

# Living Education

An Oak Meadow Publication

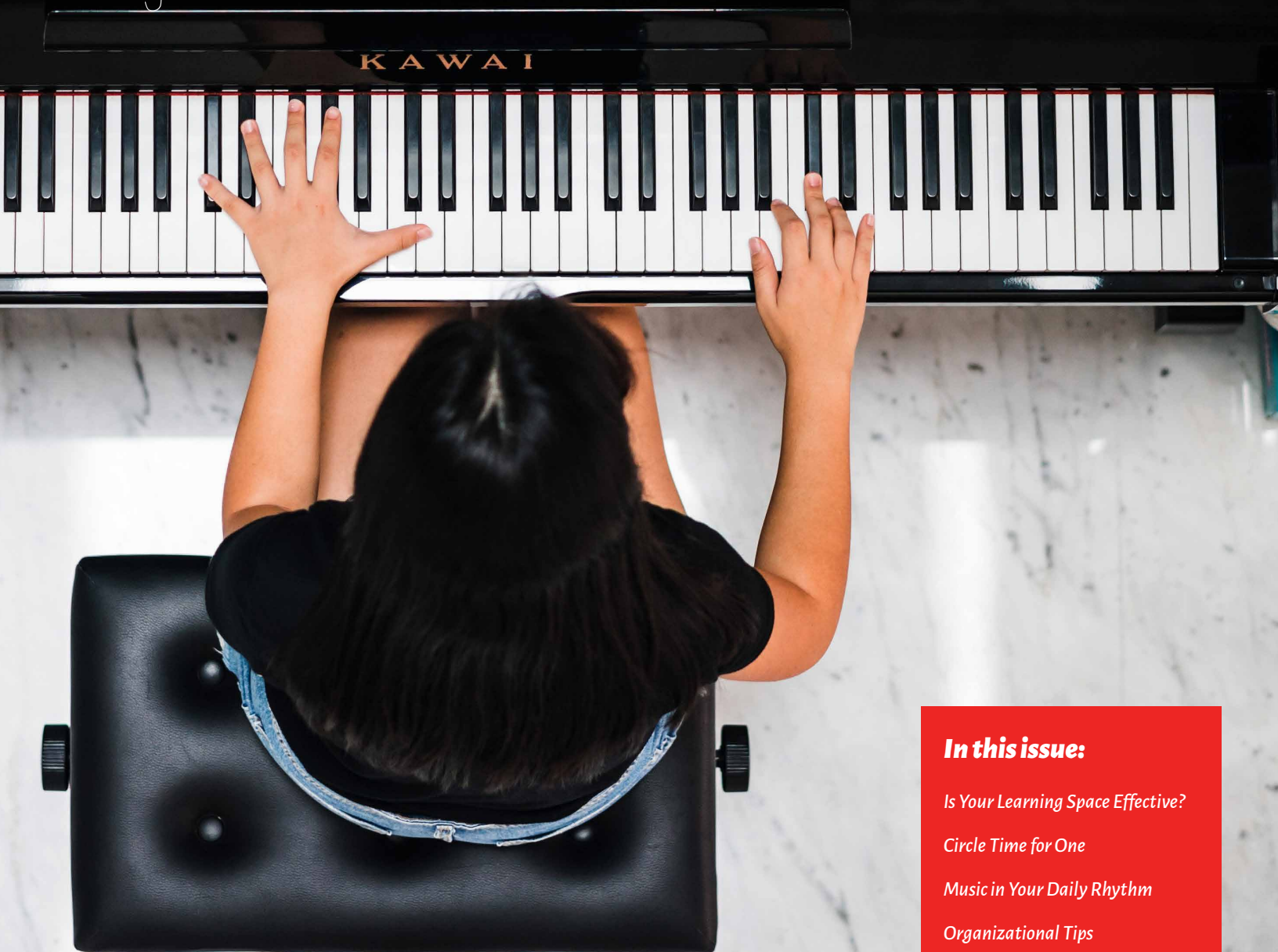


**Oak  
Meadow**



## Start Strong:

## Rhythms and Routines for the School Year



### **In this issue:**

*Is Your Learning Space Effective?*

*Circle Time for One*

*Music in Your Daily Rhythm*

*Organizational Tips*





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## Welcome to *Living Education*!

If your day was a piece of music, how would it sound? Perhaps the morning would begin with soft symphonic music. Or maybe your day begins with a lively folk tune or some hip-shaking Motown. As your day unfolds, how does the music change? Are there marching band moments, smooth salsa moments, and improvisational jazz moments?

All day long, we move through the hours with varying levels of focus, energy, and purpose. These natural rhythms are mirrored, on a larger scale, in the yearly cycle and even the cycle of our lives. Think about that for a moment. What kind of music expresses the tone of your childhood? Your young adulthood? Your current phase of life? It's interesting to reflect on the way we move through the world at different times in our lives.

The same is true for our children. While they don't yet have the long lens of time through which to view their lives, they are blessed with the ability to be totally in the moment. This means that when it is a rock and roll time of day, they are all about the rock and roll. Asking them to sit down and do math or write a book summary when they are feeling rock and roll would be frustrating for everyone involved. The reverse is just as true: when your child is feeling a mellow R&B vibe or an orderly Bach movement, you aren't likely to get much enthusiasm for a think-outside-the-box art project or a vigorous science hike.

There is a time and mood for every homeschooling task, and our intriguing challenge is to find the right fit between what needs to be done and how the day, and each child's energy, is flowing. Does this mean we can't schedule certain things at certain times? Does it mean we have to always let our child's mood dictate our day? No, not a bit—it would be hard to get anything done if that were the case!

The takeaway here is to be aware of the times of the day or week that seem to match your family's rhythm and mood. Early in the day, and early in the week, the energy and focus are often freshest. This is a good time to tackle new projects or challenging tasks. Later in the day and week are well suited to more creative endeavors, or ones with fewer strict parameters or expectations.

In this issue of *Living Education*, we explore rhythms and routines, and look at how to create learning spaces that support the symphony of your homeschooling day in all its glory.

Enjoy finding your groove!

DeeDee Hughes  
Editor, *Living Education*





# Getting in the Groove

By Ruth O'Neil

**A**fter homeschooling my children for 20 years, I've learned a few things. One of those is that every child is different and has different needs. I couldn't teach each of my children exactly the same way. However, I also learned that routine is good for all of us. Routine is necessary for learning; it sets a rhythm and a tone for the school day. It helps us get in the groove.

Disrupt that rhythm and you have chaos. I have known families who had no schedule and no routine, which led to practically no learning. I knew that wasn't what I wanted for my kids. I also worked from home and needed to put time into that. If the kids didn't have a schedule to do their work, it would have made it much harder for me to do mine.

But not all routines look the same. I knew one family who took every Friday off so the kids could just be kids. Another family I knew would sleep half the day, get up and do schoolwork in the afternoon, and then spend time with dad, who worked an unusual shift, later into the night. That's a routine that wouldn't have worked for this morning person, but that's one of the many benefits of homeschooling: You find what works for you and your children.

Having a routine is good because it helps children know what is expected of them. Having a routine is good because it helps children develop responsibility skills for later in life (college, jobs, etc.). Yes, having a routine is good.

But . . .

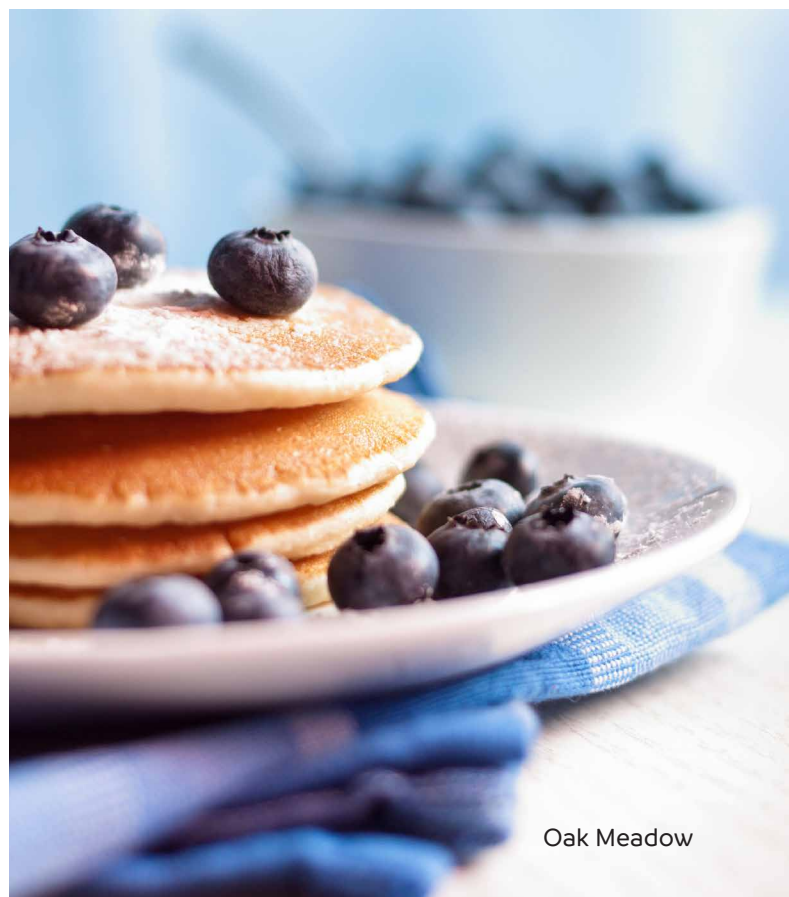
Don't get so caught up in routine that you don't allow variations in your schedule. Mixing things up once in a while can be beneficial. When we do the exact same thing day in and day out, it can become monotonous and boring. That isn't an ideal learning setting.

