

Living Education

An Oak Meadow Publication



**Oak
Meadow**

Experiential Learning

In this issue:

*Ways to Incorporate Experiential
Learning while Social Distancing*

Sustainable Living and Learning

Using Learning Stations

Seasonal Table



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Welcome to Living Education!

September 2020

You've probably heard the saying, "Experience is the best teacher." It seems like 2020 has given us more new experiences than ever before. From the global pandemic and climate change crisis to the urgency of acknowledging and addressing racial injustices, this year has required all of us to reflect, adapt, and LEARN. Change and growth go hand in hand. As adults around the world face new experiences and struggle to learn new ways of being, we can perhaps better understand life from a child's perspective, where every experience is new and there is always a steep learning curve.

This year has brought millions of new families into the world of homeschooling. For many, this seismic shift in family life has been challenging, frustrating, rewarding, and eye-opening. No matter how long a home-learning experience lasts, it can be made richer and more enjoyable for the whole family by incorporating active, experiential learning. That's what this issue of Living Education is all about!

Learning by doing makes skills and knowledge more memorable, more relevant, and more fun. Reading and research is invaluable, of course, but no matter how many articles you read on gardening, there's nothing like the experience of putting your hands in the soil, tending plants, and harvesting a homegrown tomato. You can watch videos about how to ride a bike or a horse, but until you actually hop on and go, your knowledge will be limited.

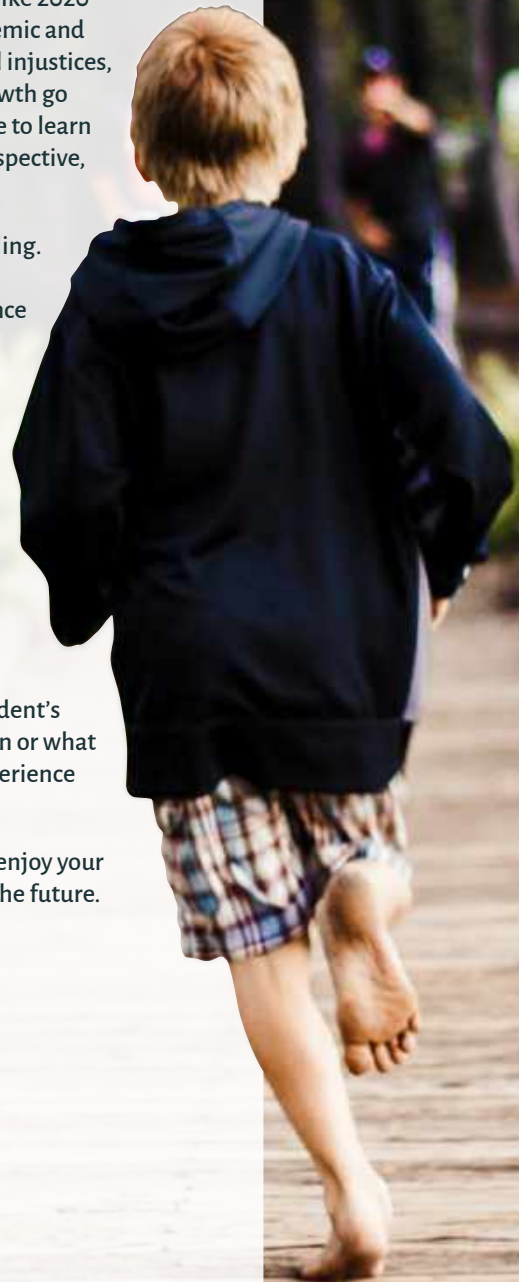
At Oak Meadow, we strive to incorporate experiential learning into each student's educational journey. No matter what home-learning environment you are in or what curriculum you are using, you can find ways to let your students actively experience learning in a meaningful way.

We hope this issue offers some inspiration and encouragement to help you enjoy your home learning more than ever during these challenging times and far into the future.



DeeDee Hughes

Editor



Experiences Unlimited:

Ways to Incorporate Experiential Learning while Social Distancing

by Elise Moser

Experiential learning makes homeschooling appealing to many families. Taking opportunities to leave the desk and get out into the world makes learning fun.

This year, things may look different. Local attractions may be closed or restricted. Travel may not be safe for your family. Your usual visits to museums and historical sites may be postponed.

But just because there are limitations on the usual outings doesn't mean you can't create experiences right at home. The possibilities for experiential learning are still endless. When you start to think outside the box, you'll find many ways to incorporate unique and hands-on experiences at home.

Get outside!

Explore nature: Being outdoors is the safest way to explore beyond your home. Now is the time to indulge in lazy days spent outside. Spend time on trails, and let your child set the pace. Stop to examine wildlife. Take photos of plants that interest you. Bring a sketchbook to draw what you see. Enjoy the peace and quiet of wandering in the woods.

Identify wildlife: Study the local birds and plants in your area. How many can you and your family identify? Local bird and plant guides can help you learn what to look for. Make it a game, and create a scavenger hunt with the species you're most likely to see. How long will it take for you to find them all?

Learn wilderness skills: This is a great time to learn a variety of outdoor skills from camping to orienteering. Head to a local park, and practice reading a map and using a compass. Find a nearby campsite, and spend a few nights in a tent. Teach your child how to start a campfire and how to cook over an open fire. Learn conservation skills like "leaving no trace" and proper disposal of wastewater.

