

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Savvy shopper

Show your tween that she can use math to be a smart consumer and save money. In a store, have her compare sale items. Say two brands of shirts cost the same, but one brand is "buy one, get one half off," and another is 40 percent off. Which is the better deal if she buys two shirts?

### How-to for parents

If you have parenting questions, you may get answers at free workshops in your community. Speakers might focus on topics like how to ease your child's transition to high school or help him cope with anxiety. To find out about upcoming events, read emails from the school and look for flyers at the library or recreation center.

### Lights, camera, action

Many tweens love to make videos—and that can be a great study method. Encourage your middle grader and her friends to record each other reading class notes, demonstrating science experiments, or acting out historical events. They could use props, add music, or think of other creative ways to review the material.

### Worth quoting

"If you want children to keep their feet on the ground, put some responsibility on their shoulders." *Abigail Van Buren*

### Just for fun

**Q:** How do you talk to a giant?

**A:** Use big words!



## Planning for standardized tests

When your middle grader takes a standardized test, having a plan will boost his confidence and help him do his best. Here are strategies to use every step of the way.

### The week before...

Encourage your child to try his hardest on practice tests. Even if they're not graded, the results can reveal what he needs to brush up on. Suggest that he try to figure out where he went wrong on incorrect answers and ask his teacher if he's not sure. This may prevent him from making similar mistakes on the actual test.

### The day before...

Being well rested and well fed can keep your tween focused and alert. Before bedtime, help him plan a breakfast with protein and whole grains. You might hard-boil eggs while he sets out a cereal box, bowl, and spoon. Then, he'll need a good night's sleep (at least 9–11 hours). *Tip:* Have him pack a healthy

snack like an apple, whole-grain crackers, and water, if allowed.

### The day of...

Your middle grader should think carefully about how to approach different types of questions. If he's given a passage to read, he might skim the questions first so he knows what information to focus on. For multiple-choice math problems, he could solve first, then look to see if his solution is among the choices—if so, it's likely correct.



## Bonding with your tween

Spending time with your child opens the door to conversation and keeps you involved in her life. Plus, it can be fun! Consider these ideas:

■ Create a family photo album. While you work, talk about memories the pictures bring to mind. *Tip:* When your middle grader has a rough day, flipping through the album together may encourage her to smile and perhaps talk.

■ Have monthly living room campouts. Put out sleeping bags and popcorn. Then, take turns reading aloud or telling stories by flashlight. *Tip:* Your tween may be more likely to chat in the dark. When you turn out the lights, share something about your day, and she might follow suit.



## Be an active reader

Does your middle grader ever turn the page of a book only to realize she's not sure what she's just read? Reading more mindfully can help her understand and remember important information. Try these tips.

**Preview.** Suggest that your tween scan for "coming attractions" before she reads. Skimming subheads, captions, charts, or diagrams can tell her what to expect. That way, her mind will be better prepared to take in the material.



**Apply.** Doing something with the information as she reads can keep your middle grader engaged. She might draw a map showing locations of the scenes in a novel, for instance. Or she could make an outline of a textbook chapter. That will help her remember key details and see how facts are related.

**Tip:** When your child reads online, suggest that she turn off any notifications and close all windows except for the one she's reading so she won't get distracted. 👍

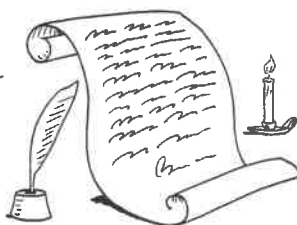


## This day in history

Your tween can learn about the past—and discover that history is being made every day—with these activities.

### Research the past

Encourage him to find out what happened on today's date in previous years. He could check the library or search "on this day in history" online. Then, ask him to share the "old news" with your family at dinner-time. For example, on March 1, he might report that the Peace Corps was established on this day in 1961.



### Capture the present

Suggest that your middle grader make a record of the immediate past by starting his own "Today in History" calendar. When he learns about an event (say, a record-breaking blizzard or the release of a new cell phone model), have him jot it down on the correct day. Then, he might add a brief explanation or draw a symbol to represent it. 👍

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## Parent to Parent

### Learning to lead

I had always believed the saying "Leaders are born, not made." So at a recent work seminar, I was surprised to discover that leadership can be learned.

