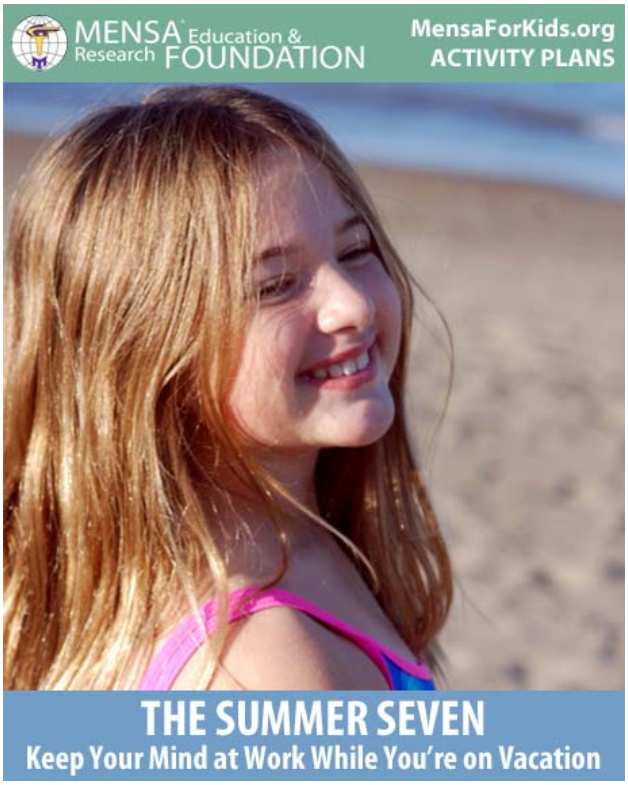
The Summer Seven!



Overview

This series of educational programs was designed to entertain and challenge gifted youth in their time outside of the school setting; however, the activities may be easily shared and enjoyed by older people as well. Programs may be scaled up or down depending on number of attendees, desired level of complexity, etc. Sample materials are included with most plans. The series was developed by Lisa Van Gemert, M.Ed.T., the Mensa Foundation's Gifted Children Specialist. Contact her at giftedyouth@mensafoundation.org.

Introduction

Summer isn't just about beaches! Have you been looking for things to do to keep kids cognitively challenged this summer and avoid the dreaded summer brain drain? Want to do it without breaking the bank? It's easier than you think to turn your home into a place of fun and learning. Here are the Mensa Foundation's top seven tips for avoiding summer brain drain. Enjoy!

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1. Take one TED talk and call me in the morning

TED talks are a perfect (and free) way to open your child's mind. To help parents and teachers use TED talks with kids in interactive ways, we've created TED Connections – guides to TED talks appropriate for kids with high-level thinking questions and companion activities. Find them here www.mensaforkids.org/tedconnections

Be sure to check out the newest venture, TEDed: http://ed.ted.com. They've taken lessons by some amazing teachers and professionally animated them so that there is an engaging blend of video and animation guaranteed to hold a student's attention. The videos have lessons that accompany them as well; they are searchable and, like everything else on TED, wonderful. Logging in (account is free) allows you to track progress. Take the tour here: http://ed.ted.com/tour.

2. Read a book – not just any book

The Mensa Foundation's Excellence in Reading program is the perfect summer reading program for youth of all ages. Divided into grade-level bands, the program guides young readers (up to 12th grade, although most adults will not have read the entire 9-12 grade list!) through the world's greatest literature. When a child reads all of the books/series on a list, the Mensa Foundation sends him or her a free T-shirt and a certificate. No registration is required, and kids can complete any or all of the lists. Best of all, there is no deadline. See www.mensaforkids.org for more information and to print off a list.

Double dip! Find a list of summer reading programs for kids here: http://bit.ly/L5rT1u and let kids earn other prizes for their reading. By the end of the summer, they could have some serious word-earned loot!

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3. Count

Some studies show that math skills decline even more than language skills over the summer. That is sad and so unnecessary when there are amazing (and, of course, free) resources to help kids not only maintain but actually build skills over the summer (or anytime).

First, a book: *Family Math* by Jean Kerr Stenmark *et al.* is the gold standard in helping families use common household items to develop math skills – and not just arithmetic, either.

Next, a blog: This is a perfect place for a parent (or teacher) to go to find high-quality, engaging math to do with young people. http://letsplaymath.net

Then, of course, the mother ship: www.khanacademy.org is *the* place to go for high-quality math instruction in snack-sized bags. This site has gone from solid to uber cool very quickly, with loads more functionality.

Other sources

If you have to hide your kids' math in the manner of hiding vegetables in muffins, these game sites may be more palatable for your kids:

- www.mensaforkids.org/play_template.cfm (11 and under): The Mensa Foundation has great online games on many subjects on the site. All are safe, free and of good quality.
- www.coolmath4kids.com (younger) and www.coolmath.com (older kids – through calculus)
- www.kidsnumbers.com (younger): This is the math site for a family of educational sites; there are other sister sites for other subjects. It's not all games – there are basically online textbooks here, too, as well as movies and printable pages.
- www.multiplication.com: This site allows kids to learn their times tables painlessly!
- www.learninggamesforkids.com/math_games.html (grades K-5)
- www.funbrain.com: This site has way more than math, and it's a little easier on the eyes than some of the other sites.