Utilize technology.

Become a reporter: Interviewing someone important is easier than ever. Think big, and contact whomever your child is interested in speaking with. Consider a local official, scientist, or a professional in a field your child is interested in. Then, set up a video interview. Prepare ahead by writing a list of questions to ask. Your child will act as a journalist. Afterward, have your child write a "news story" about the person they interviewed!

Create a blog: Utilize the web as a place to document all the learning your family is doing. Create a blog to be run by the children. Include photographs and even video clips of the experiences you have through your homeschool. Your child can take the lead on this. They can take photos and videos by simply using a smartphone. Older children can write blog posts explaining what the project was and what they learned. Posting online is a great way to share what your child is learning with other homeschooling families. And no need to worry about safety: you can create a private blog that only those with a direct link will be able to see.



Take the curriculum beyond the page.

Get creative: Now is the perfect time to try creative projects related to literature and history. Have your child write a play based on a book or historical event, and then act it out. Get as extravagant as you'd like! Make costumes out of things you have lying around. Paint backgrounds on big panels of butcher paper or old sheets.

Another idea is to use multimedia to reflect on literature and history. Art, photography, and filmmaking are all ways for your child to express what they have learned. Have your child create a piece of art that reflects the mood or tone of a book. Have them create a photo essay or make a documentary recounting a historical event or time period.

Make a living history exhibit: Have your child choose a historical figure to study. Once they have learned about their person, have them dress up in costume and act as that historical figure, answering questions in character. Encourage them to use factual information as well as their imaginations! Make this a collaborative project by inviting other homeschooling families to join in a living history night on Zoom. Each child will have an opportunity to share what they've learned, and other participants can interview them as if they were the real person.

Experiment: Chances are you already use hands-on learning in your math and science studies. Science experiments are a great way to apply what you're learning to real life. Don't limit yourself to testing chemical reactions. There are experiments for any scientific discipline you are studying, from physics to biology and ecology.

In math, try counting collections for young learners. This is a simple way to practice number sense. Create collections of small, found objects, such as pebbles, acorns, or seeds. Collections should be as large as your child is expected to count for their academic level. Young children may work with collections as small as 10, while older kids may have hundreds of objects in a collection. Then, have the child count the objects. Practice different ways to count such as sorting into even groups, counting by 2s, 5s, or 10s, or arranging the objects in a certain way (such as displaying 123 objects by using 100 to form the shape of a number 1 for the hundreds place, using 20 to form a 2 for the tens place, and using the final 3 lined up for the ones place).

Do more exploration.

Study subjects of interest: Let your child lead the way. Scour books for interesting concepts. Find YouTube videos on topics that fascinate them. Don't set parameters for this research. Let your child travel down the information rabbit holes. Eventually, they'll end up somewhere that really sparks their interest.

Make something: When you're exploring, you can focus on the process of creating rather than the product. If possible, check out books on crafts, science experiments, or cooking from your local library. Try new things that you haven't done before. Get messy in the kitchen. Try knitting. Most of these experiences will be cross-curricular. When you're baking, you're using measurement and arithmetic skills. Many crafts promote fine motor skills, teach your child to focus for long periods of time, and test their ability to recall directions.

Just because the usual experiences are not available doesn't mean your family can't incorporate hands-on learning into your home-school. Instead of letting social isolation keep you from having unique and fun experiences, branch out and consider all the possibilities already available to you at home. Adventure awaits! 🌿



Elise Moser is a writer who has worked in education and libraries. She currently works with kids and teens at a public library in St. Louis, Missouri. Find her writing at [Book Riot](#) and [Medium](#).



What Has Your Child Taught You Today?

Today, my 4 children taught me to breathe, cry, laugh, be honest, play, love one another, plus take care of myself—and it's only 12:30 pm in the afternoon!

My children have taught me it's the simple things we do together that matter. They want to sweep, fold laundry, help cook. I need to slow down and let them.

My son has taught me to be less fretful because he's never worried about anything. Being his safety net has made me more confident, calm, and composed.

Today, my daughter taught me the fussiest babies always wind up with the most creative mothers!

Today, my kids reminded me that flowers are for picking and sharing. They look lovely in the garden, but the smile on my mother-in-law's face was even better!

Today, my children taught me how important I am . . . who knew! We moms and dads often forget we are valuable and worthy human beings.

My child has taught me...

I have an endless amount of love.

It's more important to enjoy the moment than worry about the mess that's being made.

There is a little magic on every corner, and beauty can be found in almost anything.

The innocent wisdom of a child can far outweigh adult knowledge.

Never underestimate the power of love and forgiveness.

Bounce back and be happy regardless of the setbacks you encounter.

Say yes whenever possible and save no for when it's really needed.

Find the extraordinary in the ordinary.

It is important to fuel up and not run on empty.

We should always listen to our instincts.

Some days you just have to let everything go and have fun.

It's better to emote than not, and it's very hard to share balloons.

Let my children set their own pace in life.

Stuff that was funny when you were 7 is still funny when you're 39.

Use your imagination when frustrated!