My son Jack had been wanting to start a neighborhood baseball team, and I realized it would be a good way for him to practice leadership skills. I suggested he call the local league and ask what to do first. They told him that he needed to find players and a coach and then get a local business to pay the league fees (in exchange for putting the company logo on the players' jerseys).

When I explained that a good leader delegates tasks, he asked three neighborhood kids to help him hang flyers and recruit players. Jack has been working hard on this project, and he has enough kids for a team now. Next, he will call a players' meeting to work on finding a coach and a sponsor. 👍



## The dangers of internet challenges

**Q** I've been hearing about "internet challenges" where kids dare each other to do dangerous things.

How can I keep my daughter from getting involved in these kinds of risky games?

**A** In today's online world, dares can spread like wildfire. Children may be encouraged to post videos of themselves eating hot peppers or being duct-taped to a pole, for example. Other kids see the videos and might be tempted to copy them.



Keep an eye on your daughter's online activities, and make sure to stick to websites' age limits. For instance, you must be 13 to post on YouTube and most other social media sites.

Also, ask your daughter to tell you when she hears about a challenge. Explain that some can cause serious injury or even death, such as the "choking game" or "blackout game," where participants cut off their own air supply. Be sure she knows she can come to you if she ever feels pressured to do something that makes her uncomfortable. 👍

# MATH

**MATH**  
**Puff-puff golf**

**puff-puff go!** Help your child practice subtraction.

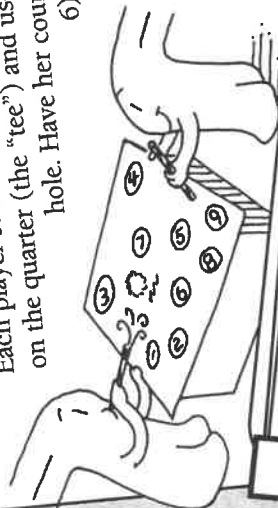
...blatton golf to help your child practice soccer.

**Ingredients:** quarter, pencil, poster board, cotton balls, straws, paper

the poster board and then number  
the poster board and then number  
or the floor.

Each player starts with 50 puffs. Player A blows it to the quarter on the quarter (the "tee") and uses a straw to blow it to the hole. Have her count how many puffs it takes (say, 10). Then subtract the number from 50.

and subtract the number of points the golfer lost from her score ( $50 - 6 = 44$ ). Then, the next person plays the first hole. Continue until everyone has played all nine holes. The golfer with the most points left wins.



# SCIENCE

## Create a catapult cup

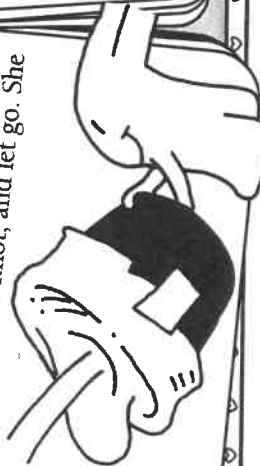
**Your youngster can explore force and motion by building a catapult.**

**Ingredients:** paper cup, scissors, balloons.

First, cut out the bottom of the cup so it's open on both ends. Tie a knot in the uninflated balloon, and snip off the opposite tip. Tie a knot in the opposite place the knotted end into the cup and stretch the cup end over the opposite end of the cup. Tape the balloon in place.

Now your child should put the ball in the cup, pull on the knot, and let go. You can watch the ball soar and measure how far it travels.

Have her vary the force she uses to pull on the balloon and measure the distance each time. She'll see that the harder she pulls back, the farther the ball will fly.



## READING

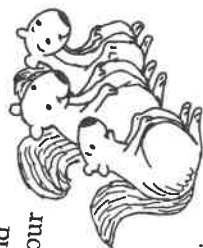
## Adverb charades

This twist on charades is an active way for your youngster to discover adverbs.

**Ingredients:** picture book, index cards, pencils

Read a chapter or short book aloud, and ask adverb he hears on a separate index card. (An adjective, or another adverb and often ends in *ly* and *joyfully*.)

To play, one person draws a card and acts out the adverb. For *clumsily*, your youngster might pretend to trip. For *slowly*, he could walk in slow motion. The other players try to guess the adverb. The first one to guess correctly acts out the next one.