Part of our routine was to get up at 7:00, breakfast at 7:30, and start school by 8:00. We didn't take a lot of days off during the school year. I found too many days off distracting and disruptive. When the third child started school and we took a day off for Columbus Day, all they did was fight over the remote. I wondered why we were wasting the day. We stopped taking all those types of holidays and started taking random days off when we had something fun to do—go out of town for the weekend, go on a field trip, etc.

That helped break up some of the monotony of our routine.

You can create a schedule for the week where each day is different. Maybe one day you work on math a little more, but another day you give it a break. Each day is different from another, but there is still a routine. I know families that use this approach, and it works well for them. I found this system to work best when my children were younger as opposed to the high school years where it was easier to hit each subject each day.

The location of the “classroom” can also be boring if the student is always looking at the same four walls. We had a schoolroom, but on nice days in the fall, and especially when spring fever was rampant toward the end of the school year, we would move our





classroom outside. Sometimes we would go to a park where the kids could get a little play time in between subjects. Some days we would just take a blanket and some snacks out into the yard to work. Other days my son would hang his hammock from the porch pillars and lie there to do all his reading. There is something to be said for fresh air. It rejuvenates the soul and opens the mind up for learning.

Another part of our school routine I found helpful was to start out heavy with classes in September. Many years we had courses that only took half the year. We would start all of them in September when the children were excited about getting back into school. Shortly after Christmas we would begin dropping finished classes, which lightened their workload. As the school year was winding down, the load became even less. It was helpful to not have so much to do when we were all tired and ready for summer vacation.

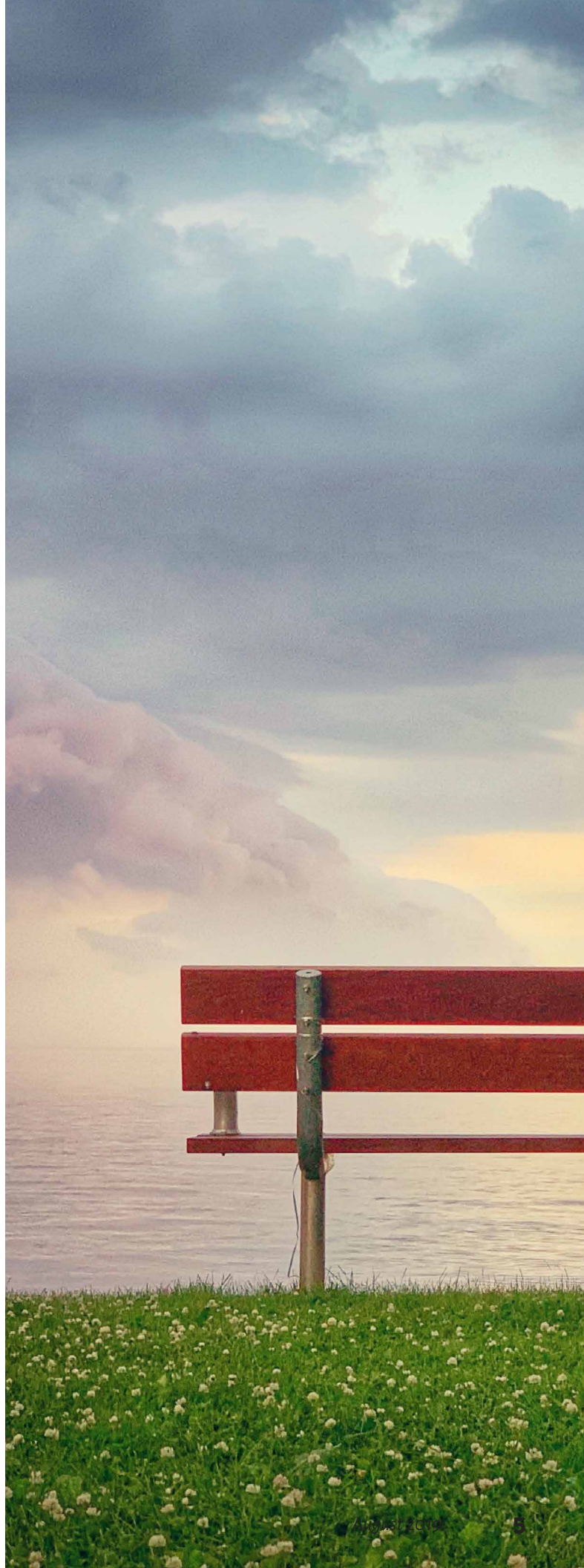
I applied the same principle to their high school years. I planned out all four years with sophomore and junior years being the heaviest. That left them with a somewhat easy senior year when they had jobs and just wanted to hang out with their friends. By the time they were seniors, they could drive and had a little more freedom. Less stress in our school routine helped them enjoy that final year.

Here is a quick list of some of the things I learned from homeschooling:

- Your schedule, routine, and rhythm changes as your children change.
- Routine is good, but things don't always have to be exactly the same.
- Don't be afraid to mix things up once in a while.
- If you're struggling with your schedule, try a different approach.
- Ask your kids what they think would help give them a better learning environment.

Set up a routine; even if you don't follow it completely every single day, at least you have a guide to know where you want to go. And then add surprises occasionally. If it's a beautiful day, take advantage of it. If it's a rainy day, don't rule out the possibility of taking time to jump in some mud puddles. A routine—and taking breaks from the routine—can bring a world of good to your child's education. 🌿

*Ruth O'Neil is a veteran homeschool mom who has been a freelance writer for more than 20 years, publishing hundreds of articles in dozens of publications as well as a few books. When she's not writing, she spends her spare time quilting, reading, scrapbooking, camping, and hiking with the family. Her newest project is a series of devotionals based on classic literature. You can visit her at <http://ruths-real-life.blogspot.com/>*



# Making a Fresh Start

By Natalie Wise

**L**earning can be messy! One of the most challenging parts of homeschooling is to stay on top of the clutter and mess. As the new school year approaches, set aside a day to clean and organize your learning spaces to prepare your house for the homeschooling adventures ahead.

When I wrote *The Organic Country Home Handbook* (Good Books, 2019), I offered some practical tips for preparing a clean and tidy space using all-natural cleaning supplies that can be made at home.

## Organization and Storage

This is the basic cleaning process: purge, clean, and organize. If doing all three of these things sounds overwhelming, don't worry. Trust me: clean and organize, and your sense of self gets a little shining up, too.

**What you need:** It's best to have a few supplies handy before you begin tackling the Purge, Clean, and Organize routine. Cardboard boxes work well. Depending on the room, you'll need various organizing totes, baskets, bins, labels, markers, measuring tape, hooks, hangers, etc. Look for natural materials such as metal, canvas, wire, raffia, seagrass, and cloth. Plastic storage containers may be less expensive, but they are disposable and will crack and break with use. Natural materials are likely to last longer and don't harm the environment or end up in the landfill.

**How to purge:** This might be an overwhelming task at first, but once you do the initial purge, each subsequent session gets easier. And you'll be able to breathe! It will feel so wonderful, I promise. We are not meant to live amongst clutter.

**Here's the process:** You're going to take everything out of the space you're in, piece by piece. It all goes out of the room, somehow. Only things that you actually need and really want go back in. Everything else either goes to another part of the house, the recycling bin, the thrift store, tag sale, gets resold, or gets trashed. Everything will have a new home, be it still in yours or someone else's. Enjoy thinking of who in your life might be able to use your extra computer chair, or whose children might like the toys your family has outgrown. Think of which charity you'd like to support and drop off your donations with them. Have a tag sale and make new friends and a few dollars. Drop usable items off at your local swap shop for someone who is in need but doesn't have any money to purchase new items.

## Daily Clean Sanitizing Wipes

You can use these on just about anything: to clean a small desk fan, wood, glass, ceramics, laminate, and even your desk chair. These wipes are handy because they are disposable, so you don't need to run to the laundry room with a dirty rag each time you clean. This is one area where I think the convenience of disposable is worth it. Of course, feel free to use regular cloth wipes if you prefer; the process is identical and you simply wring the extra solution out of the wipe, clean the desk, then throw the wipe in the laundry.

***¾ cup vinegar***

***¼ cup distilled or boiled and cooled water***

***¼ cup rubbing alcohol***

***15 drops tea tree essential oil***

***1 roll of half-sheet paper towels***

***Container that will fit half the paper towel roll and solution with a tight-fitting lid***

### Instructions

Cut the paper towel roll in half so you have two halves that look like toilet paper rolls. You'll want to use a heavy-duty serrated knife for the best results. Remove the cardboard roll.

Then, in a small bowl, combine the vinegar, water, alcohol, and tea tree oil. Mix well. Place one half of the paper towel roll into the container and pour the solution on top, being sure to saturate all of the paper towels. When you need to use a wipe, pull from the inside of the roll. Use the wipe to thoroughly clean the surface of your desk, drawer handles, and the handset and receiver of the phone. Toss the paper towel when you're through.



You'll begin by starting with three boxes or bags. Label them "Stay," "Trash," and "Give Away." Trash is obvious . . . line the box with a trash bag so you can easily get rid of it right away. The stay box will be put in other places in the house or brought back into the finished room. The giveaway box is just like what it sounds: everything in here will be given to new homes, be it friends or through donation or a tag sale.