Life does not need to be rushed, and sometimes the best way to enjoy it is to slow down.

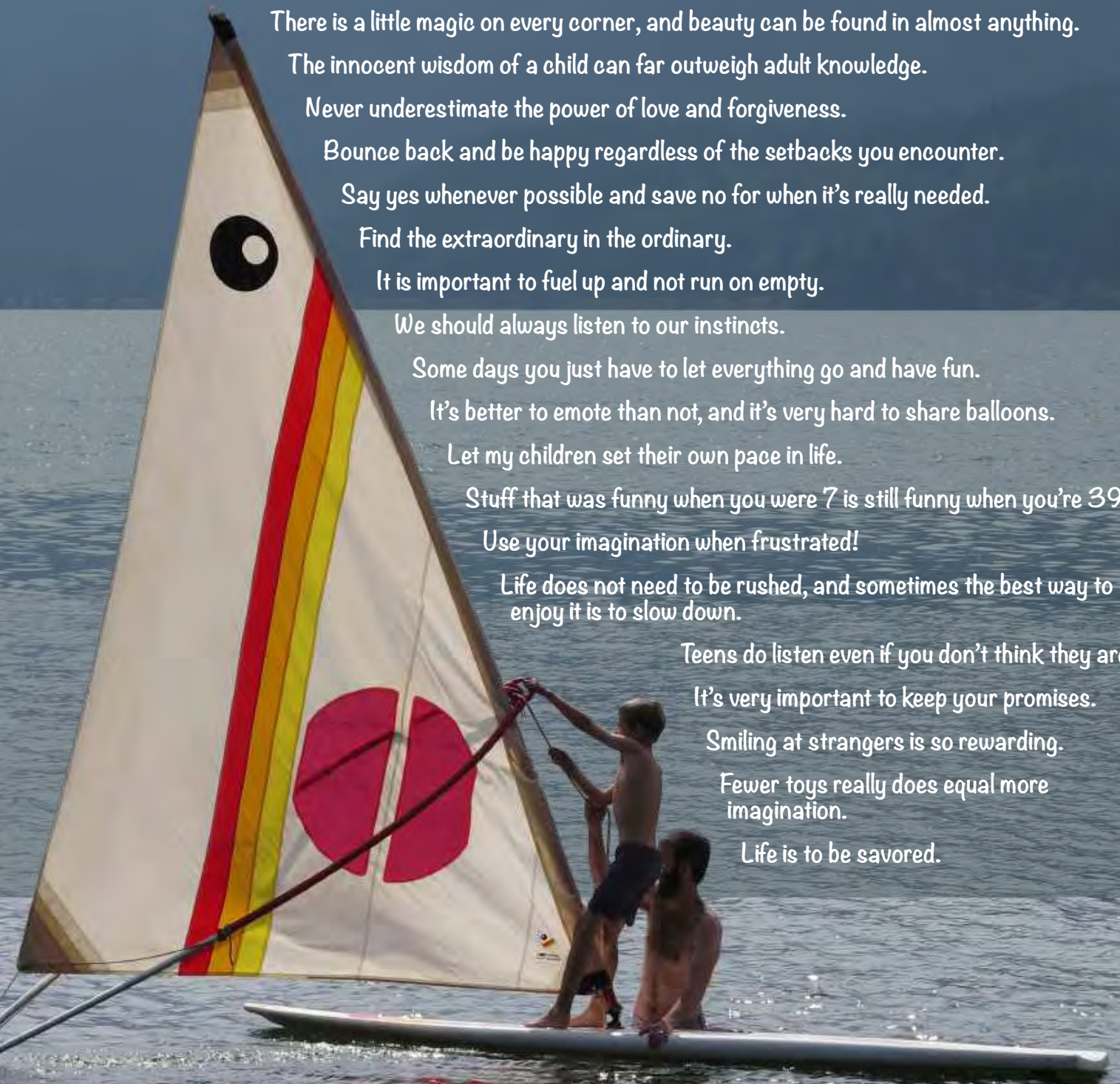
Teens do listen even if you don't think they are.

It's very important to keep your promises.

Smiling at strangers is so rewarding.

Fewer toys really does equal more imagination.

Life is to be savored.





Teaching Money-Saving Common Sense to Our Children

by Ruth O'Neil



During the global pandemic, many families have had to make do with fewer resources and less money than usual. One of the many things I appreciate about my mom is that she taught me how to survive in hard times. Our family wasn't always in the midst of hard times, but there were a few. A lot of what she taught me, I'm sure she learned from my grandparents who grew up during the Great Depression. So much of what she taught me was common sense and maybe a little bit of thinking outside the box.

A lot of fruit grew wild around us. When Mom saw that one kind was ready, she sent us kids out with buckets or baskets and told us not to come back until they were full. She canned that free produce, keeping us supplied in fruit and jellies for an entire year. Definitely a "waste not, want not" attitude.

Several years ago, we had a derecho—a land hurricane—and lost power for seven days. My first thought was to use up the food in our freezer. We utilized our grill and even our camping stove. Most other people immediately started going out to eat, losing hundreds of dollars in wasted food. We lost almost nothing.

I knew one couple who didn't know how to do laundry when they got married. Only after they ran out of underwear, did they attempt it!

