



Fun Projects at Home

Trying to teach your children at home during lockdown is not the easiest thing to do - it can be quite a frazzling experience for parents. We'd like to lift some of the strain off you and suggest that the children do the work and you listen! When children are interested in something, they are usually keen to find out more, and to tell others about it. This form of independent learning can provide parents with some welcome relief from playing the role of the teacher. Most importantly, it should be fun for the child.

How this approach works

- The child chooses a topic which interests them and which they want to know more about.
- They then plan and carry out an investigation. They think of questions they want to answer. Their investigation will often be online but there are other sources such as family members. It might take them a few hours or even a few days, depending on their age and level of interest.
- Finally, they show off their learning to their family by telling them all about what they have found out.

Step 1 - choosing a topic

Ask the child to suggest a topic they are interested in finding out about. If they can't think of one, you can make some suggestions. Child pleasing ideas might include castles, dinosaurs, football, pets, nature, space, weather, art, ancient civilisations, maps, natural disasters, oceans, the Titanic, films, buildings, transport. There are (almost!) no wrong answers - the key is that the child is interested in what they are doing. It's important that the child knows at this stage that they will be telling the family what they have been learning - knowing the audience for their work in advance will be very motivating for them.

Step 2 - the investigation

To help them start their investigation, discuss what they know already, and decide on some questions they might like to find the answers to. Support them as needed to plan their investigation and locate online resources which answer their questions but resist the temptation to do the project for them. Encourage them to think about how they will show the family what they have found out.

Step 3 - telling people about it (the presentation)

For their presentation, which should be informal and relaxed, they could use a poster with text and pictures, a PowerPoint presentation, a zig-zag book (made from one sheet of paper - instructions online) or a home-made notebook. It's up to them. The presentation can be made in person or on a sharing platform, such as Zoom.

To help you get going, here are some suggestions for topics, activities and sample questions.

Castles

Children are fascinated by the times before computers, cars and TV and love learning about how people lived in various periods of history. Life in a castle is a very appealing topic.

Sample questions:

- When, where and why were castles built?
- What are the main features of a castle?
- What was life like in a castle? (this is a really big question made up of lots of little questions) - What did they eat? What did they wear? How did they defend the castle?
- Why did they stop building castles?

The Titanic

TITANIC sank over 100 years ago on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic with the loss of around 1500 lives. Her story continues to fascinate children and adults alike. The stories of the passengers and crew, the magnificence of the first class accommodation, the engineering of the biggest ship ever built and the astonishing events surrounding the sinking never lose their appeal. You could begin this topic by choosing a high-profile passenger such as Colonel Astor and asking your child to find out what happened to them.

Sample questions:

- Why was Titanic built?
- What was life like onboard?
- What happened on the night of the disaster?
- Why did she sink?
- Who should get the last seat on the lifeboat - the first class passenger who paid full fare or the stowaway who paid nothing?
- Should Titanic be left to fall apart on the seabed, or should divers be allowed to remove parts of her and her contents?
- Remember to mention some interesting or favourite facts that you found out.

Pets

Children love pets and many have a favourite. They can investigate a range of pets or choose, for example, a particular dog or cat breed to find out more about. If they have a pet already, it may be the springboard for an investigation into it.

Sample questions:

- Which creatures are wild, which are farm animals, which are working animals, and which are pets?
- Why do people keep pets?
- What do you need to do to look after a pet?
- Where do different pets live / sleep?
- Should people keep exotic animals as pets?
- Remember to mention some interesting or favourite facts that you found out.

The Mystery of Flannan Isle

In December 1900, three lighthouse keepers on Flannan Isle, 40 miles off the west coast of Lewis, disappeared without trace. Some clues were found as to what might have befallen them but the mystery of their disappearance has never been solved. Children will love investigating this mystery and presenting their own theories as to what happened to the lighthouse keepers. The clues include daily entries in the logbook, an overtoppled chair in the living room - and two missing sets of oilskins.

Sample questions:

- Why did / do we have lighthouses?
- What did lighthouse keepers do and where did they live?
- Where is Flannan Isle and what is it like?
- Who found out that the lighthouse keepers were missing? How did they know?
- What could the reasons be for their disappearance?
- What is your favourite theory and what evidence do you have for this?

Weather

This topic is based on observations made in the area where you live.

Sample questions:

- What is meant by weather?
- How does our weather differ from other parts of the world?
- How is weather measured and recorded?
- Where does our weather come from?

Some weather activities:

- Make your own daily weather records and find out about your local climate.
- Research cloud types and record which clouds you see each day.
- Record the amount of the sky which is covered in cloud - in eighths.
- Research the Beaufort Wind Scale and use it to record the wind speed each day.
- Record the approximate number of hours of sunshine each day.
- Make a note of when it rains and if the rain is heavy or light.

- Keep your records in a zig-zag book which you have made yourself or in a notebook.
- Present your findings and observations to the household and then keep them as a permanent record of the weather in your area, at this time.

Space

Astronomy is incredibly interesting for children and many, once introduced to it become completely engrossed. The numbers and distances involved are beyond our comprehension but this doesn't matter to children! You could introduce this topic by writing something like the following challenge on a piece of paper, put it in an envelope with your child's name on it and leave it where they will find it. *"Our own planet Earth and her moon are just two of many planets and moons in our solar system. Our own star, the sun, is just one of many stars in the universe. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to find out more and tell me all about it."*

Sample questions:

- What is a planet?
- How many planets and moons are in our solar system?
- What is a star?
- How old is our sun / the earth?
- What are comets and asteroids?
- Which are the famous constellations in the night sky?

Seas and oceans

Most of our planet is covered in water by the seas and oceans. Many people live next to the sea and many people travel or work on it. People are able to go below the surface to see the many different forms of life - fish, crabs, seals, whales, coral reefs, jellyfish and sharks. Some creatures, like penguins, live both in the sea and on the land.

Sample questions:

- What are the names of the world's biggest seas and oceans and where are they?
- How do people explore underwater?
- Where does sand at the beach come from?
- What different kinds of life can we find in the sea?
- What are tides and why do we have them?
- How do people use the oceans?