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4. Become a word dynamo

Dictionary.com has added a cool game feature designed to help players develop and track vocabulary growth using games that you can select. It will also recommend games for you. One wonderful thing about this free site is that you can select by topic (SAT words, anyone?) or grade level. Visit and play here: http://dynamo.dictionary.com

You can also use the Mensa Foundation's Year of Living Poetically program found here: http://bit.ly/KiCO4V to encourage kids to memorize wonderful poetry. The program includes 12 poems, explicated for kids, along with activities for memorizing them. Select the poem or poems right for your child.

5. Go outside

Set a mile goal to walk this summer. Invest in a pedometer and let your kids track and graph their mileage. Calculate the distance between your home and place they'd like to go to and try to see if you can "walk" there this summer. You may wish to do this as a family (how many miles can you walk all together?).

It is not at all unreasonable to walk 3 miles a day, so see if you can find something 100 miles away and "walk" to it, actually driving there to visit when you reach your goal. If you have young children, you may wish to set much smaller goals, such as 1-2 miles and visit a park or favorite snow cone stand.

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6. Learn a skill

Summer is the perfect time for kids to learn something new – crafty, "projecty" skills that they don't have time to acquire during the hectic school year but that could come in handy when there is downtime waiting in cars, etc. Your local library and the Internet are both jam-packed with resources for teaching kids everything from knitting to fishing.

The best hobbies lead to the creation of items of lasting value, can be learned fairly easily and match the child's natural temperament.

A short list of five great hobbies for kids

- **Genealogy.** Check out the free www.familysearch.org site to get started on this hobby, which is quickly becoming the number-one hobby in the world. Did you know that your kids can actually index the 1940 census? How amazing is that! Go here for information on how to participate: https://the1940census.com/getting-started/. It's easier and more fun than you might think (even tweens love doing it).

- **Zentangle®.** Focused, patterned "doodling" is one way to describe this art form you can learn in ten minutes and spend a lifetime mastering (see image to the right). Check it out at www.zentangle.com. Easy, eminently portable, and very few supplies necessary = ideal for kids.

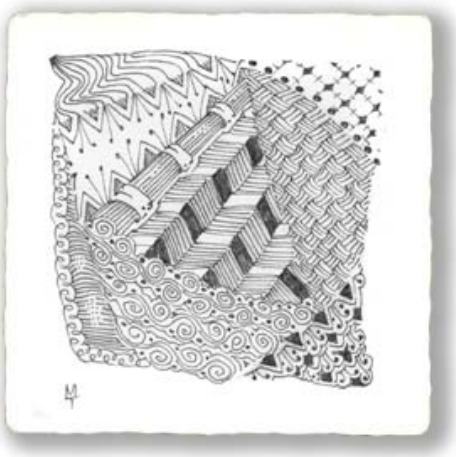

image courtesy of zentangle.com

- **Computers.** Have a budding computer programmer? Use this free site where kids can learn to code: www.codecademy.com. It's really quite cool.

- **Postcards.** www.postcrossing.com allows anyone to receive postcards (paper, not e-cards) from around the world. You request an address, mail the postcard to that address, and then you get a postcard from another one of the more than 300,000 members. When you receive the card, you register it, and then you start over!

- **Magic.** Learning magic tricks helps kids gain confidence, develops hand-eye coordination, and decreases self-consciousness. Find resources here http://bit.ly/magic4kids.

Didn't find any that sounded good? Want a huge list of hobbies to browse through for ideas? Look here: www.notsoboringlife.com/list-of-hobbies/

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7. Be a tourist

Contact your local convention and visitors bureau and get the information you would receive if you were coming to town on vacation. Besides just going to see places you haven't seen before, have the kids create a "Welcome to our Neck of the Woods" brochure or guidebook for future guests, including reviews based on your travels and a history of your area.

Have them keep a photo journal or use one of the great timeline sites available (see below) to create a really cool "What I Did on my Summer Vacation" memory.

If you live in a rural area with no real tourist information, all the better. Create it and then share it! No matter where you live, there are things worth seeing and doing.

Have kids design a brochure about your home or neighborhood, including lore, stories and photos. Research your home's history using city or county records. Pin photos of it at www.historypin.org.

They can also design a guided walking tour of your neighborhood, selecting interesting features to point out (the widest driveway, the best yard, the biggest dog, etc.) and give the tour to guests.

Links to online timeline sites

- www.capzles.com: advanced, multitude of features, good for advanced students; tutorial here: http://bit.ly/capzles
- www.dipity.com: intermediate, can collaborate with others so your whole family can share a timeline
- www.prezi.com: intermediate, many features; not as good with image manipulation but can have multiple collaborators
- www.timetoast.com: easy, few features

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8. Peruse

Still not finding anything that catches your eye? Let your kids peruse some of the myriad sites that have ideas for things to do over the summer with you and pick some to try. They will be more on board with your neat ideas if they think that they are *their* neat ideas (you know that drill). Here are some places to start:

- www.pinterest.com/brightkids: This is where the Mensa Foundation shares resources for bright kids (and their parents).
- http://bit.ly/LxbtvP: Mom-to-mom ideas. This is the summer-activity equivalent of old-wives' tales – you know, the ones that actually work?
- http://nurturestore.co.uk/screen-free-week-kids-activities: This list was for screen-free week, but it works all the time! The list is clickable.
- http://avoidthesummerslide.com/: Okay, so your kids won't like this one as much. It's the site that teachers use to donate cool lessons and activities to prevent summer slide. How nice of them! There's some great stuff here, and some medium stuff here, so look around and pick what works for you.

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