Go through every single item in the room. Arrange for someone to pick up exercise equipment you never use. Have the kids go through the junk drawer and separate rubber bands from lip balms, and to test each and every pen, pencil, and highlighter. Don't say, "Oh, I know everything that's in that box is a keeper." Open it. Go through it again. I bet you can find a way to get rid of even more, or you'll find something that's useful to you now that you forgot about. It's important to touch every item in the room.

Then, you have to follow through. Find new places in your home for anything in the "Stay" box that isn't going back into the original room. Leave the items that will go back into the room for later. Bring the trash to the dump immediately. Put the bags and boxes that are being given away into your car directly so you can bring them to friends or the thrift store the next time it is convenient.

You should have an empty room now. Breathe. You did a great job. It was tough, probably, but doesn't it look spacious and exciting?

**How to clean:** Next, we're going to get into every nook and cranny of the room and make sure it is spick and span. This is the simplest part of the process, because you know what needs to be done. Dirty things need to be cleaned; it's that simple. The cleaning tasks

will vary depending on the room, but the basic premise is this: clean the room top to bottom and farthest corner to the doorway. Cleaning needn't be done all in one session, either. Take this as you can. Take one day and do the ceilings and walls. Another day do the baseboards and carpets. Clean every square inch.

**How to organize:** Now it's time to organize what's left in the "Stay" boxes. There's a reason people make a living organizing for others. It is an art and a science in one, and some people are better at it than others. But we can all learn these basic organizational practices.

**Give everything a place, and put it there.** Sounds so easy, right? Give each item a home, and let it live there when it's not in use. Think about where you would go looking for an item, or where it would be most convenient for the task you'll be using it for, and try to keep it there.

**Don't let things "float."** If things float, they are creating clutter. If you need two of something so they stay in separate rooms, so be it. I keep a pair of scissors someplace in just about every room of the house.

**Group like-items.** Keep all of the books in one location. All of the art supplies in one bin. All of the extra batteries in one drawer.

**Leave extra space.** It sounds counterintuitive, as if empty space will simply invite a mess of more stuff, but extra space is actually one of the keys to creating a space that seems organized visually and not overstuffed. Leave extra space in drawers, on bookshelves, on coffee table shelves, in cupboards.



## Shine Up Your Computer Screen

Computer screens get fingerprints, food splatters, and dust that we don't notice until the light hits it just right. Most computer screens can be cleaned with simple water. If that doesn't do the trick, add some vinegar to the mixture.

***¼ cup white vinegar***

***¼ cup distilled or boiled and thoroughly cooled water***

### Instructions

It's important to start with a computer screen that is cool, so power off and unplug your computer or laptop before cleaning.

Mix the white vinegar and water together in a small bowl, and using a lightly textured cloth, clean the screen in a left-to-right, top-to-bottom motion, being sure to get the edges well. For any tougher spots, a gentle circular motion may help loosen grime. Let the screen dry completely before plugging in or turning on the computer.

## Clean Air Cacti (and Other Plants that Enjoy Toxins)

Electronics put out air pollution, electromagnetic wave pollution and chemical off-gassing. But we can protect ourselves by using plants that absorb pollutants and clean the air.

**Any and all cacti:** Cacti are great to place right near your computer because they are one of the best plants to detoxify your air. Cacti not only purify the air, but they thrive when neglected during busy times.

**Boston fern:** One of the top chemical-cleaning plants available, a Boston fern takes a bit more care than some on the list here, so be prepared to give it some TLC.

**Spider plant:** This is another easy-to-grow plant. The spider plant will keep creating “babies,” or shoots, that you can grow in separate containers. Repotting and growing the “babies” can be a fun project for kids.

**Any aloe plant:** Not only will having an aloe plant be useful if you get a burn (simply break off a leaf and apply the gel to the burn), it is also one of the best air-cleaning plants you can get.

**Bamboo palm:** These grow well in low light, but will grow exponentially taller if exposed to sunlight.

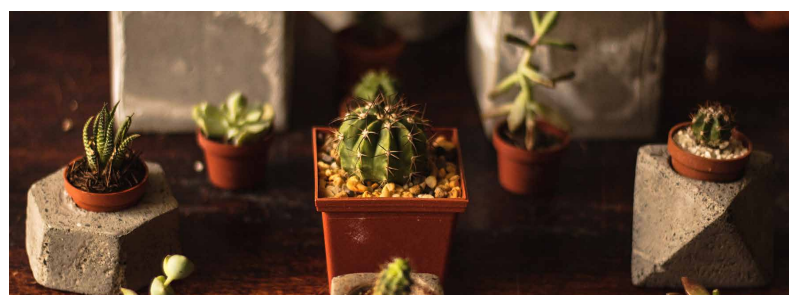
**How to keep it up:** Every time you clear clutter, you find you accumulate less, because you know you'll eventually have to get rid of items. So only bring what you love and need into your home, and the process becomes easier. Of course, we all end up with things that are no longer useful to us, so it's still important to purge and clean regularly.

Another piece of the puzzle is making sure everyone in your home is on board. No matter how tidy you get the bookshelves and cupboards, if no one understands the system but you, it won't work. Go over the system with everyone in your household and ask them to commit to keeping it up. Remind everyone that charging cords don't float, and that each one stays in one location (one in the living room, one near the door so you don't forget a charging phone on your way out, etc.). Remind them that all the DVDs live in one location. Teach your children that everyone is responsible for keeping the house clean.

**Bringing in help:** If the time or effort required to tackle a big purge and clean just doesn't work for you, hire someone. Another set of eyes and hands is always useful, and the expense may be worth it for your family. You can also consider hiring someone the first time to teach you organizing skills you can maintain.

Yes, learning—and life—can be messy! But with a little organization and time devoted to regular maintenance, you can make a fresh start for all the exciting homeschooling adventures to come. 🌿

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## Toy Store Restore: Toy Cleaning Wipes and Spray

Toys get gross! There's no getting around it, since they're played with on the floor, kitchen table, put in mouths, handed around to friends, brought outside, etc. But since they're mostly made of plastic or wood, the good news is they're easy to clean. Small plastic toys, including many bath toys and bath mats, can be sanitized in the dishwasher, too, or cleaned with a little castile soap in the sink or bathtub.

This spray uses the natural cleaning properties of vinegar, which is all you need. This method will make toys look like they just came from the toy store.

½ cup vinegar

½ cup distilled or boiled and cooled water

8 small, thin rags made from T-shirts or similar material

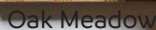
Mix the vinegar and water in a 1-quart jar. Add the rags and shake to get them saturated. To use, simply pull out a rag, wring out any excess moisture, and wipe down toys. You can also mix it together well in an 8-ounce spray bottle. Shake first, then spray any hard toys and wipe down with a cloth.



The computer itself, including the keyboard and mouse, is likely just as dirty, if not dirtier, than your screen was, so why not clean both while you're at it? Don't spend money on compressed air, which also contains toxic chemicals. If you've already made the computer screen cleaning mixture, simply add the 2 tablespoons of rubbing alcohol and proceed to clean the rest of the computer.

**Mix well in a small bowl.**

**Mouse:** Use the paper clip and cotton swab dipped in the solution method to clean your mouse.



This spray works wonders! Lemongrass and eucalyptus are two of my favorite essential oils to make a room smell pleasantly clean, and their natural antibacterial properties are a bonus. Stale air is uninspiring, but this spray will also add a bit of aromatherapy to your space. It's a good thing to use in winter, when germs are everywhere and airing out the house by opening the windows is a frigid prospect.

**Mix well in an 8-ounce spray bottle. Shake well before use.**

Cords are a breeding ground for messes, crumbs, tripping, and dirt. Yep, they always seem to end up tangled and untidy. While you're tackling the tangle of cords, consider getting a smart power strip that doesn't send any power to machines that are turned off. It's a simple way to save money and energy.

First, vacuum the area where the cords are, as they always seem to have dust bunnies, tissues, torn paper bits, and dried plant leaves among them.

Then, mix up a small dish of warm water with a drop of castile soap. Use a rag dipped lightly into the mixture to slide along cords. Be sure to get into the middle groove of cords. Do not clean the metal prongs with any water at all; only wipe with a dry cloth.

**Extra Tip:** Use recycled plastic bread ties (the flat kind that slip on), to label cords. Write in permanent marker on each tab, or use different colored ones, to know which cord at the power strip belongs to which machine on the desk.

# Is Your Learning Space Effective?

**C**reating an effective learning space can boost student focus, engagement, autonomy, and motivation. Here's a checklist to help you get your students off to a good start.

## 1. Have a dedicated study space.

Make sure each student has a comfortable place to sit, where their feet can touch the floor (or rest on a footstool) and there is enough room for the writing arm to be supported by the writing surface. Keep the space clean and orderly. Clutter can be distracting.

## 2. Ask students for input.

Encourage students to help you set up their learning spaces, and let them have a say in how things are organized. This will encourage them to take ownership of the space and keep it tidy.

## 3. Create a distraction-free environment.

Put away phones and other electronic devices while learning (or teaching). Focused work time is efficient and productive, which allows students to make real progress toward their goals.



## 4. Keep supplies organized and handy.

Use boxes, bins, folders, and shelves to keep school supplies and books easy to find and use. Make sure there is a place for everything and that your students know where that place is.

## 5. Make a plan.

Create a weekly list of what will be accomplished and then make daily lists so your students can work at their own pace without having to wait for further instructions. Post it in a prominent place and have students check off assignments as they are completed.

