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Sesame Family Newsletter

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## Questions! Questions! Questions!

by Jordan D. Brown

**A dad marvels at his daughter's endless queries.**

**Featuring:**

- Answering Questions with Questions
- "Daddy, What's the Hard-Knock Life?"
- Gorillas and Whales
- This Week on the Street...



## This Week on the Street...

*Muppets have questions, too! Find out the answers by watching these videos.*

- [Cookie Questions Prairie Dawn](#)  
Ask questions to learn about things.
- [Rosemary Clooney Asks](#)  
Rosemary Clooney sings her question to Hoots the Owl.
- [Telly's Questions](#)  
Big Bird answers five questions from Telly.

### Sesame on the Web

Do you Hulu? Sesame does!

[Visit Sesame Street on Hulu.](#)

### [Sesame Street: On Air](#)

Find episode guides and meet your favorite cast, characters, and celebrities from *Sesame Street*.



## Sesame Street Parents

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Visit the new Sesame Street Parents section! Find tips, activities, and related media for you and your child

## Answering Questions with Questions

Ever since my daughter Olivia learned to speak, much of what comes out of her mouth are questions. Some of her queries are easy to answer, such as "What kind of animal is that?" or "What will happen if I put ketchup on my hair?" Now that she's 4 years old, though, Olivia's questions are even more plentiful and much more sophisticated. Some are mind-bogglers: "What's a black hole, Daddy?" "Is Santa Claus real?" "Where do babies come from?" and "How come caterpillars turn into butterflies, but dogs always stay dogs?" Questions like these sometimes stump me and make me wonder what about the most appropriate, useful responses.



### [How to Handle Questions From Your Child](#)

Not every question requires an instant answer.

One strategy that helps me come up with meaningful answers for Olivia's trickier questions is to respond by first asking my own questions. By asking her, "Why do you ask?" and "What do YOU think?" I can often cut to the heart of the matter, and find out what inspired the question in the first place--and learn what information she really yearns to know. Whenever I ask her, "What do YOU think?" or say, "How do you think we could find out?" I'm empowering her to think more independently. In general, I try to respond to Olivia's questions in a way that makes her feel smart, and that inspires her to ask more. Even when she asks questions that make me uncomfortable, I try to avoid frustrating her by saying, "I'll tell you when you're older." I've also learned by trial and error that some of her questions aren't really looking for specific answers, but are simply ways to keep the conversation going. Her asking, "Why do spiders have eight legs?" is sometimes her way of saying, "Aren't spiders cool? Let's have fun talking about them. Tell me anything you know."

## "Daddy, What's the Hard-Knock Life?"

Sometimes the simple act of reading a book or watching a movie with Olivia will inspire a flood of interesting questions. During a visit to the library on a recent rainy afternoon, Olivia selected the DVD of "Annie" for us to watch. As you probably know, this musical comedy, set in the 1930s, tells the adventures of a plucky young orphan girl.

While the show's hit song is "Tomorrow," the number that Olivia loves most is "It's the Hard-Knock Life." In this song, Annie and the other girls in the orphanage complain about their rotten lives, and the poor treatment by Miss Hannigan, the comic villain who runs the orphanage. As the girls sing this song, they scrub the floors and do other chores. After watching the movie, Olivia asked me to go back and play the scene with that song again... and again... and again. Each time, she listens carefully to the lyrics, and asks me to help her understand what they mean. "Why do they call it the hard-knock life?" "Why do the girls want wool blankets instead of cotton ones?" and the most bizarre, "What's a Mickey Finn?" (After looking up the last one, I discovered it was a term from that era for a drink laced with something that makes you fall asleep.) I did my best to explain the answers to each of her questions in an appropriate, engaging way. During our discussions of what an orphanage is, I try to help her appreciate how lucky she is to have all the comforts she does, and to realize that many children in the world truly have "hard-knock" lives.

Inspired by her new understanding of this song, Olivia created a little game at home. In this game, she asks me to play Miss Hannigan, while she, of course, plays Annie. When I act really bossy and tell her to scrub the floor "'til it shines like the Chrysler Building," she then pretends she's Annie and hands me a cup of water. She whispers, "Don't worry, Daddy, it's not really a Mickey Finn." I sip it, and then comically fall on the floor, sticking my tongue out. We both laugh and have a marvelous time. Hours of fun together all because I indulged her curiosity about the meaning of a song's lyrics.

## Gorillas and Whales

While helping me set the table for dinner the other evening, I could tell from Olivia's expression that she was thinking deeply about something. As she set down a glass, she asked, "Do gorillas ever eat ice cream?"

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

"Nooo, Daddy!" Olivia 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," she said. "Everyone should always try new foods, right?"

Clearly, this conversation had taken a turn for the surreal. In a fleeting thought, I wondered aloud 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?)



### [Empathy In Children Aged Two to Six](#)

Learn to identify with the feelings of others.



### [Elmo Zoe and Telly Learn the Scientific Method](#)

Watching a leaf floating in a bucket of water leads Elmo to ask many scientific questions.

When we sat down to eat, Olivia shifted her attention to another animal. Ever since she learned that blue whales are the largest creatures on Earth, she has been asking many questions about them: "If blue whales never sleep, then when do they sleep?" "Could a blue whale ever be a princess?" "Would you buy me a blue whale some day?" "What happens to blue whales when they die?" It's amazing how a single fact can spark a child's curiosity.

Jordan D. Brown  
Sesame Workshop

## Sesame Workshop: The World's Largest Preschool Classroom



Best known for the groundbreaking children's television program *Sesame Street*, the goal of Sesame Workshop is to give all children the chance to dream, discover, and reach their highest potential. Using the power of media and Muppets, the Workshop brings these opportunities to 120 million children -- many who would otherwise have no access to early childhood education -- in over 140 countries worldwide. But we can't do it without the help of friends like you -- our Sesame Family! Visit [Sesame Workshop](#) online to discover more ways to support the Workshop.

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Sesame Workshop

One Lincoln Plaza

New York, NY 10023

212-875-6119

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