One of the most valuable things you can teach your children is life skills. When you are planning your school schedule, make sure to add some practical experiences alongside academic skills.

Use the following common-sense tips to help prepare your children for the future.

- Teach children how to sew on a button. A shirt that's missing buttons is useless.
- Learn how to sew a simple hem so you don't have to pay for alterations or throw away those pants/skirts that are too long or short.
- Teach children how to get creative with leftovers to make a new meal. Let them experiment!
- Cleaning wipes are convenient, but you can easily make your own. Fill a glass jar with your favorite cleaner and add some washcloths. Pull out one cloth when you need it. Wring it out to save on solution. Wash and reuse the cloths to make cleaning more economical. Allow the kids to help you clean even if they don't do it perfectly at first. That's how they learn.
- Teach the kids to know how to cook some basic foods, such as eggs, soups, and pasta. Even young children can begin learning kitchen safety rules and skills like how to use a knife, whisk, and spatula. Older children can read recipes and help younger ones measure and mix ingredients.
- Save bread crusts and stale bread. They make great bread crumbs and even stuffing. Pop them in the freezer until you have a need. Children can cut or tear the bread into chunks before freezing.
- Planning contributes greatly to saving money. Go to the grocery store with a meal plan taking advantage of what you already have at home, what's on sale, and what is seasonal. Kids can help create a meal plan by putting their favorites on the menu. That's a good night to have them help cook.
- Science class can be in session when you turn a bar of hand soap into a much larger bottle of body wash. Grate a 4-ounce bar of soap and add it to 4 cups of boiling water. Stir to melt. Allow to sit overnight to reset. Pour into an empty plastic bottle.
- Teach your kids to balance a bank account. This seems like a lost art in the age of online banking, but it's an important lesson in budgeting and money management.
- If you have older children who can cook and want to be a little more adventurous, save vegetable scraps—the ends of celery and onions and carrot peelings—in a bag in the freezer. When the bag is full, pull it out to make vegetable broth. Or use chicken and turkey carcasses to make and can broth. Once the broth is made, the children can use it as the base of a soup.

For any of the above that you don't know for yourself or feel comfortable teaching, help your kids search YouTube, where you can find educational videos on anything you want to learn how to do. Don't wait for hard times to strike—start working now with common sense teaching so your children will be prepared to survive anything that comes their way. 🌱



Ruth O'Neil is a veteran home-school 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/>

Sustainable Living and Learning

*With so many people exploring home learning for the first time, we thought it might be helpful to return to *The Heart of Learning*, a book in which many parents have found inspiration and encouragement for their homeschooling journey. We hope you enjoy this excerpt from Chapter 16: Sustainable Living and Learning*

Many of us find it easy to dive into new things with gusto. Once we've made the decision to try something new, like homeschooling, we want to learn everything we can so we can be really, really good at it. We make big plans—we'll work our annual trip to the seashore into a unit on oceanography!—and create rosy images of winter days with our children studiously bent over their books at the kitchen table while we bake homemade crackers and upload photos of the latest clever homeschool project to our blog site.

Then reality hits.

The baby wants to be held constantly, so forget the homemade crackers. The trip to the shore was a blur of flip flops, sunscreen, and sandy snacks. And the fourth grader still can't seem to write legibly no matter how many times we remind her. The clever homeschool projects are assimilated into the general clutter without a single photo being snapped, and dreams of capturing the miraculous journey of home learning in weekly blog posts is long lost. In a short time, our resources—physical, emotional, financial—are exhausted.

We often create unrealistic expectations of ourselves and our homeschooling. Rather than helping us become better teachers, this only serves to wear us down even more. Pretty soon, homeschooling begins to feel impossible, too difficult, too time-consuming, too life-consuming.

So how can we make home learning sustainable? How can we arrange our lives so that homeschooling becomes do-able and not an added stress in an already overflowing life?

If we really want our homeschooling lifestyle to work for our families in the long run, we have to design sustainability into it. How do we do that? There are lots of ways, and the answer is different for every family, but here are some basic ideas.



Slow down

When we slow down, we can find lots of things to appreciate. Living life in fast forward usually means missing or skipping over all the delicious little details that bring us joy and contentment. Nature observations (a bee visiting a flower patch, a bird building a nest, a puppy exploring snow for the first time) are always best enjoyed at a leisurely pace. Heartfelt conversations—especially those quiet ones that happen at bedtime—can't be rushed. It takes time to express oneself fully and to respect the thoughts and feelings of others. Slowing down sends a message to ourselves, to our children, and to the world that life is worth savoring, that we are people who take the time to enjoy life.

Taking the Long View

Creating a lifestyle of learning means that we will be learning right along with our children. Our lessons might not be about fractions and prepositions (then again, they might be!), but they will be about how to create a healthy living and learning environment for everyone, including ourselves. Once we learn to see our own health and wellbeing as a priority, we'll find we have more energy, focus, presence, and attention for our children. What's good for one is good for all. When we apply sustainability to our living and learning, everyone wins. 🌱



Lawrence Williams co-founded Oak Meadow in 1975 along with his wife Bonnie, in order to homeschool their own children. Since then, Oak Meadow's curriculum and distance learning school have helped families around the world create successful homeschooling experiences.