## 6. Gather materials ahead of time.

Review the curriculum to plan and anticipate upcoming projects, then gather together all the necessary materials. Find a place for them to be stored before and during use.

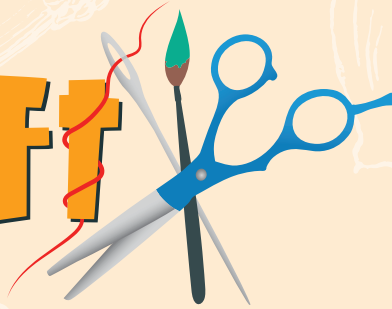
## 7. Use the outdoors for natural inspiration, reflection, and rejuvenation.

Help students learn to recognize when they need a break and, if possible, take breaks outside. This encourages physical movement and helps students relax after a period of focused intellectual work. Incorporate reflections on the material and on the learning process, and have these done outdoors, too. Walking is a great path to meaningful reflection. Move writing, drawing, and reading activities outdoors for a refreshing change.





# Craft



## Bread Animals and Other Fun Shapes

**W**ho says crafts can't be delicious? Here is a collection of fun ideas for some kitchen adventures for kids of all ages.

Breadmaking is surprisingly easy. There is nothing like the smell of fresh bread baking, and the transformation from a pale lump of dough into a golden-brown, fragrant loaf is delightfully gratifying. If you don't already have a favorite recipe for bread dough, you can find one online or in the library, or click on the links below for kid-friendly bread dough (which have few ingredients and produce dough sturdy enough to face enthusiastic handling).

Once the dough is made, it needs time to rise, so you might want to make the dough (either by yourself or with kids) in the morning, and then plan to shape and bake it for lunch, afternoon snack, or later in the day. The shaping is where the creative fun comes in!

One large ball of dough can be the body and five small balls become four legs and a head of an imaginative creature. Use a dab of water to "glue" the pieces of dough together. Seeds, nuts, raisins, or sliced olives can become the eyes. Roll a long skinny tail or a short fat one. Use a pair of kitchen scissors to snip bits of dough on the animal's back to create a spiky hedgehog effect.

For more inspiration, check out these links, which also include recipes:

[For Kids: Bread Recipe You Can Shape into Animals \(and Other Things\)](#) (adorable turtle bread!)

[Easy Fun Bread Shapes for Kids](#) (funny spiders, snakes, and snails—very easy to make)

[Bread in a Bag](#) (for children who are a little reluctant to get their hands into the dough, try this one)

You can also shape letters (and spell names!), make numbers, shape hearts, twist pretzel shapes, or roll long, thin breadsticks. Try shaping three fat snakes and braiding them together.

### **Bonus ideas:**

- Whisk an egg white, and let your child paint the tops of the loaves or shapes to create a fancy, shiny finish.
- Roll balls of dough into breadsticks and then roll them in parmesan cheese or sesame seeds before baking.
- Add minced bits of veggies to the dough.
- Add minced herbs to the dough and squares of cheese.
- Add raisins and cinnamon, with a pinch of sweetener (if you use a liquid sweetener, you'll need to use less water in your dough).
- Chop sunflower and pumpkin seeds and mix into the dough.
- Roll the dough flat and add a layer of spinach and feta (or any filling you like). With the filling inside, roll the dough into a log shape and bake. Let cool before slicing. Or you can slice the filled dough into pinwheels, lay them flat on a baking sheet, and bake.



# Help! My Home is Overflowing with School!

By Jerri Mayer

From the **Oak Meadow Archives**

*This article first appeared in Living Education Fall 2012*

**W**hether you're just starting out or have been on the homeschooling journey for years, organizing your homeschooling routine can seem like an immense undertaking. The key to any successful organizational system is to keep it simple and make it part of your normal daily routine. The first year that I homeschooled my son Matt, I worked hard to make sure that homeschooling didn't throw our entire household into chaos. By the time his little brother Mason was ready for school, I had gotten a whole lot better at it.

Here are some of the lessons I've learned. Hopefully these simple suggestions can help you get organized, too.

**DIVIDE AND CONQUER:** Divide up school supplies into individual bins. Inexpensive, plastic containers with lids can be purchased from any discount store. Label the bins according to their content and keep them where they are easily accessible. This will help you save valuable time and energy looking for needed materials.

**SCHOOL IS IN SESSION:** Implement a school schedule and daily routine for your child. Displaying a large calendar in your home, marked with school times/days, activities and field trips, allows students to better grasp their homeschooling schedule up to a month at a time.



**MY SPACE:** Whether your family prefers working in a formal classroom setting, at the kitchen table or a picnic table, it is important to create a proper workspace for your child. Remove any items that you feel could cause distractions that would negatively impact the learning process.

**LESSON PLANNING 101:** Set aside an hour each weekend to prepare for the following week's lessons. Daily work bins or file folders can save you time and frustration! Many homeschooling families with multiple children prefer to pre-fill individual work bins for each day of the upcoming week. This system gives students the ability to work independently and visually comprehend their daily work load. It also allows the parent the freedom to move from child to child answering questions or assisting with more challenging tasks.







**MAIN LESSON BOOKS:** The sky is the limit on ways to document your child's work. Many veteran homeschoolers believe the Main Lesson Book concept is the easiest, best organized, and most memorable way to organize your child's school work. I agree! By the end of the school year, your child has created a beautiful scrapbook filled with all their hard work. Pre-made Main Lesson Books can be purchased directly from Oak Meadow or you can create your own MLB by simply hole-punching the school work, binding it together with string, and adding a sturdy cover.

**SHUTTERFLY:** Hands down, my favorite homeschool aid is Shutterfly.com! All you need is one hour a week, a digital camera, and a desire to brag about your homeschooler. Throughout the week, I snap little pictures of the boys working on everything from science or history projects to painting wonderful works of art. Then on Sunday, I upload these pictures directly onto my Shutterfly account. Once uploaded, these items can be posted to your personal share site, photo album, or memory book, and can be made accessible to your Oak Meadow teacher. This access allows them to view and comment on the posted pictures, videos and school work.

With Shutterfly, you also have the ability to create personalized yearbooks for your children. Simply drop and click your photos into the website's "Memory Book" feature. By the end of the year, each child has a personal yearbook filled with all their school activities and accomplishments. Blank pages are left for signatures and well wishes from friends and family. For less than an hour, once a week, you have created a fantastic, professionally bound record of your child's school year. Plus, you have made a beautiful yearbook that will be enjoyed for many years to come.

**COMMUNICATION:** If you're a family that has chosen enrollment in Oak Meadow School as we have, I would encourage you to take full advantage of the knowledge and experience of your child's teacher. Your entire learning experience becomes easier and more productive the more the parents and teacher communicate. Mark your calendar as a reminder of when to submit work to your teacher, and don't hesitate to email or call when you have questions. Regular communication will help your teacher better assist you in tailoring the material to your child's needs.

Listening to your family's needs and daily rhythms can help you put in place an organizational system that will work best for you and assist you in reaching your homeschooling goals. Just as importantly, it will help you achieve peace of mind! Hopefully these ideas will give you a starting point for getting your home ready for the upcoming school year. Staying organized will return benefits that the entire family will enjoy. 🌿

*Jerri Mayer lives with her family in Oklahoma, where she spends a lot of time sharing learning adventures with her sons.*

# Our Rhythm Writes Itself, I Just Have to Listen

By Erika Silva

**S**ince childhood I've loved summertime in New England—the long lake days and endless cookouts-turned-s'more-roasting nights . . . As the snow slowly thaws in late March and the sun hangs in the sky a little longer each day, I find myself dreaming of flip-flops and fireworks, and I can't help but wonder if I'm making the most of those three glorious summer months.

As a homeschooling parent, I know how great going into the year “prepared” feels. Plus, nothing beats those newly arrived packages brimming with curriculum piling up at the door! As a fun-loving, ice cream-craving kiddo at heart, I wonder if my numbered summer days could be better spent. So along with my spring cleaning this year, I tasked myself with digging deeper and asking the question: Is our homeschooling plan working?

