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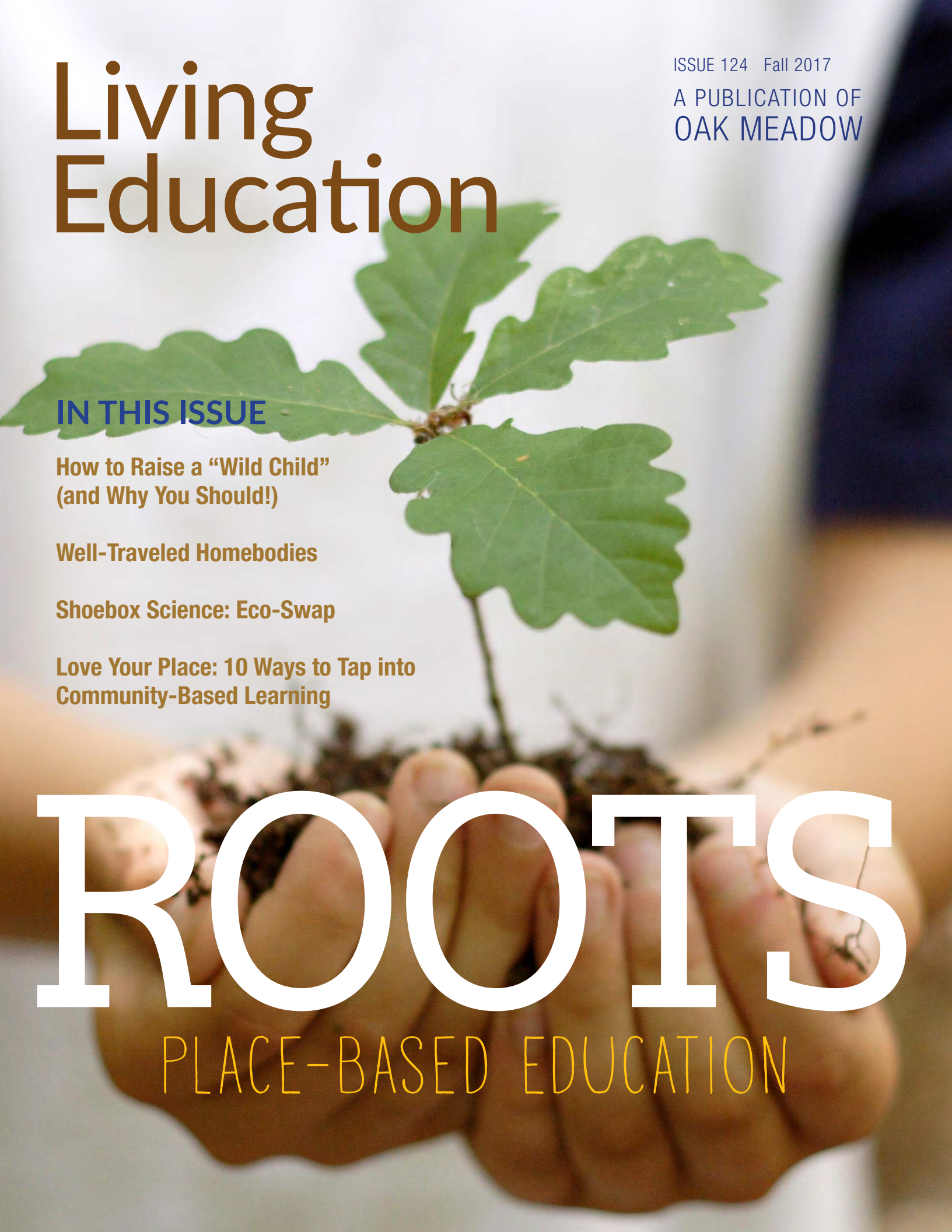

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ROOTS

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

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Roots: Place-based Education

What gives you a sense of place? What does it mean to have a sense of place? This issue explores the value of place-based education. When we use the resources all around us—environmental, cultural, community, and human—we build in our students a stronger sense of themselves and their place in the world.

This issue focuses on place-based education through many different lenses. Learning from nature and the particular geography of the local region, connecting with community organizations and mentors, reaching out to people in other regions, and spending time just being in your own place are all ways we can weave together meaningful learning no matter where we are.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Living Education*. Let us know your favorite ways to take advantage of what your unique place has to offer!

How to Raise a "Wild Child"

(and Why You Should!)

by Alan Fortescue


Life is good

Research has shown that the simple the act of getting children outside is the most effective way to foster environmental consciousness. As prominent environmental educator David Sobel eloquently stated, “one transcendent experience in nature is worth a thousand nature facts.”

It turns out that children who have an immersive experience in nature develop a deep love of the environment that they carry with them their entire lives.

Aside from significantly increasing the likelihood that they will actively work to preserve the important life-giving aspects of the environment as adults, an engagement with nature has other positive cognitive impacts, from an improved performance in school to a greater involvement and concern for community well-being. A study of 300 of the world’s most innovative thinkers and leaders showed clear links between childhood immersion in nature and an out-of-the-box creativity and tireless commitment to society.

Here are some ways you can (safely) launch your child into the wild:

Let go of fear

One of the hardest things to overcome if you are not used to being outdoors in the wild yourself, or if your children are not, is a fear of what may be lurking there. Fear may lead you to try to overcontrol the situation to prevent any harm from happening to your child. This may ultimately have the opposite effect on your child, confirming unreal conceptions about nature that may make them fear it rather than love it.

To be sure, there are things that bite (mostly mosquitoes) and stuff that may sting or burn (like poison ivy), but these are easily mitigated, and in many ways are part of the beauty of the experience. The natural world is not Disneyland. Encountering and mastering its challenges while enjoying its beauty and wildness builds confidence, practical skills, and a profound sense of connection.