# LOGICAL THINKING

...this simple code with

Share this simple code with your child:  $a = c, b = d, c = e, d = f$ . Can she figure out the rest of the code and write you a secret message? Hint:  $y = a$ , and  $z = b$ . Take turns giving each other coded words to decipher (jcv for hat).



## SAFETY

Recycle a shoebox into a first-aid kit. Your youngster can write "First Aid" on a mailing label and stick it on the lid. Help him find supplies to put inside, such as bandages, gauze, a thermometer, and tweezers. When he's done, he can choose a spot to keep it (bathroom, car).



# Recipes for Success

Practical Activities to Help Your Child Succeed

MARCH 2018

## WRITING

### ABC activity box

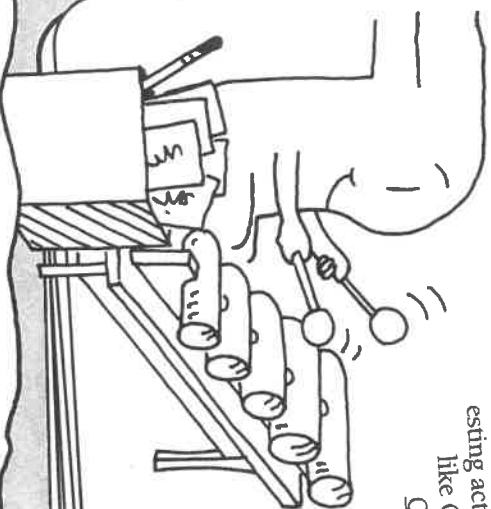
It's fun to write...and writing can lead to even more fun! Here's how.

**Ingredients:** pencil, index cards, small box or large envelope

Have your child write each letter of the alphabet on a separate index card. Then, help him brainstorm an activity for each letter. For example, he could write "make paper airplanes" for A and "read a book" for B. If he gets stuck, suggest that he look through the dictionary. He might end up with interesting activities for tough letters

like Q (play a game of 20 Questions) and X (build a xylophone).

Let him store his cards in a box. The next time he says, "There's nothing to do," he can choose a card and do the activity.



## Congratulations!

We finished \_\_\_\_\_ activities together on this poster.

Signed (parent or adult family member)

Signed (child)

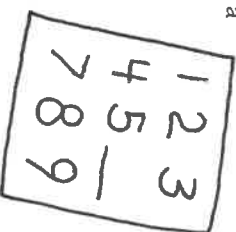
## COUNTING

Write the numbers 1-9 in order on a piece of paper,

leaving a blank for one number.

It's your youngster's job to read the numbers

and fill in the missing one. *Variation:* Write the numbers 1-30 randomly, and omit



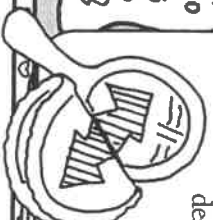
## VOCABULARY

Open a box of crayons, and ask your child to make up her own names for the colors by thinking about what objects or feelings they bring to mind.

*Examples:* Sunshine Yellow, Meadow Green, Stop Sign Red. Now she can draw and color a picture showing what she imagined.

## SYMMETRY

Kaleidoscopes use mirrors to make *symmetrical* images (each half is a mirror image of the other half). To create a kaleidoscope picture, have your youngster fold a paper plate in half and draw a design on one half. Placing the plate with the folded edge against a mirror lets him see the "whole" picture.



## Character Corner

### INDEPENDENCE

Show your child how to set an alarm clock and how to turn it off. Have her use it to wake herself up. If she has trouble getting out of bed, suggest that she put it across the room so she has to get up to shut it off.



### HELPFULNESS

When you have company, give your youngster a special job to teach him about being helpful. You might put him in charge of talking photographs, hanging up guests' coats, or playing with younger children.



### KINDNESS

Children—and parents—enjoy kind words. Have each family member make a "mailbox" by decorating a large envelope. Tape the envelopes to your bedroom doors. Then, leave kind messages for each other.



### FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS

This game has one rule: No laughing! To play, give your child silly instructions. *Example:* "Stick out your tongue, and flap your arms like a chicken." If she does it without laughing, she gets to give you instructions. If not, it's your turn again.



# Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

March 2018

Middle Country School District  
Title I - Parental Involvement

## Book Picks

### ■ *The Losers Club* (Andrew Clements)

In this laugh-out-loud story, Alec just wants to be left alone to read. So he starts a club with a name sure to keep the other kids away: "The Losers Club." Now the sixth grader can't understand why so many of his classmates want to join him.



### ■ *Who Was Albert Einstein?* (Jess Brallier)

This illustrated biography explores the life of physicist Albert Einstein. Einstein was a shy child who struggled in school but grew up to be one of the world's most famous scientists and thinkers. (Also available in Spanish.)

### ■ *Lily's Mountain* (Hannah Moderow)

Unwilling to accept that her father died while climbing Mt. Denali, 12-year-old



Lily embarks on a mission to rescue him.

Along the way, she uses the many outdoor skills her dad taught her to overcome physical and emotional challenges. A fast-paced adventure tale.

### ■ *The Animal Book* (Steve Jenkins)

Does your child know that most of the animals on earth are insects? Or that there are more extinct animal species than living ones? This almanac features hundreds of creatures and interesting facts about where they live, what they eat, how they defend themselves, and more.



## Write with a purpose

Whether your youngster is running for student council, writing a story for younger children, or leaving instructions for a pet sitter, keeping her purpose in mind will help her communicate clearly. This advice can help her keep her eye on her goal throughout the writing process.

### Keep it front and center

Encourage your child to write her purpose on a sticky note and put it where she'll see it as she works. For instance, maybe she's writing a campaign speech. Her purpose might be "To persuade others to vote for me." This will remind her to include information about how students would benefit from selecting her as their candidate.

### Choose words carefully

The words your youngster uses can help her achieve her goal. Say she's writing a story to read to a kindergarten class. Picking words little ones will understand (*happy* vs. *elated*) will make her story more entertaining for them. Or if she's



writing instructions for a neighbor who's watching her pet iguana over spring break, she could describe the animal's personality (*timid*, *playful*). That will tell the sitter how to approach him.

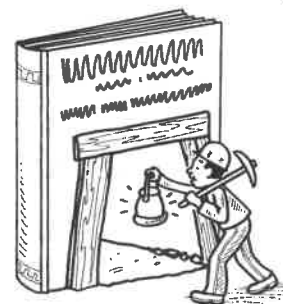
### Revise

Suggest that your child reread her writing to make sure every sentence is in line with her purpose. She might add missing points or take out anything that doesn't fit. For example, in a letter to her grandmother, she may realize that she should write about her piano lessons rather than mentioning her favorite video game twice. ■

## Dig deep

As your child gets older, he'll be expected to think more deeply about books. Talk together about what he reads. You may not realize it, but the questions you ask can encourage higher-level thinking on his part! Here are two ideas:

- Pose questions that require more than a one-word answer. Example: "How did the main character change as the story went on?" instead of "Who is the main character?"
- Choose questions that can't be answered by what's in the story alone. Questions that start with "Why do you think..." or "What if..." are good options. ("Why do you think the author ended it that way?" or "What if the story took place 100 years ago?") ■





# The “extra! extra!” benefits of newspapers

Sharing the newspaper every day is an easy way to encourage your youngster to read regularly. Consider these ideas.

**Sports recaps.** Start by watching a game together. The next day, pick up the sports section, and look for a story about the game. Which highlights does he think the reporter captured well? What would he have added if he were the writer?



**Entertainment reviews.** Does your child agree with reviewers’ opinions? After you see a movie, play, or museum exhibit, let him read a review of it in the newspaper and tell you what he thinks.

**Comic strips.** Have your youngster choose a comic to read aloud each day at breakfast or dinner. He could use a different voice for each character. At the end of the week, let family members vote for their favorite strip.

**Calendar of events.** Your child can use the newspaper to plan family outings. Encourage him to look for free community offerings like a farmers’ market or a parade. Then, let him announce the time, date, location, and other details.

## Fun with Words

### What’s in a contraction?

Words like *it’s*, *she’ll*, and *wouldn’t* add variety to our language and make writing flow smoothly. These *contractions* are formed by combining two words, with an apostrophe replacing one or more dropped letters. Enjoy these activities.

#### Talk and listen

Play a game over dinner: no contractions allowed during your conversations! Your child will need to choose her words carefully—and listen closely to others to make sure they don’t use a contraction. Who can go the longest? She’ll see that without contractions, speech can sound awkward or choppy.