## Ditching the yearly plan

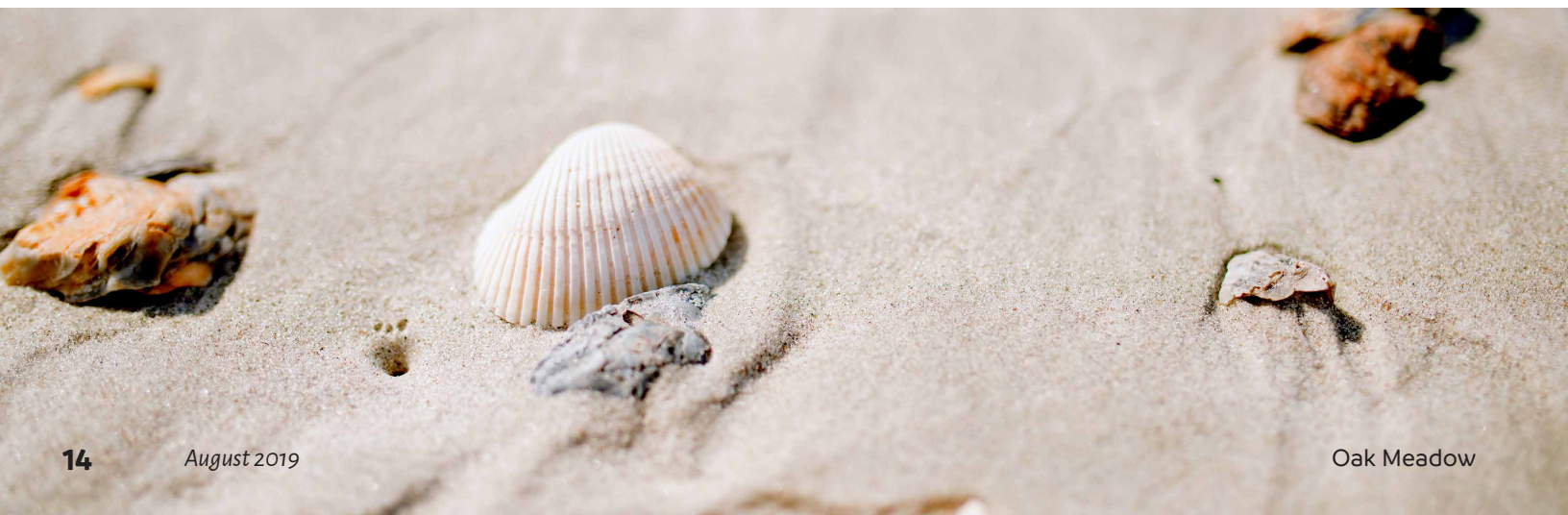
I hope I am not alone in this, but I love planning way more than following a plan. Granted, it takes forever to choose the topics you want to cover, work out a schedule for the year, and then do your research to decide what curriculum you'd like to use. (When I said, “do your research,” did anyone else read, “stalk your favorite homeschool bloggers”?) But it is so gratifying to have an idea of what

the year ahead will hold. The planners, and sticky notes and—it's worth mentioning twice—the packages! And then the cherry on top comes when I get to sit down with my husband, our self-proclaimed principal, and show off the endless hours of work that so eloquently outlines my hopes and dreams for the coming year.

But that is where the joy in yearly planning ends.

It wasn't lost on me that even with the best of intentions our plan was always short lived. Last year we were back to square one before the end of September! The schedule gets scrapped, or the curriculum isn't a good fit, or we are trying to do too much, and it is never worth the countless hours I sunk into the plan.

It's been the cycle for years, and yet I continued to waste away my precious summer evenings obsessing over the plan. Why? Because there are some families who can make a plan for their school year and stick to it and I could not accept that we weren't one of them. Maybe this ability comes with experience that I didn't yet have. Maybe they are just less wavering and will modify a bad curriculum instead of tossing it and starting over. Or perhaps it just comes down to a difference in styles. Whatever the case, this year we've started to shake things up a bit!







## Going with the flow

No matter how well-intentioned my planning has been, there are a few things it could never account for. First, there are three of us entering the classroom every morning and three BIG personalities at that! When I wrote our yearly plan, it was from my perspective and showed what I thought we should learn. My main reason for homeschooling is to instill a lifelong love of learning in my children, so why was I not taking into account what they wanted to learn?

Instead of constantly stressing and reworking a schedule that was owning us, we've started enjoying the adventure each new day brings. Now we all take ownership of our schedule as a group. Our style has evolved from classic to eclectic over the past year, and our homeschool is all the better for it. We follow the kids' interests. We piece together curriculum, picking and choosing what we like best from different materials. And, whenever possible, we let learning come to us in an organic way.

## Year-round rhythm

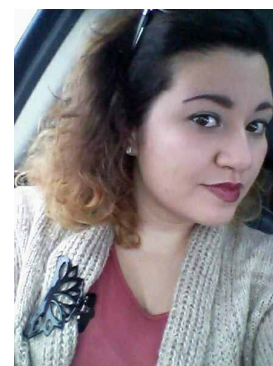
While we've learned to give up on what isn't working, it's just as important to stick with what is! Our switch to a more eclectic style of homeschooling is largely due to our transition to year-round learning. Are we really getting credit for taking our clipboard to the beach and getting in some math during lunch? Or better yet, documenting our findings in the sand, and then surveying friends and family on their favorite sea creatures to create a graph? Yes, yes, and yes! There's a joy in this way of learning, not just for the kids, but for all of us.

Taking a three-month hiatus during the summer felt like way too much down time for our family. The boredom always seemed to set in too quickly, and many great seasonal learning opportunities were going unexplored. Plus, raising lifelong learners means we are naturally seeking knowledge all year round—why not get school credit for it?

Year-round homeschooling has been a great blessing for our family. We never lose our rhythm of learning. Even better, we never get burnt out because we get more regular breaks throughout the year.

Our learning feels more like a natural extension of our lives. No, we haven't completely ditched the curriculum, nor do I think we will. We will just continue to seek the balance that makes learning enjoyable for us all by accepting what works and letting go of what doesn't. Our school finally works for our family. 🌱

*Erika Silva is a homeschooling mom residing in beautiful central Maine with her husband and two children. She's a crafter, book hoarder, and self-proclaimed serial-hobbyist. When she's not learning and exploring alongside her kiddos she can be found hiding from her ever growing laundry pile. Erika hopes to continue exploring her love for writing so long as it doesn't interfere with her reigning cribbage championship title in the Silva household.*



# Circle Time for One

By Shannon Herrick

**O**ne, two . . . what to do? The circle we make is an oval, he and I, and we're acutely aware that some circle games just get awkward for ovals like us. But, let me begin at the beginning.

When my son, Oliver, and I found ourselves on the homeschooling path, we had trouble finding any road maps for how to do this beautiful thing—circle time—with an only child. I found resource after resource on how to homeschool multiple grades at once, or manage multiple schedules, or provide multiple children with the one-on-one attention they need. There was a startling lack of information on creating a nurturing experience for my only. I felt very much like an anomaly, and statistically speaking, that checks out.

We soon discovered, on our own, that there are advantages and disadvantages to each and every family size. We had utter freedom to create whatever rhythm and schedule we felt like, without the needs and desires of siblings to consider. Curriculum and activities didn't have to be adapted for multiple grades, and there were no comparisons to be made. He had my undivided attention, always.

Of course, some of the perceived “advantages” also felt like disadvantages, depending on the day. Sometimes I longed for Oliver to experience all the joyful shared learning I would read about in homeschooling books or on blogs written by moms whose life fit the stereotype of big, happy homeschooling family. Then there's the social aspect that comes with having to share more than just your learning, but also your home and parents with siblings. What would he glean of respect and kindness from just . . . me? And, honestly, the undivided attention, always? It tipped the scale towards disadvantage more often than I'd care to admit. Rhythm to the rescue.

I imagine most homeschooling families, of any size, would attest to the importance of establishing a daily and weekly rhythm, especially when children are in the early grades. Oliver had attended a Waldorf preschool and kindergarten, and when we were on our own with the Oak Meadow curriculum, I wanted to hold on to the benefits a predictable schedule provided. A degree of comfort was gained during his previous school years with certain things happening on certain days of the week (lentil soup on Wednesdays) and certain activities being for certain hours of the day (circle time at 9 a.m.). Rhythm is like a drum beat, a heartbeat. As I transitioned to becoming a home teacher, it made sense to me that holding a steady pace through the days and weeks would open me up to the learning that was all around, because I didn't have to think about what came next. The metronome ticked, and I would be free to explore the melody.

So, it shocked me when, even though I understood the why of it, circle time became our biggest roadblock. It's the kick-off moment of a daily rhythm, after all! Why wasn't it working for us? I felt I had to get it right (oh, that elusive “getting it right” we strive for when just starting out homeschooling), as it was an important part of the day for Oliver at school, and it would be at home, also. It was a prominent feature in our shiny new Oak Meadow curriculum, too, and I knew, inherently, that such an outbreath is necessary as a bridge between the mundane tasks of the morning (breakfast, getting dressed, making the bed) and the time of focused learning.

For a while, we tried to model how it had always worked at school, but here's the thing: it was awkward. It was more formal with just two people, and I realized that it was feeling more contrived, more like performing, to do verses, songs, and movement without friends and teachers, and Oliver actively detested performing. It didn't help that I was shy about such things, too.







Oliver has never enjoyed singing, especially in front of anyone (even me!), and I went back in my mind to that bit about him having my undivided attention, and how that can be an advantage. It was up to me to tailor his learning experience, and I knew him better than anyone else. We didn't have to start off our homeschool day with something that was uncomfortable. If he was self-conscious about circling up with just me, and so was I, then why were we trying to recreate what seemed to work best in a group setting?

A fine gift of homeschooling is that you can slow down and really pay attention to which activities ground your child. What brings them to center? What brings you to center? The 5–20 minutes of circle time is about mind/body/heart connection, building foundations with speech recitation and repetition, and—perhaps most importantly—it's about setting the tone of the day and marking the transition to learning time.

So, I slowed down and allowed myself to trust that there isn't necessarily a right way to create that space. What we needed was a way that worked for us.

What worked was morning walks, when the weather cooperated. We would casually recite verses and poems, as though it were spontaneous. Where he used to clam up if we were facing each other, he would shout joyously while skipping up the road. If it was raining or stormy, we would play catch inside the house instead, with beanbags or a small ball. Eventually, it morphed into teatime with a single, intentional verse to begin the day. He was entrusted to pour the water, which gave him a boost of confidence and pride. We even had a short period of time when he liked to dress up to start the school day, so circle time meant counting verses in a mouse voice with his mouse ears on. It shifted organically, as we sunk into what rhythm looked like for us and our uniqueness as individuals and a learning team.