Start small

If you are a novice to the outdoors, start by finding a place that you and your child can feel safe exploring, or that you could feel safe letting your child explore with little supervision. You might start by planting a garden. You could talk to your kids about how plants grow and then go to the farmers market and buy seedlings that you plant and harvest together. You might try taking a walk in the city park, or town common, or the local nature reserve. From there, your adventures can grow along with your wilderness comfort zone.

Let your kids play

In a world where childhood time is highly structured and controlled, children often do not get the chance to explore on their own, in their own way and time. Being able to make sense of their world is crucial for the development of critical thinking skills. The goal is not to show nature to children as another thing to check off the list, but to give them the time to see it for themselves. Let your kids set the pace, maybe even choose the place. Let them decide what to explore, and to follow their curiosity when one discovery leads to another. Try not to be overprotective, try not to be directive. When my son was two years old, I would take him to the middle of a local forest and just let him wander, at his own pace and in his own direction. It was an incredible bonding experience as I wandered with him, watching him pick things up and try to figure out what they were, splash in a stream, or dig in the mud. For hours we wandered, rarely talking, just experiencing.

Don’t be scared of the dark

Camping is an amazing way to explore the natural world because you are immersed in it not only during the daylight but all through the night. From setting a tent up in your yard to hiking miles into the forest and roasting marshmallows over a fire, spending significant time outdoors will change your child’s life. The experience of sitting around a campfire is elemental and will be remembered throughout life.

Be a role model

While children can and will develop a love of nature when allowed to explore it on their own, your behavior in nature can also be a powerful influence. For younger children, you can demonstrate curiosity by stopping to look at things you see. You could bring a magnifying glass, for example, and stop to look at how varied the colors of leaves on trees. You could ponder out loud, “Wow! I never knew there was such a difference between leaves, did you?” The “did you?” question is an important part of nature explorations with children. Asking for their opinions or ideas in this inclusive way allows them to feel an important part of the discovery. You might ask, “I wonder what we should look at next?”, which naturally invites your child to engage in the wonder of being out in the wild.

Prepare for all opportunities

The first step is to dress appropriately, with sturdy clothing and footwear that fits the weather and terrain. Sunhat, sunscreen, raincoat, mittens—think about what will help everyone be comfortable spending time outside. Bring water and a small snack in case you lose track of the time. Carrying a simple first-aid kit can let you take care of a simple splinter or scrape without having to cut the adventure short.

Engage the reluctant

Until their get their feet wet, perhaps literally, kids who have spent most of their lives inside may show little interest in a nature walk, much less camping. In these cases, it will take some careful planning and baby steps to bring them into the wild. One way I like to get kids engaged is by introducing the idea of a challenge related to their imagination. For kids who are into video games, for example, I might inspire them to tell me what kind of fort we would need to defend ourselves from some character in the video world. Once I get the description, I would then say, "Yeah, but, looking at the forest, where would we put such a fort if we had to build it here?" Then I would set the challenge of making the fort together.

Nature treasure hunts are also a lot of fun (and this is the beauty of exploring nature—it is instructional and fun at the same time). For example, I might tie different colored ribbons around trees or hide them beside rocks, and direct the kids to find the ribbons in a certain order. Or, for older kids, I might tell them I really need help counting the number of maple saplings in a certain space (say a 100-yard square). After showing them what maple saplings look like, I ask them to let me know if they see any interesting bugs or animals on or near the saplings they find. Giving them a task or focus can help them let go of their timidity or boredom and tune in to their surroundings. You might visit the library beforehand and find out about the local birds or plants, and then go on a treasure hunt for these. You can have students create a checklist, using pictures or drawings, and then mark off how many plant and animal species they see. Once they are engaged they will begin to notice much more around them.

To sum it up:

- Remember to let your child explore. Give children the freedom to make their own discoveries and observations.
- Let your child's imagination run wild. Let the time be about your child. Make it about curiosity and discovery, not learning facts.
- Let your children get their hands dirty and explore just like a child would.
- Allow your child to bring home a collection of nature treasures: rocks, sticks, leaves, feathers.
- Try to play like a child yourself. Get wild together!
- Talk to your kids about the experience afterwards. Help them learn to see that nature is a system of which they are a part.

Alan Fortescue is Oak Meadow's High School Program Director. He's also an avid mountain climber and hiker who can usually be found outdoors, regardless of the weather. This article is adapted from a piece originally written for PBSParents in 2009 (see here for the original article).

Make the Connection: Learning in Place

By Jessica Turner

"Hey, this is really disgusting!" says one high school student to another as she conducts a water quality test on a particularly trash-strewn section of river that flows through town.

"Yeah, but the data makes sense," says her friend, "because it just rained last night, which affects both the pH levels and the dissolved oxygen."

A third classmate shakes a vial of solution, which will indicate phosphate levels, while a fourth uses a Secchi disk he constructed earlier to determine turbidity levels. A fifth takes photos of the river and the sloping banks; these will be integrated into her final lab write up. We've walked to this site from our downtown classroom in Brattleboro, Vermont to engage in hands-on science as part of our environmental science class. Place-based learning is often associated with getting students outside and immersed in their local environment. In a small city such as ours, we broaden the scope of place-based learning to include every aspect of the city–from architecture to circus school, from underserved populations to urban development. One of the joys of Oak Meadow's high school curriculum is the abundance of hands-on projects and thoughtful readings. We take inspiration from these projects and readings and adapt them to our place.

For example, Main Street is lined with old, beautiful, historic buildings that welcome visitors and locals alike. As part of the geometry study, students choose a downtown business and do a scale drawing of its interior floor plan. Then, they do research on the American With Disabilities Act (ADA) and determined what modifications might be necessary to make that business ADA compliant. Finally, they create a new scale drawing with those modifications in place. In the future, students will present their findings to the Select Board's planning committee, in the hopes of increasing accessibility for all.

