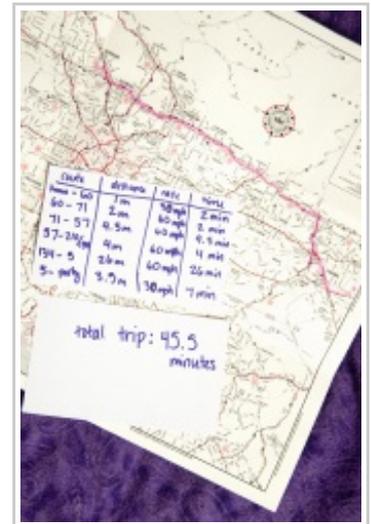


Engage Your 5th Grade Traveler!

You've been talking about this vacation for years. You've saved the money and hoarded your days off from work. Your fifth grader is even, finally, old enough to savor the sights. It's a dream! There's just one teeny problem: about five hundred miles in the car, each way. Of course, it's wonderful to think about the overflowing photo albums you'll enjoy for years to come. But in the meantime, you can be sure you'll hear a nagging soundtrack, too, with refrains like "Do we have to hear that song again?" "Do you really believe that joke was funny?" and, of course, the perennial favorite, "Are we there yet?" Try as we might, we parents can't make those questions go away, but here is a suggestion that may help: Call on your fifth grader to be a Trip Guide. Try the following activity and you have a good shot at engaging your kid...and reinforcing valuable academic skills as well.



What You Need:

- Road map
- Highlighter
- Ruler
- Paper and pen/pencil

What You Do:

1. For this activity, be sure to choose a big map with a clear key showing scale and types of road. (Rand McNally makes good ones, as does AAA).
2. Before your trip, spread your map out on a table and talk about it. By the end of fourth grade, your child should be able to read and apply all parts of a standard map key. Check for understanding by asking your child to identify landmarks, roads, boundaries, and so forth.
3. Start by having your child find your starting point and destination, and mark each one with a highlighter; then ask your fledgling travel buff to recommend an itinerary. When he or she has made a decision you can live with too, invite your kid to trace it with a highlighter.
4. If your fifth grader is on track in math, he or she should be ready for the next stage: calculating distance, rate, and travel time—but do expect this part to be challenging, and be ready to help! Have your child use a ruler to estimate the miles between junctions and intersections; for speed, estimate 15 miles per hour in crowded downtown areas; 20 on suburban roads; 40 on "scenic" country roads; 60 on major freeways. On a piece of plain lined paper, create a chart like this:

Section of Route	Distance	Average Rate	Time
Home to Route 95	5 miles	20	.25 hr.
Route 95 to Elm Avenue	90 miles	60	1.5 hr.
Elm Avenue to Valley Circle	20 miles	40	.5 hr

To figure out how much time each section of the trip takes, your child will have to use not only addition estimation skills (generally covered in second and third grades), but fourth and fifth grade division, fractions, and decimals. For time, your child will need to divide distance by rate. In the example above, that means that if you go five miles from home to Route 95, you'd divide 5 by the speed—20—to come up with .25 of an hour.

5. Here's a great chance to show how math really IS a practical skill in life. When you're driving, put your child in charge of checking off each leg of the trip. How accurate were your time estimates?

What conditions helped you beat those estimations, and which ones held you back? How should you adjust your itinerary on the way back? Of course, in our techno-savvy era, your fifth grader may very well point out that you can get the answers to these questions by clicking a MapQuest button. But what you won't get is the chance to dream up your own, original routes, or to test your personal calculations against the challenges of the real open road. Your child's teacher will love the fact that you're reinforcing social studies and math skills that are crucial foundations for the future. And finally, if you've ever weathered one of those long family road trips, you can also be sure: if you can lessen that incessant wail of "How Much Longer?" you're already halfway there.

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