#### Read and write

Ask your youngster to read a page from a book out loud, replacing each contraction with the two words that form it. For example, if she sees *you’re*, she would say *you are*. Then, have her write each contraction on one side of an index card and the two words that form it on the other side. This will help her remember the correct spelling.



### Three cheers for improv

“Improv” lets your child practice speaking and thinking on her feet. Short for *improvisational theater*, improv involves acting without a script or planning ahead. Try these suggestions for a fun family night.

#### Guess the character

Each person secretly picks a storybook character (Curious George, Rapunzel). Set a timer for 5 minutes, and take turns being the character you picked. “Curious George” might run and jump around, then say, “I got in trouble today, as usual, but my friend with the yellow hat rescued me.” And “Rapunzel” could act out brushing her long hair while saying, “I can barely hear you up here in my tower!” When the timer goes off, try to guess each other’s characters.

#### One word at a time

Work together to say an outrageous sentence. On each turn, a player may say only one word. The first person might say “I,” the next player could say, “saw,” and so on. (“I saw a big green dragon eating a cheeseburger on the bus.”) After the last word is said, everyone acts out the sentence. One player might be the dragon, another could drive the bus, and everyone else could be passengers, for example.



## Q&A Challenging a strong reader

**Q** My son reads above grade level. But the books he picks out are either too easy or the subjects are too mature. How can I help him stay challenged and find appropriate books?

**A** Start by talking to his school librarian. She will be able to suggest books on your child’s reading level that are appropriate for him. Perhaps classics or historical fiction would be a good fit.



Or nonfiction may be a good choice. Your youngster can look for books with advanced vocabulary that match his interests. Is he a shutterbug? He can check out photography books. Does he like engineering? He might enjoy books about how things work or biographies of engineers.

Keep in mind that it’s okay if your son occasionally wants to read easy books or reread old favorites. Reading for fun is an activity that he can enjoy all his life.

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# Math+Science Connection

Intermediate Edition

Building Understanding and Excitement for Children

March 2018

Middle Country School District  
Title I - Parental Involvement

## INFO BITS

### All-day math

Does your child realize he does math all day long? Challenge him to carry a notepad for a day and write down each time he uses math (buys lunch, tells time). *Idea:* Show him how you use math by keeping your own list (measuring laundry detergent, paying bills).

### Animal track detective

Which animals have been scurrying around your neighborhood? Encourage your youngster to investigate by looking for tracks, or footprints. She can draw the tracks and practice math skills by measuring their lengths and widths. Then, help her use a library book or a website to find out who they belong to!

### Book picks

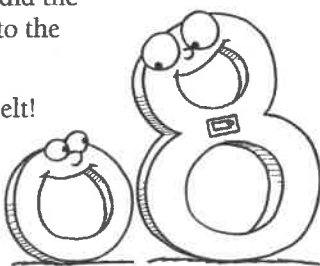
■ *Lines, Bars and Circles: How William Playfair Invented Graphs* (Helaine Becker) is the true story of the man who created the world's most popular kinds of graphs.

■ A baby elephant must quickly learn many important survival skills from its herd. *How to Be an Elephant: Growing Up in the African Wild* (Katherine Roy) describes an elephant's journey from the moment it's born.

### Just for fun

**Q:** What did the zero say to the eight?

**A:** Nice belt!



## Put numbers in their places

Hands-on activities like games and art projects can build your child's understanding of place value. Try these.

### Number toss

Have your youngster fill four plastic zipper bags with uncooked rice and seal tightly. Then, she can write the numbers 0–9 on pieces of paper and tape them to the floor. On each turn, throw the bags, and use the digits they land on to say the largest possible four-digit number. For example, if your child hits 4, 1, 8, and 3, she'd say 8,431. The person with the biggest number wins each round.



### Guess the digits

Play this version of Hangman with numbers instead of letters. Your youngster picks a three- or four-digit number and draws a blank for each digit. Now, ask questions to figure out the digits ("Is the digit in the 10s place greater than 5?"). For each wrong guess, your child draws one part of a stick figure. Guess the number before the figure is complete! Then, trade roles.

