

Early Literacy Submission June 2010
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“Are we there yet?” Only ten minutes into a six hour journey, it may be hard to match your child’s excitement with “Not yet, honey.” But parents who travel with children are resourceful. They know there are more options than mesmerizing children into silence with DVD’s or electronic games.

Parents haul bags of ‘travel tricks’. The bags hold CD’s or an iPod of music and audio stories – favourites from home or new ones borrowed from the library. The bag holds story books, seek and find picture books, crayons, paper and a stash of dry Cheerios. The bag holds stickers and page protectors with a magazine picture inside each protector for their child to make up stories by placing and moving stickers on the magazine scenes. Some parents (or their older children) enhance the story pages by drawing scenes on paper and inserting them into the page protectors instead.

The bag may hold a blindfold for their older preschooler or school age child to wear while drawing a simple picture on paper at a restaurant. The picture may be a tree, house, sun, person etc. Only after the blindfold is removed do others on the trip guess what has been drawn.

Parents also have travel tricks up their sleeves. They introduce an alphabet game, played either cooperatively or competitively. The goal is to spot letters of the alphabet in order from A to Z in road signs, license plates, billboards etc. Each letter is called out when it is seen until the winner calls out ‘Z’. The alphabet game becomes more challenging when played from Z to A.

Counting games, easily adapted to passing scenery, are at the ready too. Young children choose specific items like stop signs, cows, motorcycles or transport trucks to count. The first person to count ten of a specific item wins. More elaborate games are created for older children who can add and subtract. A counting game with horses, for example, may have different points for a brown horse, black horse or white horse. But if the car passes a cemetery, all points are lost and the player must begin at zero once again.

Parents know that storytelling games are a good choice when it’s too dark to observe the scenery. The ‘Unfortunately Fortunately’ game enables everyone in the car to tell one story together. The story is told by alternating the first word of each sentence between “unfortunately” and “fortunately”. For example the parent may start the game with “Unfortunately we are travelling with a kangaroo in the car.” One child might continue with “Fortunately we have a sunroof for his head to poke through.” Another passenger might continue with “Unfortunately it’s snowing.” Where the story ends is anyone’s and everyone’s guess.

Oh the places you’ll go. Dr. Seuss would agree. The destination can’t be reached without the journey. And the journey can be a lot of fun.