By far the most important part of place-based learning is connecting with the people in our place. We are so fortunate to have unique, talented, and diverse community members that are willing to share their expertise with high school students. We've immersed ourselves in the community in two ways: by inviting guest teachers in and by sending students out to learn from mentors. This year, our guests included a wildlife biologist, a research librarian, an artist, a writer who conducted a memoir writing workshop, a STEAM wearable tech expert, an acupuncturist, a yoga therapist, and a general contractor. Each guest teacher came because they were invited and because they were excited about sharing their passion with students. Each volunteered their time and donated the materials necessary for their class.

Prominent author and place-based educator David Sobel said we need to teach students to love the world before we teach them to save it. This is the guiding principle for place-based learning. With a little thoughtful planning, just about any academic subject or lesson can be extended into the community and enhaced by local connections. Teenagers need the opportunity to fall in love with their place in the world and with the community that surrounds them. And we can help them do that.

Jessica Turner is the director of Oak Meadow's onsite microschool, Brattleboro School Without Walls (BSW2), where high school-aged students benefit from mentors who are experts in their field, the beautiful southern Vermont landscape, and the myriad fine arts opportunities available in our small city.

Well-Traveled Homebodies

by Esther Sorg

My mother is a wanderer who knows where she left her nest. She keeps pictures of places that she wants to visit on her desktop, and encourages my tentative solo flights away from home. She is the first to suggest going for a drive "just because," and an enthusiastic contributor to family vacation plans. This is the woman who homeschooled me and my brother and sister, and this is the attitude with which she did it.

We wandered. My schoolhouse was anywhere that could be reached and returned from by the time Dad got home from work.

"Kids, let's visit Grandma today," Mom would say, and we would pack up our school books and drive down to Adams County, Ohio to finish our math practice on my grandmother's back porch.

“Field trip!” Mom would announce, and we would find ourselves on the hiking trail at the local park, identifying different trees from their leaves and sneaking up on squirrels. Homeschooling provides children with the unique opportunity to see what the world outside looks like, any time, any day. My mother would get funny looks from cashiers at gas stations when she came in with a troupe of three school-aged children at eleven o’clock on a Tuesday morning. “Shouldn’t they be in school?” the looks said.

We were in school. We were learning how to exchange money for goods and services, how to read a map, and how to make rational decisions on snack foods for a short hiking trip. In other words: math, geography, and critical thinking skills.

For non-homeschooled children, the most interaction they have with adults is with their parents and their teachers. I met all sorts of adults as a wandering homeschooler: cashiers, banking associates, waiters, National Park employees, college students, joggers, dog walkers, veterinarians. Mom took us with her on her errand trips, and I’ve never had a problem asking questions of strangers. I could hold an informative, functional conversation with an adult from the age of six. No matter where we went, however, we always made it home at the end of the day, glad to return to the roost. We were well-traveled homebodies.

We homeschooled in the car, in the woods, at the zoo, on my grandmother’s back porch, and –sometimes– in our house. My siblings and I would receive our assignments at the kitchen table and then disperse to our personal favorite study spots. I did my math work at the table and my grammar on the living room floor. The backyard was our gymnasium and the kitchen was our laboratory. Even when we were staying home for the day, I wandered, roaming the house from subject to subject to find the right environment for each topic. My mother made the rounds as well, seeking each of us out to check on our progress.

My mother taught me to wander. She taught me to meander, to joyride, and to spend way too long at each zoo exhibit, because if you can’t go at your own pace, then what is the point? Homeschooling doesn’t have to mean staying home, being bound to one house and one piece of land. This entire world is my home, and anywhere I go will have something to teach me. The exact location is not the most important part. It is the deep-rooted knowledge of self and truth that really defines homeschooling. It is honoring the people who make your life and learning possible, and knowing how to find your way back from wandering. It’s remembering where you left your nest.

Esther Sorg is a former homeschooler currently completing a Bachelor’s degree in English at Wright State University. She reads voraciously, walks vigorously, and writes vociferously.

Shoebox Science: Eco-Swap

by John Dorroh

My philosophy for teaching science—or any subject, for that matter—is simple: get the students engaged with the content as quickly as possible. Learning by doing fosters a more comprehensive understanding of science concepts than reading from a book or listening to a teacher talk.

When we began a unit on ecology, I facilitated a discussion on ecosystems and then I presented a challenge. I asked, "If you were invited to collect any objects which represent the ecosystem in which you live, what would they be? What objects from out in the environment would you include?"

Questions followed: *"Can it be alive, like a rabbit or a snake?" "Do rocks count?" "Pieces of trees?" "Solid or liquid?"*

I asked students to make a written list. Their lists were interesting. Some students had only one or two items written down while others had an entire notebook page! Here is a partial list of items that we gleaned:

- Magnolia leaves
- Pine tree branches and needles
- Rocks
- Beetles
- Worms
- Deer droppings
- Leaves from oaks, maples, elm, and pecan trees
- Frogs
- Pond water
- Sea shells
- A jar of water from the Mississippi Sound
- Shrimp shells

We decided to create several "shoebox ecosystems" that contained objects (or representations, such as photos of animals) from our local environment. The plan included inviting other students from around the United States to assemble boxes that represented their local ecosystems, and then swapping boxes to learn more about other places.

A group of students outside of Las Vegas assembled boxes containing objects from the desert. Another group lived in Maine and one in Oregon, two states with very different topographical features.

Mailing the boxes took some thought and effort. We had to be careful to mail objects that would not leak and that could be secured with bubble-wrap, tape, and other packing materials such as dry air-popped popcorn. I checked with a local postal worker to make sure that we were not violating any postal regulations when mailing our own Mississippi Eco-Box.

The first box that arrived at our school was from Nevada. The secretary brought it down to the room and said, "Special delivery from Nevada." The students were so excited I thought they were going to burst!