### Circle collage

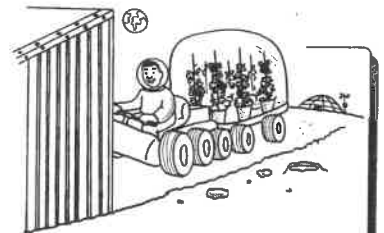
Ask your youngster to assign a color to each place in a four-digit number. *Example:* red = thousands, yellow = hundreds, blue = tens, green = ones. Write any four-digit number, and have her cut out and label construction paper circles to represent it. For instance, if your number is 5,642, she would cut out 5 red circles labeled "1,000," 6 yellow ("100"), 4 blue ("10"), and 2 green ("1"). Encourage her to glue the circles randomly on paper to create a colorful collage. 📦

## My space colony

One day, humans may live on other planets. Have your youngster pretend he's an engineer who's been asked to design a colony on a world that's very different from Earth. He'll practice thinking about the needs of living things—and coming up with creative ways to meet those needs.

First, ask your child to select a planet and determine what people would require to survive there. He might say oxygen, water, food, and shelter.

Now, he can imagine what his colony will look like and draw his ideas. If his planet doesn't have oxygen, he could include a capsule where plants grow to produce it. Or if the planet is close to the sun, he could design an underground colony with tunnels and bunkers to keep people cool. 📦



## Code the alphabet

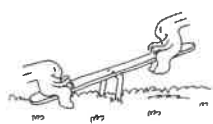
Encourage your youngster to try his hand at early computer programming with this variation on Braille. As he creates his code, he will also learn about the alphabet created for people with visual impairments—and what it is like to use it.

In Braille, raised dots stand for letters, and people run their fingers over the dots to read. Let your child use an empty egg carton and small balls or plastic eggs to create his own alphabet code.



To make A, he might put 1 ball in the bottom left corner and leave the other cups empty. He'll need to make a key for his code as he creates it. Then, take turns spelling simple words and closing your eyes to read each letter with your hand.

**Note:** Your child can find the Braille alphabet at [braillebug.afb.org/braille\\_print.asp](http://braillebug.afb.org/braille_print.asp).



### PARENT TO PARENT

#### Learning math terms

My daughter Kayla struggles with vocabulary. And since she's learning so many new math words this year, like *liter* and *quotient*, this problem was affecting her math work.

I talked to Kayla's teacher, and he thought it would help to post the words where she could see them. He suggested that she write each word on an index card and illustrate it with a drawing or an example.

Kayla and I talked about what each word reminds her of. Since her favorite water bottle holds 1 liter, she drew a picture of the bottle on her *liter* card.

We hung the cards on the refrigerator so she could see the words every day. Once she masters a word, we take it down and add it to a pile on the counter. By associating the math words with something meaningful to her, she has been able to remember them more easily.



### SCIENCE LAB

#### A real balancing act

A seesaw is a familiar example of a lever. It's a type of simple machine that can lift weight on one end when you push down on the opposite end. This experiment will show your child what makes a lever balance.

**You'll need:** 12-inch ruler, low table, hammer

**Here's how:** Let your youngster lay the ruler on a table with the zero end at the edge. Now have her slowly slide it off the table, noting the inch mark at the edge when the ruler falls. Next, have her try this with a hammer, placing the wooden handle at the edge of the table.

**What happens?** The ruler should fall off at the 6-inch mark. But your child can slide the hammer past the middle before it falls.

**Why?** Like a seesaw, the ruler or hammer balances at its *fulcrum*—this is the point where the forces are equal at each end. For the ruler, or a seesaw with children of equal weight, that's in the middle. For the hammer, or a seesaw with kids of unequal weight, the fulcrum is near the heavier end.



### MATH CORNER

#### That's (not) odd!

What happens when you add two odd numbers? Let your youngster find out for himself with this activity.

Ask him to write odd numbers (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) on slips of paper and put them into a jar. He can pull out any two slips and add the numbers together. Is the answer odd or even?

Have him try this again and again—he'll always

get an even answer! Can he figure out why this works?

**The reason:** Adding two even numbers always gives an even answer, and every odd number is 1 digit more than an even number. Add the odd numbers' even

"neighbors" together, and then add the "extra" 2 digits to make the sum even. For example,  $3 + 5 = 8$ . Since 3 is 1 digit from 2 and 5 is 1 digit from 4, add  $2 + 4 = 6$  and then add 2 for the digits you dropped ( $6 + 2 = 8$ ).



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