Creating a Grand Language Adventure

by Wendelyn DeMoss, M.S., CCC-SLP, LSLS Cert. AVT

Summer can be a highly anticipated time for families. Routines change with the end of the school year and plans are made for outings away from home. New adventures are just around the corner for parents who have children with hearing loss learning to listen and talk, and as parents we utilize every opportunity to expand and extend a child’s language. Experiences out of the normal routine provide perfect opportunities to develop higher level language skills.

Now is a great time to think about what “grand adventures” are in store for this summer. A grand adventure happens wherever listening and talking are occurring. Whether you take day trips in your hometown, visit family on a road trip or explore the world by plane, language enrichment can be at the top of the family agenda.

Here are some ideas to think about for summer escapades the whole family can enjoy.

Explore Your Library

- Sign up for a library card. Sharing books can be the inspiration for new routines and vocabulary, new ways of thinking and for using a creative imagination.
- Share books to help children make connections with their life experiences. Focus on exploring the pages, identifying pictures and listening to the rhythm of the words. Parents who share books even in infancy prepare their child for reading.
- School-age listeners focus on expanding their knowledge through books. They learn about the characters and the vocabulary to describe them, and observe how the characters experience life routines and solve problems. Share chapter books aloud and you share an adventure.

The following are some suggestions for books your child may be interested in:

- Early listeners: “Spot Goes to the Beach,” “Spot’s First Picnic,” and “Spot Visits His Grandparents” by Eric Hill; and “Goodnight Gorilla” by Peggy Rathmann.
- Ages 9-12: “Flat Stanley’s World Wide Adventures” series by Jeff Brown; “Summer of the Monkeys” by Wilson Rawls; “Bridge to Terabithia” by Katherine Paterson; and “The Voyages of Doctor Doolittle” by Hugh Lofting.

Share a Family Zoo Jaunt

- Read books about zoo animals you expect to see. What do they eat? How do they sleep or play?
- Explore the zoo website together. Find zoo sponsored activities such as observing “behind the scenes” feeding times, animal care classes or special tours.
- Imagine the day as a safari. A safari vest and hat are perfect for a day of exploring. Pack a zoo map, magnifying glass, binoculars and camera. Prepare a list of animals you might see on a real safari and play “I Spy” at the zoo to see how many you can spy.
- Create new songs from familiar tunes by substituting animal names and actions. Example: “The tigers at the zoo can growl, growl, growl” to the tune of “Wheels on the Bus.”
- Photograph the animals and your child in various settings. Use the photos to develop an “experience book.” Save zoo brochures and other treasures to talk about later. Use the
experience books to develop narrative skills of describing, recalling the event and retelling the story to family and friends.

Take an Overnight Road-Trip Excursion

- Prepare a route. Use downloadable apps to find rest areas, restaurants and local attractions. Older children can calculate the mileage for fuel stops and meals, and prepare a budget. Involve your child in trip preparation by going to the car wash or the gas station for fuel or an oil change.
- Pack your bag. Expand categorization skills by planning together what you will need. Identify categories of clothing, grooming items, books and toys. Use inference cues to identify items through audition. For example, “You will need a kind of clothing that you wear to bed;” “You will need a kind of grooming item to wash your hair.”
- Use a blank journal for your child to record new experiences and new words heard in conversation. Attach a pocket to collect souvenirs (napkins, tickets and menus) to talk about when you return.
- Learn Road Trip Lingo. Expand vocabulary by pre-teaching words that might be experienced on a road trip. Search free stock photo websites for examples: bridge, two-lane, speed limit, billboard, rush hour, no pass zone, guard rail, median, mile marker, exit ramp, construction zone, shoulder, street sign, license plate, deer crossing, turnpike gate, toll booth, shoulder and frontage road.
- Remember, to a child even a two-hour road trip can seem like an adventure around the world if it is made fun and exciting with games.

Create an Imaginary Vacation

- Develop imagination and creativity by planning an imaginary trip that engages the whole family. Consider using as your inspiration a chapter book from the “Magic Tree House Series” or another book about an adventurous or famous site.
- Explore the location website and develop a vocabulary list to include in conversation during the experience.
- Plan the mode of transportation and book “mock” air, train or ship tickets.
- Create a passport. Your child can record the information learned and take photos.
- Plan an agenda of possible attractions. Explore the websites and learn all about them. Download brochures and photos to develop a vacation portfolio for review after the experience.
- Make a list of unique items you might need to pack.
- Investigate the “cuisine” for the region and plan an interesting meal.
- Download a travel video and create a travel experience in your living room. Invite friends or family to the event. Your child could act as travel guide as you explore the destination together. Serve the planned “cuisine” either that you have prepared or ordered from a local restaurant. Wear your travel clothing and don’t forget the camera!!

There are unending possibilities to creating a “Grand Language Adventure” for your child this summer. Memorable experiences can be planned with little cost and the richness of the language outcomes will by your reward. Happy Travels!!!

Source: Volta Voices, March/April 2011