The box contained rocks from the desert, some vials of different colors of sand, pictures of snakes, lizards, and cactus plants with colorful blooms. There were other objects, including a picture of the students. "We would love to hear from you soon," read an enclosed note.

What followed was a more in-depth study of objects in the desert box and how each of the items contributed to the overall health of the desert ecosystem. Examining that box generated more interest in taking a closer look at our own surroundings. The compositions that the students wrote about their experiences included related science concepts and had more details than usual. In addition to learning some science, the students began communicating with each other. It was a win-win situation and a phenomenal lesson for all of us. My students had learned some basic ecology…and so much more.

John Dorroh taught secondary sciences for almost 30 years. Now he consults with teachers in several states, sharing with them strategies for helping young learners understand science using reading and writing. "Never stop exploring your world," he tells his teachers and students.

Where You At?
A Bioregional Quiz

Developed by Leonard Charles, Jim Dodge, Lynn Milliman, and Victoria Stockley (first printed in CoEvolution Quarterly *32, Winter 1981; reprinted in* Living Education*, Spring 2013)*

Developing a sense of place is a key ingredient in place-based learning. It also promotes Earth stewardship and environmental sustainability. Learning about the local resources, geography, plant life, and more helps us make good choices about living more lightly on the Earth. This intriguing, surprisingly challenging bioregional quiz—playfully titled "Where You At?"—gives families a great way to open the dialogue around sustainable living while helping to develop a sense of place.

Test Yourself!

1. Can you trace the water you drink from precipitation to tap?
2. How many days until the moon is full? (Slack: two days allowed.)
3. What soil series are you standing on?
4. What was the total rainfall in your area last year, July–June? (Slack: 1 inch for every 20 inches.)
5. When was the last time a fire burned in your area?
6. What were the primary subsistence techniques of the culture that lived in your area before you?
7. Name five edible plants in your region and their season(s) of availability.
8. From what direction do winter storms generally come in your region?
9. Where does your garbage go?
10. How long is the growing season where you live?
11. On what day of the year are the shadows the shortest where you live?
12. When do the deer rut in your region, and when are the young born?
13. Name five grasses in your area. Are any of them native?
14. Name five resident and five migratory birds in your area.
15. What is the land use history of where you live?
16. What primary ecological event/process influenced the land form where you live? (Bonus special: what's the evidence?)
17. What species have become extinct in your area?
18. What are the major plant associations in your region?
19. From where you're reading this, point north.
20. What spring wildflower is consistently among the first to bloom where you live?

Boost Learning with Place-Based Education

by Karen Doll

I'm an avid bird watcher. I simply love to watch birds flit from branch to branch, down onto the ground to more closely inspect a hint of movement, and back up into the air and onto new adventures. It's a sheer delight to watch them visit our feeders, coming and going, back and forth, chattering like the dickens, until they've had their fill. Oh, I could sit for hours, immersed in their busy world. I ask you, though, would learning about birds be just as interesting if my only resources were textbooks?

Unequivocally, no. Even online resources with their myriad of videos and audio players would still just hint at a deeper knowledge. I much prefer my little place in the sun—sitting on our patio or deck or hiking along a nature trail. Some black-capped chickadees are so tame they actually land in the palm of your hand—a hand filled with bird-friendly morsels.

I realized that experiences can be better teachers than books. So, as a homeschool mom, I made a decision to incorporate place-based learning into our program. Thankfully, one of the benefits of homeschooling was the freedom to spend time learning outside of the home.

During high school, our daughter's growing faith coupled with her interest in other cultures led her to the missionary field. Through our church, she volunteered to be part of a team sent to aid victims of Hurricane Katrina. As the daughter of a handyman, she fit in well. Who knew those many hours spent working alongside Dad at home would have helped to rebuild a single mom's home more than a thousand miles away in southern Mississippi. Another short-term mission trip took Emily out of the country to Argentina. Equipped with a willingness to serve, basic construction skills, and several years of high school Spanish, Emily worked alongside other youth missionaries to repair a tiny church. Thankfully, she and several other youth stayed with a local family so conversations were a group effort.

Although learning wasn't Emily's motivation for volunteering

for those trips, every moment was a learning experience. Learning happens naturally when a student lives, even for a short time, in another country. Emily had to adapt—eat, drink, sleep, speak, and celebrate (she was in Argentina through New Year's Eve) in the same manner as her host family and local citizens, all of which was new to her.

Our son, Jeremy, is a rail fan—like father, like son. The two spend hours together traveling to local train-watching hot spots where they anxiously await a glimpse of a Norfolk Southern train. Thanks to a cell phone app, Jeremy can check the location of any one of the twenty newly painted heritage locomotives, a tribute by Norfolk Southern to all the railroads who've played a part in their history. Regular visits to railroad museums and historic sites such as Steamtown National Historic Site, the B&O Railroad Museum, and the Railroaders Memorial Museum and famous landmark, Horseshoe Curve, serve to validate his knowledge of the railroad industry, railroad design, routes, functions of the various locomotives, cards, and specific trains.

As a long-time member of the Coopersburg Area Society of Model Engineers, Jeremy regularly works on layout design—he helps to build and recreate scale models of area businesses, rivers, and landmarks which serves to deepen his knowledge of local history. And, as a regular participant in their monthly operating sessions, Jeremy assumes the various roles of railroad industry workers such as dispatcher, conductor, switcher, inspector, and more as

members communicate with each other and collectively transport goods, switch cars, and travel throughout the local region (via walkie-talkies and remote controls).

Both of my children also volunteered at our local library, and, yes, you guessed it, library skills aren't the only tasks to get top billing on the job description. Posted behind the circulation desk, volunteers get the opportunity to hone their social skills, learn time management, and practice computer and technology skills. And, of course, they get the first glimpse of all the new books and DVDs.

