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Sharing History at the Dinner Table

Tips from Kate Kelly on How to Start the Conversation



Between after-school activities, play dates, soccer matches and music lessons, busy moms everywhere know how hard it can be just to get a nutritious dinner on the table.

But despite the hustle of daily life during the school year, the importance of the family dinner as the focal point for teaching our children cannot be denied. With that said, what are ways to get the conversation started at the dinner table? How can we discuss important events of the day with our children in ways that are engaging, fun and easy to understand? 

Kate Kelly, a renowned author, historian and mom, knows how hard it can be to get that conversation started. With a focus on encouraging her readers to "remember when," Kate challenges Americans young and old to look back on classic and little-known stories of America, the political landscape and pastimes in order to fully understand today's America. Read more from Kelly on her website, <http://americacomesalive.com/>

Here are just a few of Kate Kelly's Tips for Sharing History at the Dinner Table:

- "When I was little..." Children of all ages, even very young ones, love hearing stories of how things used to be. Tell them about your own first day of school or share with them the favorite games you liked to play, or what type of vacations your family took. Those stories never grow old. Remind your kids to ask their grandparents about what it was like for them, too. Grandparents will love it, and your kids will hear wonderful family stories of how things used to be.

- Starting an instrument. In elementary school, many children start a band instrument. You can share with them that boys as young as age 9 were part of the military during the Civil War. Drummer boys were key to setting a pace for marching units. Buglers (explain that a bugle is like a trumpet) would sound calls to tell soldiers to move forward or to retreat. They played a very important part in the war.
- The importance of voting. Communities are filled with election-related billboards and signs about the mid-term elections. Explain to your kids how important it is to pay attention to the issues being discussed and to vote. If possible, take your kids with you to the polling place so they can see what it is like. You might also add that originally only white men who owned land could vote, and that it took years for women and people of ethnic backgrounds to win the right to vote.
- Newspaper boys. Today, most parents get much of their news from the Internet, but most households still have one or two papers delivered in printed form. Explain to your children that it used to be that the primary way for families to get news was via the printed newspaper and that children were key to delivering the news. Young boys would take jobs as paper boys, which would involve getting up very early and then delivering the newspaper on their bicycles. Once a month they would visit their route in the evening to collect payment for the newspaper.
- Not everyone grew up having a phone. Most young children soon realize that everyone has a personal telephone and they begin the "I want a phone" campaign. Explain to them that this is a relatively recent phenomenon. Parents today would have likely been 16 or older before cell phones were a common accessory. And when parents describe the days "before personal phones," there may have an additional teaching moment if you walk by a phone booth. What's that? Children today will likely never hear a busy signal... another moment where parents can talk about how technology has advanced very quickly.

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