Intentional simplicity

More often than not, it's a good idea to keep things simple. Cooking with what we have in the house (rather than taking another trip to the grocery store), scheduling distraction-free time into each day (whether that means free from phones, email, electronics, or whatever we find takes our attention away from the present moment), reducing clutter by putting away half the toys in the house (and rotating them periodically, or better yet, giving them away), or declaring a Little House on the Prairie Day once a month (when we can't use anything that needs to be plugged in)—these are all ways that we can intentionally build simplicity into our lives.

Downsize your life

We can downsize the number of outside commitments to give us more time to take care of ourselves or do what we love. We can downsize our scheduled activities to make our day more manageable. Some families choose to downsize their homes, living in a smaller space to save time, money, and resources (both environmental and personal). We can downsize our expectations of ourselves, of others, of what we think our house should look like or our homeschooling should be.

SOLUTIONS
FOUND

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by Erin Shelby

Activity: Play with Letters

Age Group: Preschool and kindergarten

Learning Outcomes: Letter recognition, development of fine motor skills

Learning the entire alphabet is a foundational skill for a young child, and one of my favorite children's books, *M is for Music* by Kathleen Krull, teaches the entire alphabet. Kids can do so much more with the alphabet than just look at it: they can play with it! Here are some fun ways you can teach the alphabet in a hands-on way:

Create cut-outs of letters. These can be made of construction paper, cardboard, or poster board. Your child can even decorate these. You might make a cardboard cut-out of the letter R with a tiny rocket attached to it to help your child make that connection, or a cardboard cut-out of the letter B with a tiny picture of a bee glued to it.

Use hand-lettering tracing paper. Place it over your carefully drawn letters or words so your child has a model to follow. This can help them gain confidence.

Go on a scavenger hunt for letters. Read the same story every day for an entire week. On the last day, have a “scavenger hunt” for a designated letter that is featured in the story. Throughout the week, present a cut-out shape of a letter to your child, and ask them to practice writing it. For example, in the story “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” the letters G and B are prominent, so these are ideal letters to ask your child to write and then search for in the story, on signs, or anywhere around them.

Kids can make letters tactile by using tiny, fuzzy pom poms. As adults, forming the correct shapes of letters comes second nature to us, but for kids, this is a learned skill. Adding some texture makes it a 3-D experience, which helps kids with their understanding of the shape of each unique letter. Get started by drawing the shape of any letter on a piece of paper; make the letter fill the entire page. Then, have your child glue pom poms on it until they cover the whole letter. Encourage them to feel the shape of the pom poms to feel the shape of the letter. You can do this for each letter of your child's name—they'll have fun seeing and feeling their name in pom poms.

Shaping letters from Play Doh, modeling clay, or beeswax is another fun activity. There are lots of great recipes online for homemade play dough (and your child can help you make it!).



Activity: When Did it Happen?

Age Group: 2nd grade

Learning Outcome: Vocabulary development

This is another activity that lets a story be your guide—hearing stories helps develop vocabulary! Every day, for an entire week, you will read the story. Be sure you've already identified important moments in the text. For example, if you're reading “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” some important moments are when she discovers that the porridge is too hot, too cold, and just right.

At the end of the week, can your child put these important moments in the order that they happened? You can photocopy or scan and print pictures of the “important moments” of the story to create small picture clues. On the final day, your child will put the pictures in chronological order. Provide a numbered sheet of paper, and ask them to put the story on paper the way it happened in the book. Completing this activity is a good way to assess how well a child can retain and sequence information.

Activity: Service Learning**Age Group:** All ages**Learning Outcomes:** Self-reflection, personal growth

Is your middle schooler passionate about a cause? Do they want to change the world? Is your high schooler interested in fighting climate change or social injustices? Service learning could be the perfect opportunity, helping those who are vulnerable, hungry, or hurting. The homeless, veterans, senior citizens, or victims of natural disasters could benefit from your creative ideas. What can you do? You might decide to:

Create a food closet at your place of worship. Enlist your children to get creative about ways to encourage others to donate food.

Knit gloves, hats, scarves, or mittens for the homeless. Even young children can learn to knit; handwork is an excellent way to help children develop the manual dexterity needed for writing.

Volunteer your time in a community garden. Many kids love to garden! If you have your own garden, the produce you grow can be shared with neighbors or donated to your local food pantry.

