

Time Marches On

Grades 2-5

The stories of history have beginnings, middles and ends that show events and suggest causes and effects. Making personal timelines can help children understand these elements. They allow children to use events in their own lives to gain a sense of time, to understand the sequence in which things happen and to see connections between causes and effects.

What You Need

Large sheet of paper (butcher paper, for example)

Yardstick and ruler

Shelf paper

Colored pencils or crayons

Removable tape

What to Do

* Sit with your younger child at a table. On a piece of paper, draw a vertical line. Explain that this is a time line. Use different colored pencils or crayons to make straight marks on the line in even intervals and label the marks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and so forth. Explain to your child that each mark is a year in his life.

—Beneath the first mark, write “I was born.” Then point to another mark and ask your child what he remembers about that year in his life. Help him to choose one important event from that year, then think of a label to write. Continue with the remaining years, filling in events for those early years that he can’t recall.

—Review the timeline. Allow your child to erase and change an event for a particular year if he remembers one that he thinks is more important. (Tell him that historians also rethink their choices when they study history.)

* Have your older child make a timeline *poster* by placing a long piece of shelf paper on the floor. Have her use a yardstick to draw a line that is three feet long.

—Talk with your child about important dates in her life—the day she was born; her first day of kindergarten, of first grade; the day her best friend moved in next door; and so forth. Tell her to write the dates on the line. Invite her to add dates that are important for the whole family—the day her baby sister was born, the day her favorite uncle got married, the day the family moved to a new place, the day a grandparent died and so on. If appropriate photos are available, have her add them to the timeline.

—For a horizontal timeline, use removable tape to fasten the paper to the wall, making sure it’s placed at a level that is easy for your child to see and continue working on. For a vertical timeline, hang the paper next to the doorway in your child’s room.

—Display the finished timeline and ask your child to tell other family members and friends what it shows.

—Have your child expand her timeline by adding events that were happening in the world at the same time as each event of her life. Help her use the Internet or the library's collection of newspapers to find and record the headlines for each of her birthdays.

Let's Talk About It

Ask your child:

What is the most important event on the timeline?

What effects did the event have on your life?

What are the connections between the events in your life and world events?