It was a sort of magic when I let go of perceived expectations and just listened, observed, and adapted. After all, the journey is to create a love of learning, rather than an experience to be endured. No matter how many children are in a family, circle time will be as unique as any aspect of a family's homeschooling rhythm. It may be a morning art café, a simple song and the lighting of a candle, or literally gathering into a circle to recite verses with clapping and stomping. It may also be you, your child, and a collection of stuffed animals. Or skipping circle time altogether. Or, as your child grows older, calling it something different, like a Warm-up (or something else, you know, mature), and going for a jog or a bike ride together, presenting a memorized poem, or playing a game of Banana-grams.

Whatever it looks like for you, make it your own treasured morning ritual, and I promise you, you're not doing it wrong. 🌿

*Shannon Herrick is Oak Meadow's Community Relations Specialist. Shannon lives in a little house in the big woods of southern Vermont, and does her best to grow things there. Sometimes it's peas, sometimes it's words and images, and always it's an appreciation for the lessons of the land.*





# Tips from Oak Meadow Teachers: Finding the Balance Between Focus and Free Time

## Question from a homeschooling parent:

*Some days it is challenging to get the day started with my son. I also notice after a certain period of time he seems to become unfocused. When this happens, lessons take a long time and we don't end up having much free time. How can we get into a better rhythm?*

**Oak Meadow teachers respond:**

### Co-create a predictable daily schedule.

Working with your child to organize the daily schedule can be a big help. One idea is to make a set of subject or activity cards (e.g. language arts, math, music, etc.). Each day, give your child the cards pertaining to tasks that need to be accomplished that day. He can arrange those activities in the order he prefers for that day. Another idea is to hang up a simple daily schedule so everyone knows what to expect from the day, when the breaks are (breaks are an important part of the schedule!), and what has already been accomplished. Depending on your child's love of—or aversion to—strict scheduling, the daily schedule can outline specific times for certain subjects, or it can simply list the day's tasks (showing the next assignments in each subject), which can be done in whatever order the student chooses.

### Find the day's peak focus times.

We all have times of the day when our focus is most fresh. When organizing the daily schedule with your son, encourage him to think about times when he is most focused, more tired, ready for physical activity, needs some down time, etc. For most children in the early grades, morning is the best time for academic focus. Remember, children learn through the body and not just the intellect, so make sure to incorporate active physical exercises and games in between the sit-down work. Chanting and singing verses and songs with gestures, jumping rope, tossing bean bags, marching, and other active games can be tied to academic work.

Afternoon could be spent doing outside activities, if outside is an option, or informal games. Some of these activities may have some learning skills involved, such as math or science, and some time should be set aside for simple child-directed free play and creative arts. Science hikes to observe nature or collect samples, art and science projects, modeling with clay, woodworking, and other curriculum-related activities that engage the child's creative spirit and/or physical body are excellent for afternoon lesson time.







## Organize lessons into manageable chunks.

Keep in mind that students, especially in the early grades, will need frequent breaks from academic focus. After half an hour, you'll probably notice that your child is usually ready to move on and loses focus. With that in mind, plan work periods accordingly. Knowing when the breaks will come can help a student maintain focus and productivity. Also, shifting gears to another task, subject, or activity (from mental focus to physical or creative expression, for instance) can mean the difference between being invigorated by learning and being exhausted by it.

Many homeschooling families have found that it works best to break up learning into different days. Trying to do all subjects in one day can feel overwhelming. For instance, you might schedule language arts and math three mornings a week, and social studies two mornings a week; you might have science two afternoons a week and arts two afternoons a week, leaving one afternoon free for finishing up any tasks that need extra time.

Using a structure like this, you can then divide the tasks for each subject into half-hour segments (segments can be longer or shorter, depending on the age, temperament, and abilities of your student). These daily tasks can be put onto cards or on a schedule board for your student to do in any order that works.

Let students check off tasks to see their progress.

After you make a schedule, your child can check things off as he completes them. This includes checking off lunch, break, math, etc. The idea around all this organizing is to help your child to feel empowered and active in the learning experience. Presenting manageable amounts of work for each day or week can help your student feel appropriately challenged instead of overwhelmed. Understanding what is expected for each day and then checking off tasks as they are completed gives a great sense of accomplishment and creates a satisfying visual record of progress. 🌱





# Music in Your Daily Rhythm

By Erin Shelby

**F**or the performer, rhythm is the steady heartbeat that moves the music forward. Just like music, our lives have a rhythm, too. Have you found your homeschooling rhythm?

Your daily rhythm can be felt in the simple routines, those little things that keep you anchored when other things are in flux. Through the changes in season or curriculum, your daily rhythm can be felt in rituals you do every day, even when everything else is up in the air. In music, if you don't have good rhythm, you can't make good music. In our daily lives, having a solid daily rhythm can help us deal with the unexpected and make more progress toward our goals.

This year, instead of thinking of music as a separate class, you might consider incorporating music into what you're already doing. Listening to music is one of the National Standards for Music Education, and there are so many easy ways to fuse this standard into your daily rhythm.

## Unraveling the Rhythms of Stress

No matter how much we try to create peaceful rhythms in our lives, hard times are inevitable. Difficult seasons are uninvited, and listening to music can get us through these changes. Finding moments of refuge in a song can help you nurture your own spirit. You could listen to a song that is inspired by nature, such as "Cloudburst" by Eric Whitacre, or listen to recorded sounds of nature. Rain, lightning, thunder, or even a crackling fire can bring calm to frazzled minds. You might unravel your stress with a piece of classical music, or you might find comfort in a spiritual song like "Amazing Grace." Or, it could be a fun song like the "Hokey Pokey" where everyone can get silly and dance their troubles away!

## Transitioning Through Rhythms of the Day

Songs can help young children transition from one activity to another. For preschool children, a song can cue them about what to do next. The infectious "Baby Shark" song has swept the nation, but what if you had a song to cue your preschooler that it's time to clean up her toys? You can use "The Clean Up Song" from the '90s TV show *Barney and Friends*, or you can look for something new. If you're feeling inspired, you can create your own musical jingles to signal it's time to clean up toys, set the table, wash hands, or go to bed. You can make a game of clean up time with rhythm sticks by clicking the sticks and setting a beat and then seeing how long

it takes for toys to be cleaned up. After the task is done, your child gets the reward of playing with the rhythm sticks.

## Learning the Rhythms of the Past

How do you plan to teach history this year? You can infuse your daily lessons with music even if you don't like to sing. Try listening to different artists give their spin on patriotic songs, such as Ray Charles' rendition of "America The Beautiful" or Jimi Hendrix's "The Star Spangled Banner." You can have fun with your kids by sharing with them music that was popular when you were their age. Will they enjoy the music you loved from the '60s, '70s, or '80s? You can also explore the connections between the social or political events and the music that helped tell those stories. What were the songs of the Civil Rights Movement? What were the songs of Woodstock? What was going on politically in the 1970s, and what was the popular music at the time? There are a lot of connections between popular music and popular culture. Playing one or two songs every week could create a rich experience.

## Exploring the Rhythms of Our Ancestors

Do you know the origins of your family's ancestors? Does your child know what regions of the country or world the family tree can be traced from? This basic information can help you find the music of your ancestors. Just going back a generation or two can yield some interesting results. I live in a busy urban area with electricity, running water, and public transportation. But just a few generations back, my ancestors came from the hills of Appalachia, a place that still struggles with great poverty. Appalachian music is distinct, lively music, and you know it when you hear it. I love that this music is part of my ancestry! Many, many, generations further back, I can find Native American music in my ancestry, filled with drumbeats, flute music, and chanting that honors Mother Nature. What music will you find in your family tree? The music you find can be rewarding, joyful, and unexpected.

## Exploring the Rhythms Within Stories

Does your child have a favorite bedtime story? Chances are, when you read the story, you'll find yourself pausing, speeding up, and slowing down at certain points. There's a natural rhythm when we read aloud. We start and we stop, just like music has rests placed for silence. The pitch of your voice can go up or down; maybe it's higher when you're excited or lower when you're trying to hide



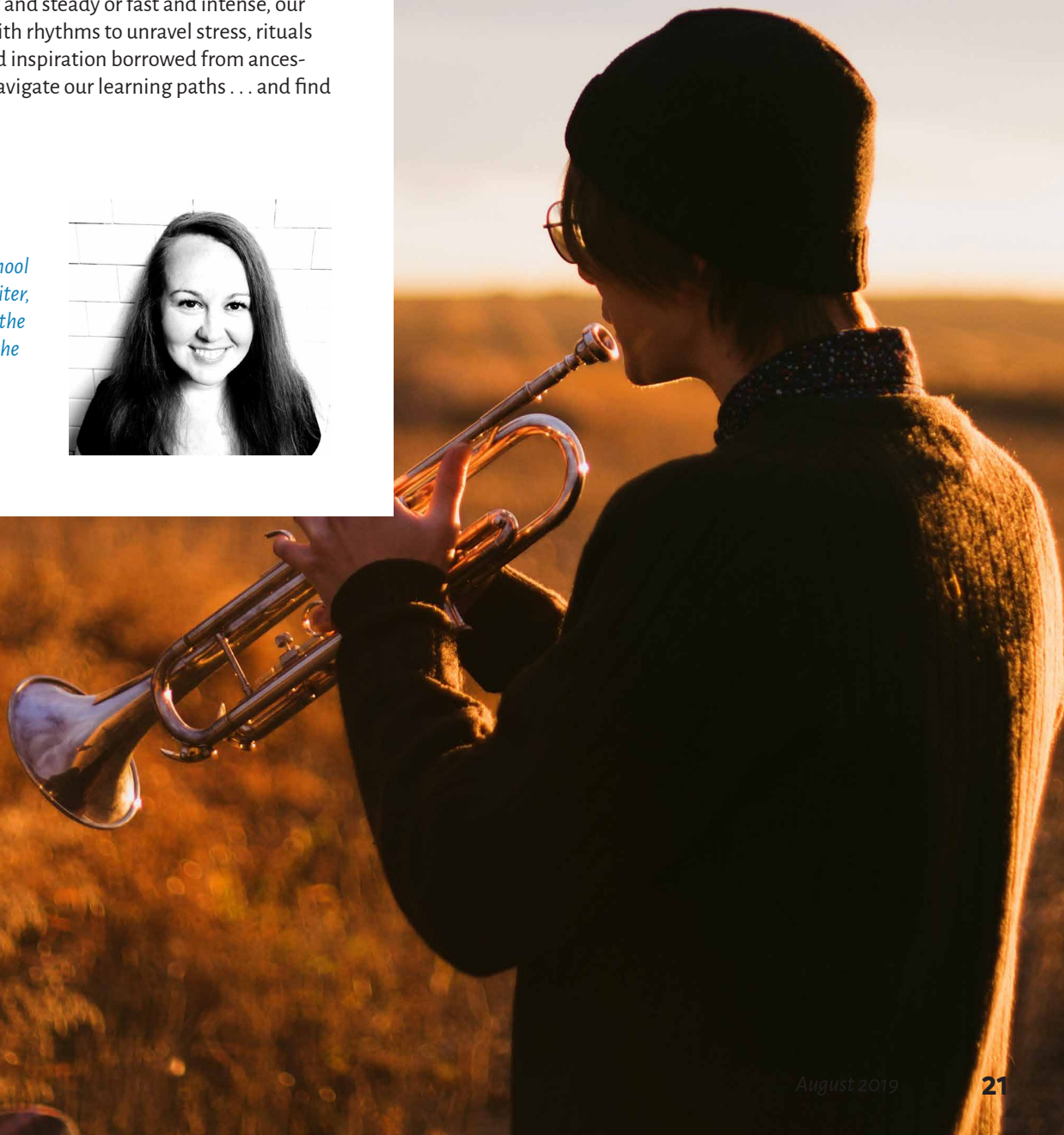
from a villain. We all act out stories with the spoken word. We're all storytellers. How do you act out the story? You can take a favorite children's story and find places to make music. Look for places where the story has created sound, and make it. Does the story invite you to stomp, clap, sigh, or snap your fingers? If there's thunder and lightning, you know what to do: make the sound go "BOOM"! Find words that look like a sound, and make those sounds come to life.

## Making Rhythms Just for Fun

As a homeschooling family, your learning can extend into all hours. You can turn learning into play and play into learning. When you've decided that it's time to focus more on fun than on learning, you can make it a musical moment, too. Many parents are fighting the battle of screen time addiction themselves and on behalf of their families. Games like "Dance Dance Revolution" or "Rock Band" can help when kids are already used to a lot of screen time. These music-inspired games make you move your body and let the whole family get involved.

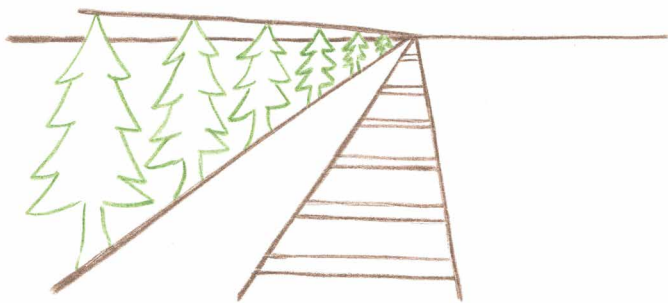
Just like the rhythm of life, the rhythm of learning can have a powerful beat. Whether slow and steady or fast and intense, our rhythms can serve us well. With rhythms to unravel stress, rituals to pivot through changes, and inspiration borrowed from ancestors and times past, we can navigate our learning paths . . . and find fun along the way. 🌿

*Erin Shelby is a former public school music teacher. As a freelance writer, her work has been published on the Daily Bread Blog, a ministry of the Community of Christ.*





# Curriculum Spotlight



## The Seven Laws of Drawing Perspective

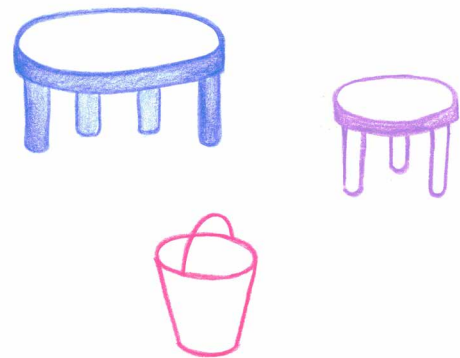
Using *perspective* in drawing means creating three-dimensional objects and scenes on a flat surface.

If we break down perspective into seven laws, we can draw anything in a three-dimensional fashion. These laws are as follows:

1. **Surface:** An item drawn near the bottom of the page looks closer than an item drawn near the top of the page.
2. **Size:** Objects drawn larger look closer than smaller ones.
3. **Surface Lines:** Lines which curve to “wrap around” an item give it the appearance of moving away or coming closer.
4. **Shading:** Adding shading to an object creates the appearance of volume and depth.
5. **Overlapping:** An object that overlaps another object looks like the closer of the two objects. An object that has another object overlapping it appears to be farther away.
6. **Density:** An object drawn darker and with more detail appears closer. An object drawn lighter looks more distant.
7. **Foreshortening:** The effect of turning a circle into an oval gives the appearance of depth in a drawing. This can be clearly seen by placing a coin near the edge of a table. If you crouch down until your eyes are nearly level with the tabletop, the coin appears to be oval.

## Oak Meadow's Grade 4 Coursebook

*Learning to draw using the laws of perspective can help students gain confidence in their artistic abilities. This will allow them to produce drawings that enhance their lessons and better demonstrate their knowledge of the academic material. Here are some excerpts from Oak Meadow's Grade 4 Coursebook, where these drawing skills are introduced.*

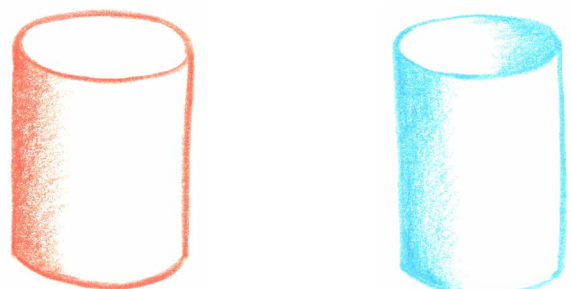


## Shading

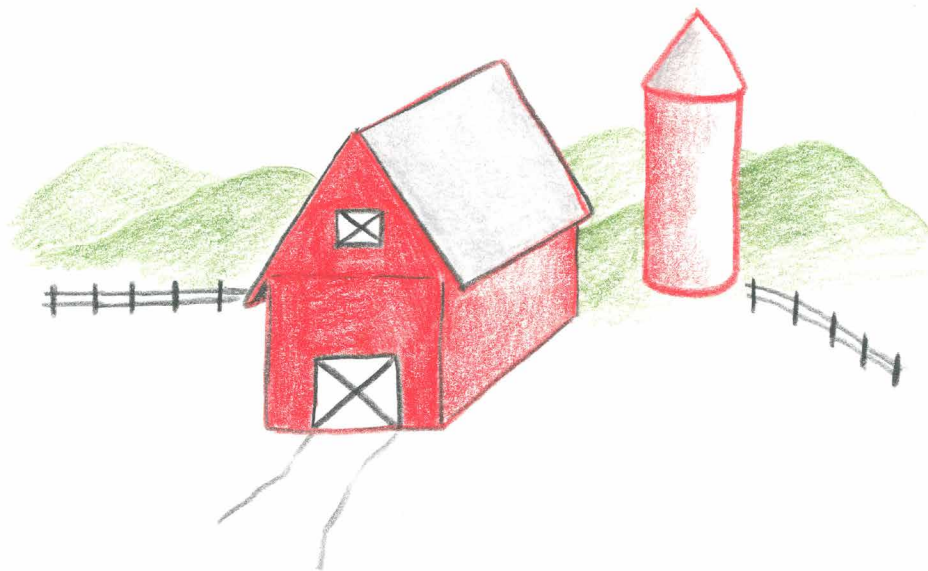
Shading is one way to create depth in your drawing. The key to realistic shading is to do it all on one side. This makes sense if you think of the shading as a shadow—the light comes from one source, so any side facing the light is bright, and anything facing away from the light is shaded.

Shading makes objects look three-dimensional, even though they are drawn on a flat piece of paper. It gives the *illusion* of substance (makes it look like something it's not).

Draw a foreshortened circle. Add very, very short parallel lines and connect them with a curved line to create a tabletop. Shade in this narrow space, which is the edge of the tabletop. Add three or four legs. Make the drawing short and stocky and you have a little stool. Angle the sides in under a foreshortened circle and you've drawn a bucket. The possibilities are endless.