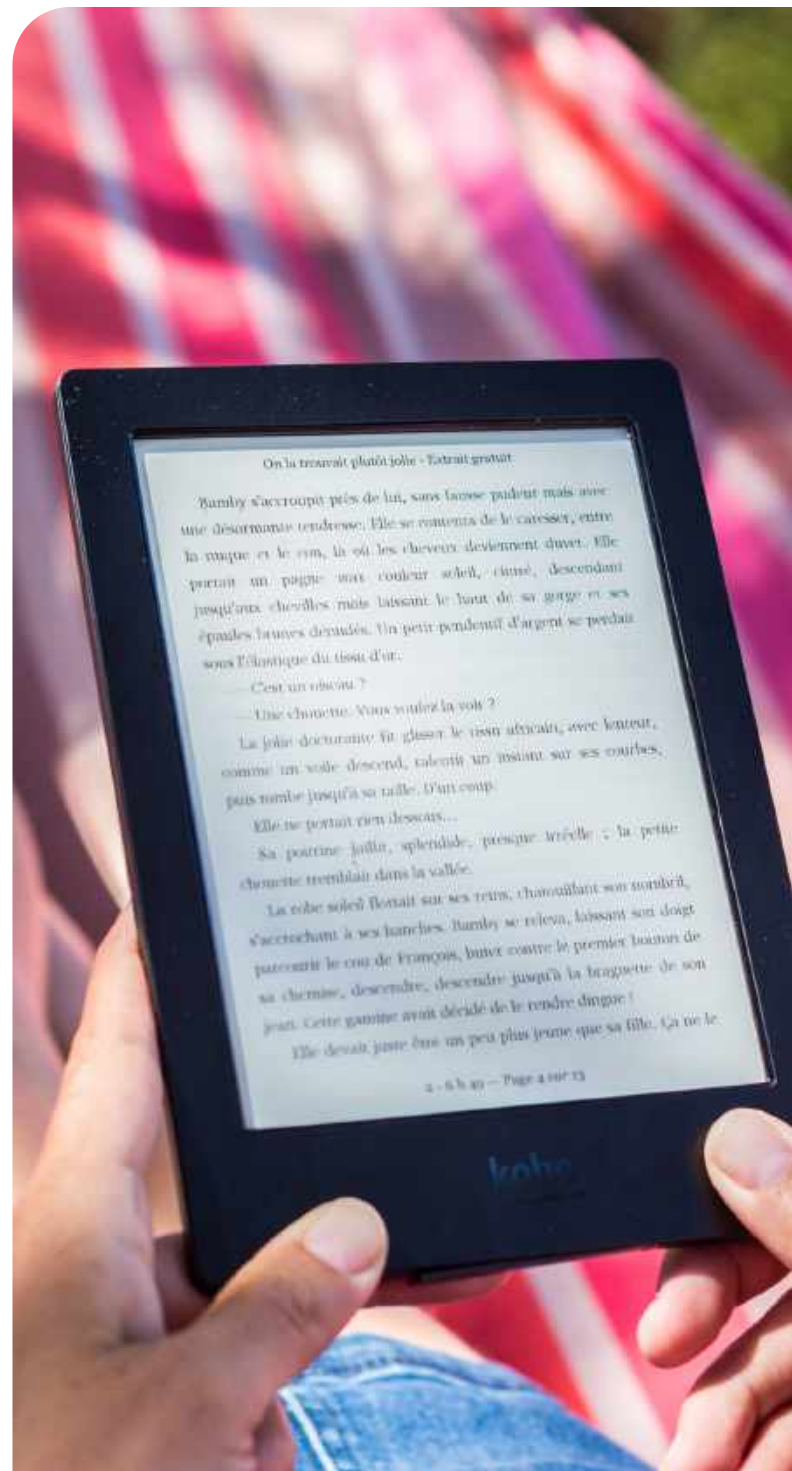
Start a Little Free Library in your community. If you love to read and want to help others, this could be the project for you. Go to LittleFreeLibrary.org to learn more.

Donate money or unused items to charity. Overwhelmed with a mess? Declutter your home, and make it a family project. Get everyone on board by having each member of the household identify items they no longer want or need. You could host a garage sale and donate the profits to your charity of choice, or simply donate the items to a charity that sells items in a thrift shop.

Service learning can make us grateful for what we have and more conscious of the needs of others. Using the skills that your family already has, you can create real solutions that will help someone else.

**Activity:** Foreign Language Podcast**Age Group:** All ages**Learning Outcome:** Foreign language acquisition

Is it ever too early to learn a language? Probably not. If you've been wanting to learn Spanish (or any other language), but you just haven't gotten around to it, try podcasts like this one: Coffee Break Spanish (<https://radiolingua.com/coffeebreakspanish/>). The podcasts are free, and they don't take a lot of time. Coffee Break is a perfect way to start learning a language, and if you're happy with the quality, you can upgrade to the paid version if you like. If you already speak Spanish, you can try learning French, German, Italian, or Swedish.





Activity: Field Trips

Age Group: All ages

Learning Outcome: Varies

A trip to the museum, a day at the zoo, or an outing to the aquarium all sound like fun, but do they really count as learning? Absolutely! Seeing animal life or historical artifacts in person can give you a perspective that just can't be found in a textbook. If your favorite spot is closed, you can still take a virtual field trip. Visit your favorite attraction online. Look for videos the organization has posted on its own website, YouTube, or Twitter. If you look through their archives or blog, you may find fun resources you can take advantage of, such as word searches, crossword puzzles, and coloring pages.



Activity: Games

Age Group: All ages

Learning Outcome: Becoming a lifelong learner

Need a break from the daily grind? Games are a reliable way to have fun while sneaking some learning into the mix. Scattergories, Boggle, and Scrabble can test and develop spelling abilities, while a game like Monopoly can be a fun dive into the world of finance. Operation can help build a small child's fine motor skills, while a game like Twister can strengthen the gross motor skills of a larger group. For a fun online game, you can play the UN World Food Free Programme Game, Free Rice, at freerice.com. This is a vocabulary game that can actually make a change in the world. For each answer you get right, they will send the cash equivalent of ten grains of rice to the World Food Programme to feed people who are hungry.

Learning doesn't have to be dull, and it doesn't have to be boring. Exploring stories, playing with letters, or finding a service learning project can help your family hit their stride with learning. While everything is subject to change, learning should be fun, and hands-on learning keeps it that way. Who knows how great your year could be? You could learn a new language, take field trips and play games, and make active learning a part of your lifestyle. 🌱



Erin Shelby is a former public-school music teacher and has previously written for Living Education. She loves to read and reviews books for a variety of publishers. You can follow Erin on Twitter @InspiredLivin15.



USING LEARNING STATIONS FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

by DeeDee Hughes

School classrooms are often set up with nifty learning stations where each student can be working on a different project or subject. When they complete the activity at one station, they move to the next one. While you might not have all the resources at home that a teacher does at school, you can still set up your learning space to encourage this kind of autonomy and self-direction. Another benefit of learning stations is that they can often accommodate students of varying levels—activity prompts and supplies can encompass different abilities. Your learning stations can be focused on themes and subjects from the curriculum (such as animal habitats or creative writing) or just offer a space for children to create, explore, and enjoy.

These stations can be changed daily or weekly depending on projects, interest, or space needs. If your space is limited, you can choose one area for self-directed learning, and then have a collection of neatly stored boxes or bins, each labeled with a topic or activity and holding all the necessary supplies. Another idea is to have a storage bin labeled for each day of the week: Monday might be the math ideas box, Tuesday's box might hold art supplies, Wednesday science, and so on. If you have multiple children, find space for each child to have room for simultaneous "learning station time," or stagger your schedule so each child gets individual time at the learning station while others are busy with you.

What goes in a learning station? Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Math Station: tangrams and other puzzles, playing cards, dice, ruler, tape measure, balance scale, empty egg cartons or ice cube trays for sorting and grouping, items for sorting and counting (pebbles, dried beans, marbles, coins, etc.), protractor, and bow compass.

Reading Station: create a book nook with a book basket and comfy pillows; think outside the box and include books of riddles, jokes, art, maps, cross-sections, and comics.

Writing Station: pencils, pens, colored pencils (and pencil sharpener), markers, envelopes, small journal (each child should have their own), writing prompts (these can be written on strips of paper and put in a jar for children to choose one), crossword puzzle book, and paper of different types, sizes, and colors.

Science Station: magnifying glass, microscope, telescope, binoculars, magnets and metal objects (such as paper clips), scale, compass, stopwatch, prisms, rocks and crystals, notebook and colored pencils (this station works well at a window that looks out onto a natural area for nature observations).

Maker Space: tools, broken toys and gadgets to take apart, wood, nails and screws, wood glue, dowels, cardboard tubes, hand-powered drill, rubber bands, string, and scissors.

Arts and Crafts Station: Paper (many different types and colors), scissors, glue, crayons, colored pencils, pencil sharpener, painting supplies and smock, modeling clay or beeswax, sewing supplies, and fabric.

Sensory Station: sand tray with small figurines, shells, stones, spoons, containers, and a small comb for raking patterns in the sand (you can also include a cup of water if the sand tray is waterproof).





When you set up a learning station, you might want to have a theme or general activity in mind so that the materials suggest certain explorations. You probably won't want to have all the materials displayed at once—that could be too overwhelming. Offering just a few items at a time will usually result in more focused, purposeful activity.

When you introduce children to each new station, show them what is available, and go over any safety rules. Depending on the age and temperament of your children, you can discuss ideas, have an activity prompt or instructions, or let them have free rein. Also show them how to clean up after they are finished so the station is ready for the next person or the next visit. As your children become familiar with learning stations, ask them what they might like included in the existing kits or what their ideas are for new learning station activities.

You don't have to reinvent the wheel every single day of the week, either. As you build activity boxes or develop your learning stations, you can rotate materials. Swapping out supplies or adding a new element can generate a new excitement. For instance, your child might show up at the science station one day to find binoculars, a bird book, a sketch pad, and colored pencils; another day, there might be a stethoscope, stopwatch, and a data table ready for filling out. If your student is doing a unit on geometry, the math station might include a Spirograph with colored pens and paper. Another day, the communication station might include a voice or video recorder and a few props (hats, scarves, and a wig or fake mustache, for instance) with a prompt to "Pretend you are a famous person from history being interviewed." Or it might have a sand tray with small figurines with the instructions to construct a scene and then write a story about it.

Don't go crazy looking at gorgeous ideas on Pinterest—if you go down that rabbit hole, you might never feel ready to set up your own learning stations. Just carve out a space wherever you can in your home, and get started. Your ideas will evolve as you and your children gain experience. With a little advance planning, you can boost your child's learning, engagement, self-motivation, and enthusiasm.

Active, engaged learning that encourages students to take ownership of their education—now that sounds like fun! 🌿



DeeDee Hughes is Oak Meadow's Director of Curriculum Development and former homeschooling parent. She lives in the Pacific Northwest where she is always exploring and learning.

Earth Cycles



Fall Nights

Punched Tin Lanterns

Enjoy the lovely late summer/early fall evenings by making a tin can lantern to light the dark and let you stay outside a little longer. Adult supervision is required for this project, but with help, children are capable of completing surprisingly detailed designs. Here are simple directions:

Materials:

- A large metal juice can or tomato can
- Hammer
- A big nail and a small nail
- Wire coat hanger

Instructions:

1. Take the lid completely off of the can, and wash it carefully. Leave the bottom of the can on. If the edges are sharp, you can cover them with tape or use pliers to bend the edges.
2. Dry the can well and draw a simple design on it with crayon.
3. Fill the can almost to the top with water, and freeze. (This will help the can keep its shape while you hammer on it.)
4. Put the frozen can of water on a towel so it won't roll.
5. Using the big and small nails, hammer holes at regular intervals along the outline of the design you have drawn. The more holes you make, the better your design will show.
6. Keep the water frozen. You may have to put the can back into the freezer several times before completing your project.
7. Make two holes near the top, and use a coat hanger wire for a hanging loop.
8. Pour out the ice and put a few inches of sand in the bottom of the lantern. Place a candle in the sand, and watch your design shine and light up the night.





Sleep-outs for Starry Nights

Have you ever slept out under the stars—no tent, just your sleeping bag and the stars above? Depending on where you live, autumn can be a perfect time to sleep outside in your yard, on your deck, or in the nearby woods.

Keep it simple the first time, and for little ones, the closer to the house, the better. If you have a big deck, it's the perfect starting point. A large sandbox or a soft lawn are also good choices for making a cozy spot to sleep. Try to find a place where your view of the night sky is relatively uninterrupted. Turn off house lights so that you can see better in the dark.

You can pair your sleep-out with a simple dinner cooked over a campfire in your sandbox or firepit, or you can just haul some couch cushions or an air bed out to the deck after an indoor dinner. Throw down a couple sleeping bags and pillows, and you're ready to go (it's okay to be comfortable on a sleep-out!). Put a flashlight next to each person's pillow, but try not to use them.

Snuggle down into your sleeping bags and wait for your eyes to adjust to the dark. It's amazing how well you can see with just a little starlight or a partial moon. If you can, wait for a clear night. If you're lucky, you'll spot a falling star. The Perseids meteor shower end in late August, but the Orionids put on a show from early October to mid-November. Regardless of the time of year, stargazing is fascinating.

Here are some things to look for during your sleep-out:

Sun and stars

- Watch the sunset and, if you are awake, the sunrise. Predict where and when the sun will rise and set.
- Identify constellations and the Milky Way, and find the North Star or the Southern Cross.

Moon

- Track the moon's progress across the sky.
- Make shadow puppets with the moonlight.

Animals in the air


- Try to spot bats swooping as they feed on bugs at twilight.
- Listen for owls calling.
- Wake up to birdsong; try to spot the birds you hear singing.

Animals on the ground

- Listen for sounds of animals moving around in the dark; often a very small animal can make a loud rustling sound.
- Use a flashlight to try to spot the animals making noises. (Remember, don't take any food on your sleep-out or you might tempt animals to come too close.)

Once you've settled in and the kids are getting drowsy, tell stories until you fall asleep. When you wake up, listen to the morning sounds and look for signs of nighttime visitors. Talk about what you'll do the same and what you'll do differently on your next starry night sleep-out. 🌿



A close-up photograph of two children sitting at a table, looking at an open book. The child on the left, with brown hair, is pointing at a colorful illustration of a landscape with trees and a body of water. The child on the right, with dark hair, is holding a black pen and appears to be writing or drawing on the book. The book's pages show text and illustrations, including a scene with a person in a green shirt. The background is a solid green color.

Grabbed by Group Learning: An Unexpected Sensory Experience

by Lindsay Banton

Merriam-Webster defines “experience” as “(verb) a direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge” and “(noun) something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through”. Experiential learning—both as a verb and a noun—arrived in our home unexpectedly. Because we have been homeschooling since the beginning, my kids haven’t felt the obvious pressures of ranking test scores, the subtle sorting of reading or math groups according to ability, or the worry about not measuring up academically or socially to the other kids in class. They’ve worked at their own pace with only themselves to compete against.

Surprisingly, our safe space did have a drawback. Comparison crept into our homeschool when I wasn’t looking. My kids’ natural tendency to compare themselves to someone still arose, and since I was the only other person around, they rivalled themselves to me. They judged their handwriting to mine. They measured their speed at writing sentences or solving math problems to me. They compared their sketches against mine. Without even being able to verbalize a slant toward appraisal, I noticed they could tell it was easier for me, which caused them to not want to try sometimes. At one point, I was so desperate for my children to see the product of another child, that I googled images of elementary handwriting to show them how they were doing. We were still marching forward academically, but I knew we needed to switch things up a bit to fight the growing frustration we all felt.

In a desperate attempt to salvage our homeschool goals, we joined a co-op to meet new people and gain perspective. We needed fresh perspective and new friends. I wasn’t sure how participating in a full-day co-op would affect our homeschool, but I was hopeful we would iron out some wrinkles. We were all so nervous the first week, but it was exciting. Would a change in our learning environment ease our comparison? Other than content, what would we learn from this experience? