



Sesame Family Newsletter

November 22, 2006

The nonprofit organization behind Sesame Street and so much more



For Parents

[Kids' Quirky Questions](#)
by Jordan Brown

A father marvels at his son's curiosity.

Featuring:

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Games and More:

Think About It!
Put your thinking skills to the test.

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From the Workshop



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Sesame Store



[Bring cheer to holiday grouches with A Sesame Street Christmas Carol, new on DVD!](#)

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Kids' Quirky Questions

GORILLAS AND BLUE WHALES

Yesterday, my 5-year-old son Finn was helping me set the table for dinner. I could tell from his expression that he was thinking deeply about something. Setting down the spoons, he asked, "Do gorillas ever eat ice cream?"

"Hmm... I don't think so." I replied, smiling. I loved his creative question, and wanted to encourage him, so I added, "Well, maybe if a gorilla were in a zoo... and a kid near his cage were licking a--"

"Nooooo, Daddy!" he fired back, "You're missing the point. What I mean is...Do gorillas ever eat JUNK FOOD?"

"Good question," I said. "I don't think so. There really isn't any junk food in the jungles where they live."

"That doesn't matter," Finn said. "Everyone should always try new foods, right?"

Clearly this conversation had taken a turn for the surreal. In a fleeting thought, I wondered if a gorilla might enjoy that famous Dr. Seuss delicacy "green eggs and ham." (Would you like them with a banana? Would you like them on the savannah?)

When we sat down to eat a few minutes later, Finn shifted his attention to another topic. Ever since reading that blue whales are the largest creatures on earth, my son has been asking countless questions about them: "If blue whales never sleep, then when do they sleep?" "If a blue whale were wrestling King Kong, who would win?" "Would you buy me a blue whale some day?" "What happens to blue whales when they die?"

It's amazing how once a topic or fact sparks my son's curiosity. He will mull it over for hours, sometimes days, coming up with endless questions. My wife Ellen recently said that one of her favorite Finn expressions is, "But the question is..." She knows that whenever he says this, he will follow it up with a thoughtful, often off-the-wall query.



CURIOSITY: TWO TO FIVE
[Why is "why" your preschooler's favorite word?](#)

CURIOSITY: BIRTH TO TWO
[Curiosity is innate, but parents must nurture it, too.](#)

ELMO CHAT
[Elmo answers kids' questions - read the transcript!](#)



DYING TO KNOW ABOUT DEATH

In addition to blue whales and gorillas, another more serious topic that fascinates Finn is death. Recently, while I was saying goodnight to my son, he asked, "Do you have to go to the bathroom before you die?" I'm glad it was dark in his room because I didn't want him to see me chuckle to myself. I want Finn to know that I take his curiosity very seriously. I want him to know that asking offbeat questions is a wonderful pursuit--something never to be ashamed of. Quirky questions often lead to less quirky, important ones, and are a marvelous way for children to bond with their family. In response to Finn's question about whether or not people go to the bathroom before they die, I asked, "What do you think?" Finn responded, "Only if your bladder is really full." (Can you tell that Finn and I recently read a book about the human body?)

Finn's questions about death sometimes pop up at the oddest times. One afternoon in the car, I handed him a snack, and he asked, "Daddy, can you sneeze after you die?" I told him, "That's a great question. I don't know." I suspect that one of the reasons Finn finds death so interesting is that it is totally out of his realm of his (and my) first-hand experience.

A few nights ago, Finn spotted a motionless bird on sidewalk outside a store with large glass windows. At first, he wondered why the bird was taking a nap there. Where was its nest? Then it dawned on him what was going on. "That bird's dead, right?" I told him what probably happened was that the bird was flying really fast toward the store when... BAM, he crashed into the window. Finn thought about this then cleverly said, "We should make a big sign to warn the birds: Don't crash into this window--OR you'll die!"



CURIOSITY: FIVE TO ELEVEN

Older children need honest answers to tough questions.

WHY? WHY? WHY?

Six years ago, when Ellen was pregnant with Finn, I remember reading in parenting books that many toddlers go through a "Why?" phase. They constantly ask questions like, "Why is the sky blue?" "Why is the grass green?" and "Why do dogs have tails?" I read that in these early years, children are convinced that everything must happen for a specific reason.