According to *Promise of Place*, part of the Center for Place-Based Learning and Community Engagement, research shows that "outside of the homeschool" learning experiences encourage a deeper level of thinking skills and positively impact children's confidence, behavior, feelings of self-worth, and ability to solve a myriad of unique and atypical problems.

With hands-on, community-centered learning, my children honed many practical skills and character traits:

- Responsibility
- A strong work ethic
- Flexibility
- Compassion
- Patience and tolerance
- Reliability
- The importance of a job well done

One of the beauties of place-based learning is that it flows naturally from experience. I liken this to new mothers. No matter how many books they read or videos they watch or conversations they have with veteran moms, nothing, and I mean nothing, prepares women for motherhood like a newborn in their arms, in their house, and in their lives. Place-based learning envelops the student in a living textbook. Place-based learning doesn't just pack up the pencils and the books and transport the learning to a new place. Taking advantage of what each unique place offers adds depth, engagement, and passion to the learning process. Students uncover a deeper meaning of the subject matter. They feel a sense of purpose and pride in their accomplishments. Consequently, motivation to continue and to dig deeper happens naturally.

So, what are your children's passions? And, how can you use the resources around you to fuel their interest and inspire them to explore them more deeply?

Resources and Further Reading:

Promise of Place: Enriching Lives Through Place-based Education
http://promiseofplace.org/what_is_pbe

Genius Loci: Place-based Learning & Why it Matters
http://www.gettingsmart.com/2016/07/genius-loci-place-based-education-why-it-matters/

Our Curriculum Matters: Big Questions. Real Places.
http://www.ourcurriculummatters.com/What-is-place-based-education.php

Karen Doll is a freelance writer based in the beautiful countryside of eastern Pennsylvania. As a veteran homeschool mom, she enjoys writing about creative ways to enrich subject matter. Karen's work has appeared on The Homeschool Mom*,* Write Shop*,* The Organized Mom*,* Seton Magazine*, and in* Home School Enrichment Magazine*. Visit her at athomewithkarendoll.wordpress.com.*

Love Your Place: 10 Ways to Tap into Community-Based Learning

Whether you are new to an area, a temporary resident, or a lifelong inhabitant, learning about the place you live can lead to all sorts of new opportunities and adventures in learning. Here are 10 simple ways to start using your community to enliven your life and learning.

1. Go nuts about nature.

Set up weekly or monthly explorations outside and get to know your local parks and hiking trails. Even if you aren't particularly outdoorsy, you can visit overlooks and viewing platforms, or even just peek over the rail of a footbridge to observe the water below. Depending on individual temperaments and the mood of the group, you can have treasure hunts (find one species of plant that you've never seen before, or find something blue) or challenges (try to walk silently through the woods so you can observe animals before they run away). Or you might just choose a spot to sit and soak in the tranquility of the setting.

2. Meet mentors. Seek out adults who share your child's passions, and facilitate a connection. Most people love to talk about what they are interested in. Some might eventually become mentors, but even a brief conversation can let your child envision what it might be like to engage in their favorite interest or activity on an adult or professional level.

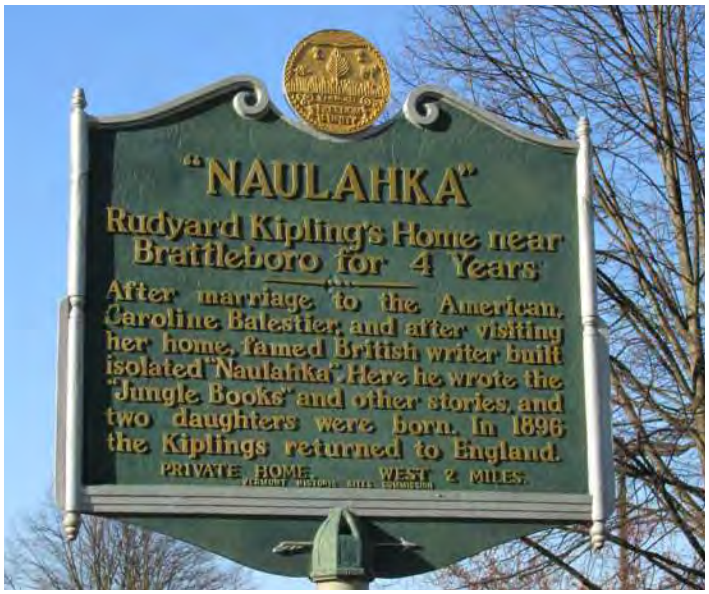
3. Trek about town. Every community has a variety of organizations, events, and activities, many of which are free or low cost. Look in the local paper, on bulletin boards around town, and keep your eyes open for notices of performances (often free to the public) from groups involved in circus arts, dance, theater, and music.

4. Love the library. A homeschooler's best friend, libraries have loads of free stuff, including organized groups and events, museum passes, lectures, movie nights, and language learning programs. Librarians are also excellent resources for community information and connections.

5. Indulge your interests. Whatever interests you and your children have, you can bet there is a group: singing, acting, cycling, woodcarving, folk dancing, reading, fiber arts, gaming, model building—you name it! If you live in a rural area, you might find online groups or make a monthly trek into a nearby town for some facetime with like-minded people.

6. Hang out with history. Does your town have a historical society? They are treasure troves of information and artifacts about your town. Also, check out the library, town hall, or city hall to look for old photos of the area and the people who lived there when the town was young. If your children seem uninterested in grainy black and white photos of people long gone, help them notice details of clothing, implements, transportation, and signs that show what life was like long ago.

7. Mine the museums. Natural history museums, science museums, and art museums often have rotating or visiting exhibits. Get on the mailing list for your local museums so you can keep informed about upcoming



exhibits and events. Many museums have a free day once a month, which makes this a very budget-friendly source of enrichment and inspiration.

