

The Family Constellation

FLJ, 2014, N. 15. John T. McMahan III

Sharing time with your children in their early formative years is some of your best memories that are created. Incorporating fun interactions with reading and writing make those moments an educational journey that is both beautiful and inspirational for your children's baptism into their early learning. One way of making this journey exciting is connecting your child to current events that are happening right before our eyes with historical perspectives that will begin to tie these kids into their community past and present. This can be done in several ways. One way that I like is telling your child that they are "Big News" take them to your local park and connect them to that given day. You can do this by simple things like talking about the weather, to who the starting pitchers are for the Cleveland Indians tonight. This allows for conversation about past Indians pitchers such as Cy Young or Bob Feller that may open up more spectacular conversation.

If you are an art fanatic like me you could bring a book of artists to the park with you and examine the likes of Monet, Renoir, Chagall and Kokoschka and have them compare and contrast these artists' paintings to what they see in the park. Depending on the time of day, you and your child can look in the sky and see Venus in the eastern or western sky and have a chat and write about what they see in the sky. Having this discussion with the very young is a great way to introduce them to science and some of the world's greatest artists and give them a taste of some of arts most beautiful works. It may also spark great conversation and fan the flames of new interests that will provide enticing conversation for weeks to come with your child. This could be art or science.

When your child begins their first scribbling's, an exciting time and an art history conversation or science conversation in a beautiful park ensues. This may have your child drawing a picture in the park that together the two of you can label, the next great artist and this is "Big News". Together depending on the age of your child you can write a news article that talks about the drawing your child just created which allows a continuation of learning as more vocabulary is used. As more words are shared with your child, the more words they can ultimately add to their word folder. These journaling moments with regards to art or science are an excellent chance to share precious time with your child that you will never forget and they will grow their reading repertoire as well.

While you are in the park there is also a great opportunity to share historical stories about the park if you know the stories. For me this was easy because in the park where I live, there

was is an old schoolhouse and church along with an old baseball field that has been there for 175 years. This was a great opportunity and place for my son and I to share some of our earliest moments. I wrote a book on the history of this small hamlet, "Footville" and much of the story was centered on the park and these buildings. This was generally the case in many communities throughout the Western Reserve. Today many of these old locations have become overgrown or simply don't exist anymore. It was very fortunate that this was not the case with Footville. This allowed for great interactions and conversations that may have my son Jake always connected and concerned about his community. These old communities and parks were where much of life happened and people came together to talk about it. Those same opportunities are still there for families to connect to their heritage today. Drawing, journaling or conversing about historical events is a great introduction into social studies which is a lovely cross curricular connection to reading, science and art history.

Always allow for time to make your children "Big News" and give them an opportunity to talk about why that is the case, the things they see and start to love and have them write about it. These shared moments provide many things that are hard to measure on the value continuum. Time spent talking to your young child about love of family, nature, reading and community is an occasion where beautiful connections can germinate and grow as you diligently allow these reading, writing and family twinkling's to become a constellation that is family created and shared.