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Dear Parents,

Let's face it: school days can be chaotic. There's the morning hustle to get the kids awake, dressed, and off to school. After-school activities flood the afternoons: sports, language programs, and classes on computer coding (yes, that's a real thing now). Trying to tackle homework amidst cooking dinner and settling sibling arguments fill the evenings. Oh, and let's not forget the dilemmas and distractions of raising a child in the digital age—the perils of parenting in a world with YouTube are endless!

Schools desire parent involvement not because they want to add to your already hectic schedule, but because studies have shown that students are more successful when there is a strong connection between home and school. Creating a supportive and positive learning environment at home fosters knowledge, sparks curiosity, and builds self-confidence.

This parent guide will not burden you with more tasks and to-do lists; rather, it will empower you with useful tools, meaningful advice, and resourceful activities to help you create opportunities for learning in the moments that make up your everyday life.

Not every activity in this book needs to be completed. Choose what works best for you and your family. Take small steps. Live in the moment with your child. If you do that, you will naturally create a learning environment that will connect your home and school beautifully and seamlessly.

# Let's Think!

## Developing Deep Thinkers ➔

Critical thinking is a skill that needs to be developed, especially in young children. It is the foundation on which a successful school career is built. Questioning, making inferences, and thinking deeply assist children in making sense of the world. Help develop and strengthen your child's critical-thinking skills with these age-appropriate activities.



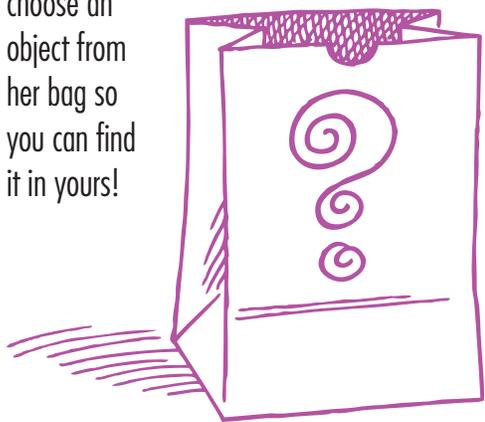
### Thinking at Home

Here's a critical-thinking activity that is easy to do at home with your child.

#### Mystery Matching Grab Bags

Collect an assortment of small objects from around your home. You will need two of each item (e.g., two spoons, two rubber bands, two apples). Next, grab two paper bags. Place one of each item in each bag.

Reach into your bag and pull out one of the objects. Show it to your child. Then, challenge her to find the same object in her bag—without looking! She has to find the object simply by feeling each object in the bag. When she's found the correct one, let her choose an object from her bag so you can find it in yours!



### Thinking on the Go

Here are two simple critical-thinking activities that are easy to complete when you're out and about with your child.

#### The Many Uses Of ...

Name a household item. Next, spend a few minutes brainstorming with your child different ways your family could use that object. Choose another object, and try it again. Here are a couple of examples to get you started:

- laundry basket—a pet bed for a small pet, a toy box, a nightstand, a storage container for sports equipment
- pillowcase—a laundry bag, a chair cover, feet warmer, stuffed-animal holder

#### Compare and Contrast

Just because two things don't seem to go together at first glance doesn't mean they don't have anything in common. In this activity, your first grader must find the similarities—and differences—between things that seem oddly alike or different. Try some of the pairings listed below, or come up with some on your own.

*How are these alike? How are they different?*

- boots, sandals
- car, bike
- hat, umbrella
- ice cube, ice pop
- phone, computer
- rubber band, hair clip
- toilet, sink
- toothbrush, hairbrush



#### Parent Pointer

*These are great little activities to use when you're stuck in traffic with your child, standing in a long line at a store, or waiting for your food to be served at a restaurant.*

## Imaginative Drawing

- Step 1** Grab some sheets of paper, crayons, and a marker. With the marker, draw half a shape, a full shape, or just a random squiggly line on a sheet of paper. Give your child the paper.
- Step 2** Explain that you would like her to draw a picture that incorporates the mark you put on the paper. Encourage her to be creative and think outside the box.
- Step 3** Set a timer for a few minutes. Don't let her draw until she has thought about what she wants to create and how to incorporate your mark. Challenge her to make a detailed and colorful picture.
- Step 4** When she has finished, ask her to explain her thought process and drawing.
- Step 5** Now, let her draw a mark on a sheet of paper. Now it's your turn to be creative!



## Family Fun

Have the family sit in a circle. Each person will draw a mark on a paper. Then, each person will pass the paper to the person on the right. That person now has to make a picture that incorporates the mark. See what interesting, imaginative, and downright funny art pieces your family can create with some critical thinking.

## Think and Sort

Gather an assortment of small objects that have a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors, such as buttons, blocks, coins, stickers, or small stuffed animals.

Explain to your child that you would like him to sort the objects using more than one criteria. Some ways objects could be sorted include by color, size, shape, texture, name, and whether they have holes. However, don't give the criteria to your first grader; rather, let him come up with the sorting logic on his own. Allow him ample time to think and ample room for sorting. As he sorts the objects, ask him to explain his thinking. When he's finished, mix up the objects and ask him to sort them again using different criteria!



## Reading Critically

When you read a book with your child, be sure to ask some critical-thinking questions before, during, and after the story. Here are some examples:

Before	During	After
Based on the title and cover, what do you think this book is about?	What is/are the character(s) feeling? How do you know?	How are you similar to and different from the character(s)?
What can you tell me about this story by just looking at the pictures?	What do you think will happen next?	How would you change or improve the story?