Despite Finn's fervent curiosity about the natural world, he did not go through this phase as a toddler. I suspect one reason might be that Finn was a "late talker." He really



"WHY?...WHAT?...HOW?...
BUT WHY..."

didn't start talking in full sentences until about the age of 3. Perhaps he was asking a lot of "why" questions in his head, but he wasn't able to express them until later.

Finn's younger sister Olivia just turned 2, and is remarkably verbal. She's already putting together sentences with as many as seven words. Still, she's not asking the incessant "why" questions. I hear from other parents that when this happens, it can be mildly maddening. If Olivia does enter the "why-why-why" phase, I'm going to try to keep in mind that it is perfectly fine to respond "I don't know"--or "Go ask your mother!" (kidding).

Another great response to the "why" questions is to say, "Let's find out!" Then together go to the library, or the Internet, to pursue the answer.

Questions, questions, questions!

TELL ME WHY

Be responsive to "why" questions

THINKING: BIRTH TO TWO

From day one a baby takes in information through her senses; over time the brain's anatomy will reflect the learning process.

THINKING: TWO TO FIVE

By a child's third birthday, her capacity for abstract thought has increased. By age 5 a child starts to understand that actions have consequences.

THINKING: SIX TO ELEVEN

A school-age child can articulate his feelings; this cognitive capacity allows him to develop self-control.

BIRDS AND BEES

As Finn and Olivia get older, I'm sure they'll be asking the question that makes many mommies and daddies squirm: "Where do babies come from?" When this happens, I hope I can hide any feelings of awkwardness, and simply and calmly let them know the truth--that babies are delivered by purple alien spaceships on the third Sunday of every month.

But seriously... For children to develop healthy feelings about sex, it is important that their questions are met with respect and honesty. From what I've read and from talking with friends, it is important to respond to such questions with simple, short, age-appropriate answers. If, for example, a 3 year old asks, "Where do babies come from?" it would be fine to give an answer such as: "You came from a special place inside Mommy's tummy called a uterus, or a womb." In addition, there are many great books for children



FORGET THE STORK

Honest answers to your child's toughest questions about sex.

MOM, WHERE DO BABIES COME FROM?

My 3 year old asked me

on this topic, so I'm sure we'll be checking them out at the library when the time is right.

[where babies come from. At this age, how much information should I give him?](#)

THE QUESTION BEHIND THE QUESTION

Sometimes what might seem like a frivolous question on the surface is actually a "mask" for a more meaningful concern. When, out of the blue, Finn asks, "Would you buy me another Deedee [his baby doll] if we had a fire in our house?" he's really saying "I'm scared that we'll have a fire in our house." In his own way, he's asking for reassurance that Ellen and I will keep him safe if there were ever an emergency. As parents, it's important that we sometimes look for what sparked a seemingly out-of-the-blue question.

Another example of Finn's question-behind-the-question is when he asks Ellen or me questions such as, "You don't think a shark's teeth will grow back if they fall out, right?" Or "You don't think anything will happen if I pour vinegar on this baking soda, right?" I'm pretty sure that at some level, Finn knows that we know the answers to these kinds of questions. But what's important to Finn when he asks them is that we play a little game in which he is the "all-knowing one" and we--the supposedly knowledgeable adults--are clueless.

Have fun with your kids' quirky questions. They're an excellent sign that your child's imagination is alive and well.

Jordan Brown

Sesame Workshop



CREATIVITY

[A guide to how creativity develops from birth through grade school.](#)

SUNNY WAYS TO NURTURE KIDS

[Tips from Sunny Days Awards winners on developing kids' minds.](#)

Weekly Trivia

Did you know. ... ?

It takes two Muppeteers to work Ernie. One puts his hand in Ernie's mouth and makes him speak. The other puts his right arm in Ernie's right arm. The "right-hand man" is the one who feeds Ernie most of the props and is the hand that performs most of the action.

FROM THE WORKSHOP

In 1968 when it began, it was one little street. Now Sesame Street reaches around the world to over 120 countries. Your gift of support will allow Sesame Workshop, the non-profit organization behind Sesame Street, to use media for what may be the greatest good, helping children around the world reach their highest potential.

[Support the Workshop today!](#)

COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

[Tell us what's on your mind.](#) Kindly note that we are unable to respond to every email received.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary Sesame Street. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like Dragon Tales and Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat, Pinky Dinky Doo and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of Sesame Street, Dragon Tales and Sagwa products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at www.sesameworkshop.org

Sesame Workshop

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