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ONCE UPON A TIME

Here we are in the middle of summer. The kids may be getting restless. They won't admit it but they probably miss the structure of school and are getting a bit bored with all the usual summer fun.

Try something we did at our house when summer boredom set in: story-telling.

Turn off all non-human noise like TV and radios. Gather the kids around and tell them a story. Then ask each child to make up a story to tell you. You can do this around a camp fire out in the wilderness or make a circle of chairs in your own back yard.

Make the story you tell interesting to get the children's attention. The ones my kids liked best were basically about me as a child but with very elaborate exaggerations and fantasies that obviously never happened, superimposed.

How do you help children to make up their own stories? Tell them to start with "Once upon a time---" If young children are hesitating prompt them about their interests. If they are into dinosaurs ask them to make up a story about T. Rex. If they flag a bit ask, "What happened next?"

Another trick is to do a round robin story. One person starts a story and stops at an exciting part. The next person takes up the narrative.

Still another family story-telling trick is to turn the story into a serial. Every time I see my twin grandchildren I provide them with another episode of, "Mary McMotter, Girl Wizard" who goes to a day school for girl wizards called Warthogs. Mary carries her magic wand with her everywhere but no one ever suspects because it looks exactly like a #2 yellow pencil.

The basic idea is to foster creativity by offering and encouraging outrageous ideas, people, and events in your own personal family fiction. Of course if it's really good and not derivative or downright plagiarism (like my McMotter saga) it could even get published one day!