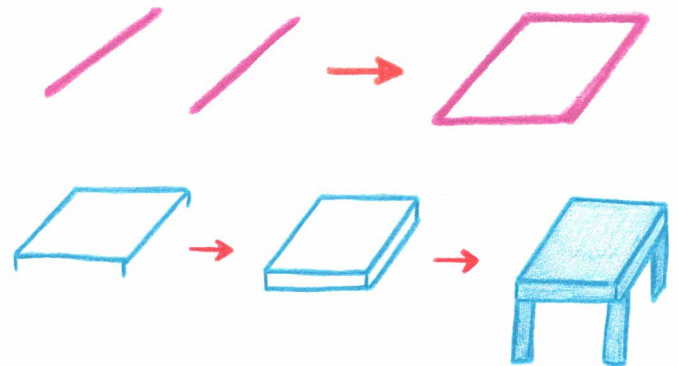




## Foreshortened Squares

Draw a foreshortened square by first drawing two parallel lines at an angle (this shape is called a parallelogram). Then connect the lines with two more parallel lines.

As with the cylinders, you can change the shape of the cube by extending its lines and adding detail. For example, tables and stools can be made by first drawing the tabletops and then adding legs.



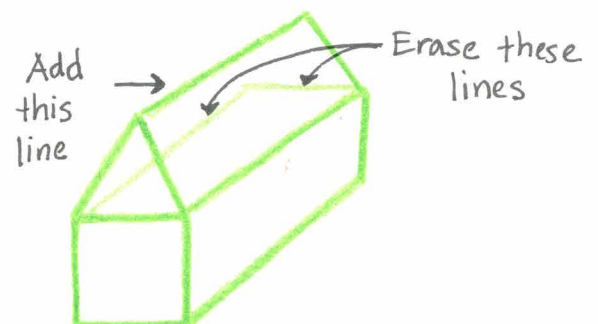
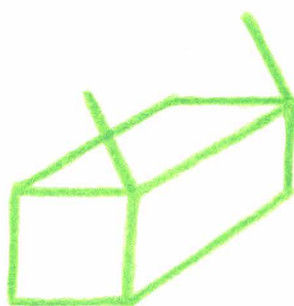
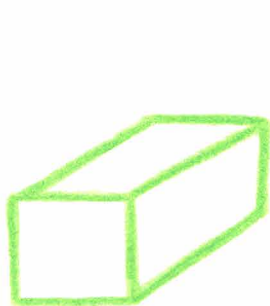
## Draw a House!

You can make a house by first making the cube for the house and then adding parallel lines for the roof.

When windows and doors are added, keep the lines parallel to the roof and wall lines.

Shading is necessary to make the buildings look three-dimensional. Think about where your light source is (the sun), and shade one side only (the side where the sun doesn't reach).

Make sure the shaded side is a darker color than the side in the sun.



# Finding a New Rhythm to Meet the Whole Family's Needs

By Roshnii Rose

**W**hen our family made a shift to a new home-educating rhythm six months ago, I learned how such a change can affect us all.

For years, we had been unschooling with no fixed schedules other than weekly home ed meet-ups and martial arts classes, fortnightly web programming classes, and monthly bush craft sessions. We had lots of time for free play and self-directed learning. My eldest was nearly 10, my second was 7, and my youngest child was almost 3. There was a gentle rhythm in our day that was guided by our waking, eating, sleeping, and socializing. However, as the stay-at-home parent, my need for time and space to myself to pursue my own creative projects and work began to forcefully bubble up to the surface.

After a turbulent year for our community following major fires in our area of rural Central Portugal that left many families homeless, a small group of local parents picked up the mantle of a community education project, which had been in embryonic stages when the fire had swept through our lives.

At first, I wasn't interested in getting involved. I believed wholeheartedly in the ethos of home-education and I didn't feel drawn to the project. However, in early summer 2018, the project took an interesting turn. The idea was raised to use the Agile Learning approach, and as the guiding philosophy came more into alignment with my own values around spontaneous, organic learning, it started to look more attractive to me.

In their own words:

"Agile Learning Centers restore the joy of learning with a surprisingly effective educational approach: intentional culture supporting self-directed learning reinforced by agile management tools." ([agilelearningcenters.org/](http://agilelearningcenters.org/))





In practice, it is a democratic learning space where the children's perspectives, passions, and natural abilities are given space and respected. All members of the whole community, young and old, are involved in planning and contributing towards the activities each day.

The project was to run three days a week with a small group of facilitators, none with any formal training in education and therefore coming with open minds and hearts to try out a new and different approach. Two of these adults were to be native Portuguese speakers, which would ensure that the children would have plenty of exposure to the local language.

A beautiful semi-restored oil press building (Lagar in Portuguese) was secured as the venue for the "un-school." It is a charming space with many possibilities for development. It includes a large, flat outside area—not so common in this hilly region—bordered by a river, waterfall, and natural pool. It is also only a five-minute walk down into the valley from our home.

Alongside these positive points, the big clincher for me was that other local long-term home-educating families became committed to getting involved. Realizing that my children would be among the few of their age in the local area not to participate in the project, and understanding that this would have a major impact on our day-to-day life without their friends and neighbours to meet up and play with, I started to open up to the possibility of enrolling them.

My three children were enthusiastic about the prospect. After a trial week in September where they became familiar with the Agile way of working together, they couldn't wait to dive in.

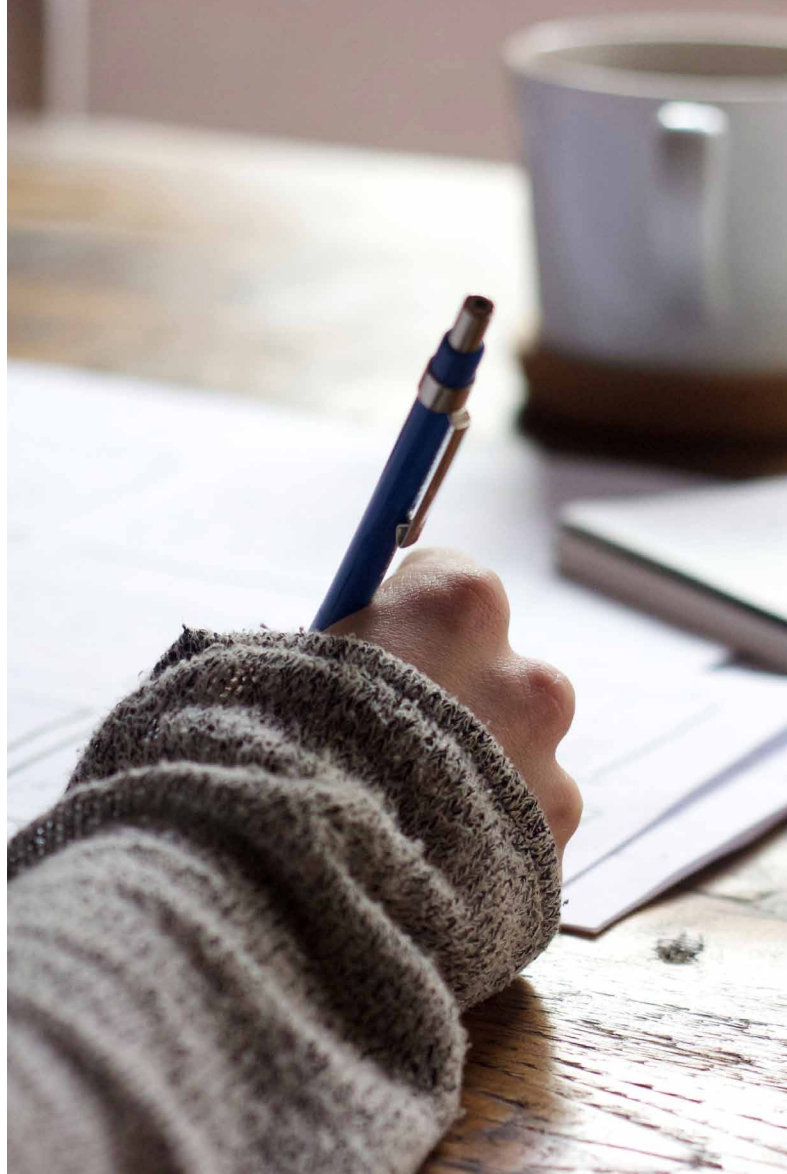
Of course, I was also very aware of the time and space that would be freed up for myself to pursue my work as a writer and birth doula if the children were engaged with other adults and children from the community several days a week.

It was quite a change to go from never really needing to get up at a certain time in the mornings and feeling very relaxed about the daily proceedings to waking up early three days a week, preparing packed lunches and snacks, and getting out the door by 8:50 a.m. to arrive on time. And yet, I quickly began to enjoy this rigour, especially since we could still enjoy a lot of freedom and slowness on the other days.

I relish the magical walk to the Lagar. We make our way along a narrow stony track bordered by wildflowers, down a very long descent on ancient schist steps, over the small river, passing the waterfall on a shady hand-built wooden bridge, to reach the building.

This change in our daily and weekly rhythm has not been without its challenges, which I admit are mostly on an internal level on my part. The first is about coming to peace with not having the kids at home full-time any more after being a staunch unschooler for the last decade. I have had to coach myself through several inner dialogues around the temptation to feel like a failure.

And yet, simultaneously I realize the importance of holding onto the home education mindset of being responsible for our learning journey and not just handing it over to the other adults who are now involved on a regular basis in my children's education.



I see that we are all thriving on this change of dynamic. I have more energy and enthusiasm to give to them when we have had time apart each week, and they get to see their mum doing what she loves, which has got to be an important lesson.

I always aspired to living in such a way that my children's learning was integrated into the life of the community. Sometimes it takes letting go of fixed ways of thinking in order to allow a new energy to flow through our lives. 🌱

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*She also loves to sing, grow veggies, and be close to nature in the Portuguese hills where she lives with her three lively children and beloved man.*





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