. Textbooks simply point to the many places a body of knowledge can lead. And it is the student's job to seek this information out. If your child describes the text as "boring," challenge him or her to find a way to make it fun!