8. Appreciate art. Many towns have regular artwalks where businesses display the work of local artists, whose work often includes elements of science, history, and geography. Don't worry if you don't know much about art—you don't have to to be an art critic or an art lover to appreciate art. Experience it, spend time viewing and discussing it, and see where it takes you.

9. Learn the urban landscape. Cities are fascinating collections of architecture, parks, sculptures, fountains, storefronts, and signs. The opportunities for exploring are endless. If you are a city dweller or live nearby, plan some city excursions where the only thing on the agenda is to explore.

10. Share stories with seniors. Visit or volunteer at a local nursing home or eldercare center. Ask those who have lived in your community for years to tell you all about it. They can tell you many interesting things that would take you years to discover on your own.

"Naulahka", Brattleboro, Vermont

Out-of-the-Box Learning Fun

by the Doughty family

Amy and Scott Doughty from Michigan have been homeschooling their three daughters with Oak Meadow for the past six years. Green Child Magazine *interviewed mom Amy and daughters Brooke and Maren to learn more about their experience. Enjoy this excerpt that focuses on how they use their community and environment to get the most out of their learning (see the entire article here).*

Are your kids involved in extracurricular activities or sports? Are you part of a homeschooling co-op?

Amy: *We love to get outside! Because we have so many winter months with snow, we play outside in many ways: skate and classic Nordic skiing, downhill skiing and snowboarding, snowshoeing, and winter camping. When it is warm enough, we are outside at the lake a lot, cliff-jumping, swimming, and climbing. The girls prefer outdoor climbing, but they have access to an indoor climbing facility nearby. We travel to other climbing gyms and outdoor crags around the region.*

We are also involved in youth theater and aerial silks. Everyone also does some kind of music, either singing, playing the guitar, violin, cello, and/or piano. The girls have had opportunities to sing and perform in nursing homes, at the public library, for our local food co-op's Acoustic Brunch Sunday, with other professional singer-songwriters, and in a youth orchestra and quartet.

Every summer, we also drive out to a wonderful area of northern Massachusetts, the Pioneer Valley, to be part of a peace-building, arts/music camp called Journey Camp. The skills, relationships, and fulfillment the girls get there carry them home throughout the rest of the year.

Where do you find inspiration for out-of–the-box learning opportunities?

Brooke: *We are part of a homeschool group of middle and high school-aged students from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and northern Michigan. We get together to spend a week in the Boundary Waters winter camping, hiking, skiing, dogsledding, and jumping through a hole in the frozen lake after being in a hot sauna! We joke that the group is called "The Granolas." The group also met last weekend to be part of a biennial symposium, called the Lake Superior Youth Symposium. We hope to go to Washington D.C. again, to be part of a lobbyist training program with Citizen's Climate Lobby. I did that last year and loved it, and I learned more about the way our government works than I did in my year-long Civics course. My chance to be part of CCL came from connections I made several years ago.*

My family met an amazing family who were sailing around Lake Superior. They run a program called Sea Change, where they teach sailing and offer programs on climate change. Each summer they take on college interns (and me last summer!) We sailed around the northern edge of Lake Superior, and we met with different communities, schools, and groups to talk about what their experiences are with climate change around Lake Superior. It was an incredible experience!

Maren: *We've been part of a homeschool group, called Immerse, where we did theater, movement/dance, and field trips. I got to play the role of Titania, in "Midsummer's Night Dream." I also formed a band with three other kids in Immerse. Theater helped me realize how much I love acting and singing, and I've gone on to get involved in other youth theater and played a variety of roles. Being part of this theater "family" has changed my life.*

Amy: *I look for ways to bring music/art into an already very creative curriculum. Selective internet searches, including using Pinterest and YouTube, are sometimes helpful, but I am careful to not let the searches consume too much time and energy. Our local music teacher has been a veritable "jukebox" of music resources and options for us.*

I've found that homeschooling families love to share ideas, resources, and networking. If one family finds out about an exciting learning opportunity, we share it, usually with a lot of enthusiasm! For example, when one family learned about a couple coming through Marquette, a group of us went down to the Lower Harbor to welcome them. We met Dave and Amy Freeman, who were canoeing/sailing from the Boundary Waters to Washington D.C. to raise awareness about saving the Boundary Waters from a potential hit to the watershed with proposed sulfide-ore copper mining. They have gone on to spend a year in the Boundary Waters, produced several incredible documentaries on the issue, and formed a national campaign advocacy group to keep the awareness going.

Science Games for All Ages

by Sarah Antel

Science games are a great way to integrate your local area into your studies. Active participation encourages active learning. Games encompass the three main learning types: kinesthetic, auditory, and visual. When the entire body is engaged in a learning activity, students are more likely to remember the information. Not only do games teach and reinforce science topics, children engage in problem solving skills, conflict resolution, communication, and building trust within their community.

Try these games (and their adaptations for older learners) and see how far your science explorations take you!

Caterpillar Camouflage

Children walk through their favorite place in the woods while looking for different colored pieces of yarn, the “caterpillars” (which you’ve placed earlier). They make a tally mark on a chart next to the colors they find. After their search is concluded, children compare their findings. Usually, the largest numbers found are the brightest colored caterpillars. The caterpillars that are colored similarly to the forest floor (camouflaged) are harder to spot. To involve older children, put them in charge of hiding camouflaged caterpillars for one another. Encourage them to use natural elements such as rocks and leaves to make it even more challenging. You might need to limit the area or make a rule (like no hiding the caterpillar completely) in order to keep the game fair.

Unnatural Object Hike

This game encourages group cooperation and trains children’s observation skills as they find items that may be out of place in their favorite outdoor space. Unnatural objects such as an eraser, a paper clip, a book, some fabric, a pair of glasses, a mug, and a pen are hidden along a path with a start and finish. This is not a race; rather, the path boundaries exist so the children know where to look. In small groups, they walk the trail together and jot down what they find and where the object is located. To add another level of challenge, have older students draw a map showing where each item was found (or, if they are the ones hiding the objects, they can draw a map showing where each item was hidden—this helps ensure all unnatural objects are found and collected at the end of the game).

Squirrel Nuts

In this game, children are invited to behave as squirrels (or another local animal), pretending to make caches of nuts for their winter food. Each student is given six to ten nuts, acorns, beans, marbles, or other small items, with each student having a different type of "food" to hide. One at a time, students are given two minutes to hide the food in a certain area while the others hide their eyes. When each squirrel has hidden their stash of food, all the squirrels are let loose at once to try to find the others' hidden caches. The game ends when all the caches are found. (This is a good time for a delicious snack for the hard-working squirrels!) Lead a discussion about the best hiding places and why squirrels might need to hide their food in the first place. The game can be played multiple times as students become more adept at finding good hiding places.

Sarah Antel is an Oak Meadow K-8 teacher. Before joining Oak Meadow, Sarah taught in a variety settings and programs, including teaching environmental education and working as director of education at an educational farm, where she started a homeschooling program. This article is adapted from "Elementary Science Games for the Classroom or Homeschool," first published on Hojo's Teaching Adventures (see original article here).

Nature Learning on the 15th Floor

Many assignments in the Oak Meadow curriculum ask students to get outside in nature, but for some urban families, this can present special challenges.

One Oak Meadow family lived in Buenos Aires, Argentina on the 15th floor of a high-rise apartment building. In the 5th grade science curriculum, students are assigned the task of observing the birds in their area. Since the student lived in an apartment and didn't have a park nearby to observe the birds, the family put some potted plants on their balcony and put out some bird food.

Within a few days, many birds were observed flying in to eat the food. To the student's delight and surprise, a pair of mourning doves made a nest in one of the potted plants and hatched their eggs there.

Here's a photo of the newborn hatchlings—quite a place-based education!

The Value of Boredom

by Lawrence Williams

Editor's note: This gem from the Oak Meadow archives eloquently expresses how a sense of place can change your life and stay with you forever.

When I was a little kid visiting Aunt Blanche's farm, nobody talked about how to relieve my boredom. Aunt Blanche always told me that being bored was a good way to learn about things. and she was right. Some of the most valuable lessons I ever learned on the farm came about because I was bored.

Aunt Blanche was my grandmother's sister. They had both grown up on a farm outside of Columbia, North Carolina, and when Blanche's husband died, she moved back to the farm with her father (my great-grandfather) and helped him take care of the place. There was always a lot to do on the farm; the chores started early and ended late. Sometimes Aunt Blanche would give me things to do, like gathering eggs from the hen house or stacking kindling next to the wood stove. But because I was little, there were

a lot of things I just couldn't do, and with nothing to do I would soon get bored. Some days, Aunt Blanche or my grandmother would take me fishing, or we'd drive into town, but other days there was work to be done, and on those days I learned that there wasn't much use in going to Aunt Blanche or my grandmother, because they had things to do, and they just didn't have time to play with me. So often I ended up wandering around the farm, looking for something interesting.

At first, I thought I would die from boredom, like a degenerative disease that gradually eats one alive. One morning, after eating breakfast, I walked out of the kitchen and sat on the back steps.
I looked out over the fields and watched the sun creeping up over the stalks of corn as far as I could see. The slow, rhythmic hum of katydids filled the air, and the humid August heat clung to my skin like heavy gauze. The day stretched before me like a great yawning abyss, and I knew in the depths of my soul that I would never live to see lunch. I imagined my grandmother and Aunt Blanche finding me hours later, still staring at the cornfields through lifeless eyes, eaten up through and through and dead from boredom, and I gained some small comfort in knowing they would shed bitter tears and deeply regret how they had ignored me.

Gradually, however, I learned that boredom wasn't a terminal disease, so I decided to find things to do. The first thing I learned was that there are a lot of interesting things happening on a farm, but you don't see them right off. You have to sit and watch for a while, and then you start to see things you didn't see before.

There were several really interesting places on the farm, but three of the best were the hen house, the outhouse, and the ditch. The hen house was fun because there were always lots of hens scratching about and talking to each other, and there was always a chance that one of the eggs might be hatching. We gathered most of the eggs for eating, but Aunt Blanche occasionally left some of them

alone so that new chicks could hatch. I would sometimes sit for hours watching a hen sit on some eggs, hoping that I would be able to see one hatch. But even though I never did, I can still remember the sounds and smells of the hen house, the shafts of early morning sunlight streaming through the cracks in the wooden walls, and the wonderful stillness that would settle over things when it was just the hen, the eggs, and me.

The outhouse was also interesting, but for a very different reason. That was where the Sears & Roebuck catalog was kept, and since there wasn't a lot of reading material on the farm, I would spend hours in the outhouse reading the catalog. At first, the smell and the wasps were a bit annoying, but eventually the sheer force of the catalog lifted me above these mundane concerns, and a vast new world opened to me. The very thought that we could order any of those thousands of items and have it delivered right to our doorstep in a few days left me in awe, and I would spend hours completely oblivious to my surroundings, immersed in the language of advertising and the magic of mail order.

But of all the interesting places on the farm the ditch became my favorite—a rich classroom in which I learned valuable lessons that have stayed with me the rest of my life. The ditch ran along the dirt road that led to the farm, and there were always a lot of things happening in the ditch. I used to sit for hours watching dozens of creatures large and small—dragonflies, June bugs, worms, mosquitoes, flies, and snakes—and from them I learned fascinating lessons about cooperation, survival, perseverance, and patience.

The frogs were my favorite. They would sit quietly on a small island of mud in the midst of the ditch and watch everything around them. They wouldn't move a muscle, but they didn't miss anything. The foolish mosquitoes would taunt the frogs, daring them to try to get them, but the frogs would just sit. They had seen thousands of mosquitoes come and go, and they knew full well the place of mosquitoes in the scheme of things: frog snacks. I would watch a frog wait… wait…and wait some more, until I was sure he was asleep or dead, when finally a mosquito would dance a tiny bit too close and Zap!—the tongue would lash out and the mosquito would disappear. Then the frog would return to his same position and wait for another mosquito. And every time I saw that, I was filled with admiration for a creature that could muster such patience and act with such boldness.

As I remember my days on the farm, I realized that the boredom I experienced there taught me a valuable lesson: we are not limited by what's outside us, but only by what's inside us. Boredom doesn't come from having nothing to do; it comes from not watching closely enough. By watching closely and looking for opportunities, we can transform the very quality of our lives, and a world that seems to offer no opportunities soon sparkles with possibilities.

The life I lived on Aunt Blanche's farm is a fading reality that rarely exists for children today. But in the midst of the constant demands from our digital worlds, it's important to provide safe places where children can be bored and then discover what awaits them beyond boredom.

Lawrence Williams cofounded Oak Meadow in 1975 in order to homeschool his own children. Since then, Oak Meadow's curriculum and distance learning school have helped families around the world create successful homeschooling experiences. This article was first published in Living Education *in July/Aug 1996.*

OM Craft

Pandora's Box

What you need:

- Shoebox with lid
- Paper to cover box
- Glue
- Tape
- Crayons
- Objects from nature: pine cones, pine needles, leaves, seed pods, twigs, nuts, stones, feathers, bark, moss, dandelions, etc.
- Bag or basket to carry objects

What to do:

1. Take a walk and collect small items from nature. Each person should collect items and place them in a bag or basket so the other person can not see what they are.

2. Cut a hole in one end of the shoebox. Make the hole large enough for a hand to be inserted through it.

3. Cover the outside of the box and lid with paper and glue in place. Brown grocery bags or construction paper can be used. Use crayons to draw nature scenes from your walk to decorate the box.

4. Cut a piece of paper to cover the hole in the end of the box. Place the paper over the hole and attach it at the top with tape.

5. Each person in turn selects several nature items and places them in the box. The other person should not see the items placed in the box. Put the lid on the box.

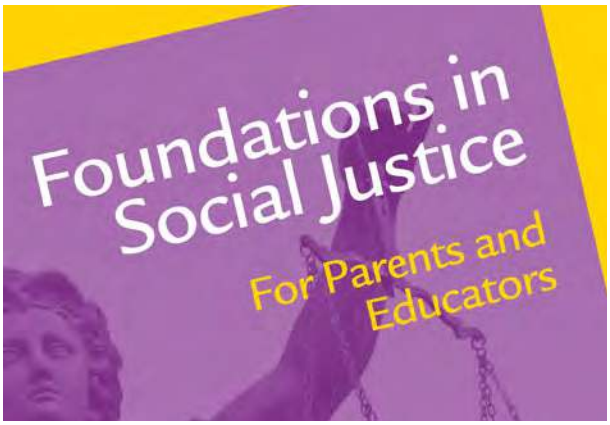
6. The other person inserts a hand into the hole in the end of the box, feels the objects, and then tries to guess the contents of the box.

7. Use descriptive words to identify the contents of the box, such as, a long soft feather; a round prickly pine cone; a skinny pine needle with a sharp tip.

OM News

Oak Meadow 2017 Graduates!

We're pleased to announce that 18 students recently received a Oak Meadow high school diploma after completing their graduation requirements in our distance school. The students live in 14 different states and France. Many will attend college next fall, while others are planning a gap year, travel, internship, or work. Colleges that accepted our students include: Harvard, Yale, NYU, Kalamazoo, Quest, Hampshire, Eckerd, Bennington, Suffolk, New England Conservatory, and UC Santa Cruz. See the full list of accepting colleges over the last five years on our website.



Foundations in Social Justice

This course for parents and educators offers thoughtful resources, reflections, and exercises to be considered on your own or in a group setting. There are no answers here, only great questions and helpful tips on how to engage your children, family, and community around issues of sexism, ageism, racism, ableism, classism, and inequality in all its forms. It is designed to inspire conversation and vision towards a more just world. Look for it in our online bookstore.

College Counseling Webinars Continue

Let us help you with the college search process. Our webinars are designed especially for distance learning and homeschooling families. We offer an introductory college counseling session as well as a series of topical webinars for juniors and seniors—but families with students of any age can attend.

Date: Ongoing options
Time: 6-7 PM (EST)
Cost: FREE!
Sign up: Fill out our online registration form to receive your login information.

Virtual Open Houses

You've looked at our website and read our catalogs. Perhaps you've even downloaded lesson samples and chatted with other homeschoolers on our Facebook page. Still have questions? Now you can attend an Oak Meadow Virtual Open House! Hear more about Oak Meadow in depth, and get on-the-spot answers to all your questions. Visit our website to sign up.

Come to Oak Meadow's Annual Open House

Autumn is one of the best seasons to visit Vermont, so plan a trip to view the beautiful fall foliage, pick fresh crisp apples, go to a harvest festival, and stop at Oak Meadow's Open House from 11am to 2pm on Saturday, October 14! Over 150 visitors from around the country join us each year.

We're Here to Help!

Oak Meadow offers several layers of support for home teachers and parents of distance learners. The following programs can be purchased in our online bookstore.

Foundations in Independent Learning: An online parent-teacher certification course for those new to teaching at home or new to Oak Meadow.

Homeschool With Heart: An online support course that helps experienced homeschoolers reflect, regroup, focus, and stay organized.

Homeschool Support: A more intensive, one-to-one consultation service with an Oak Meadow teacher.

College Counseling: Our experienced college counselor helps parents and their teens think ahead, prepare, and navigate the college admission process.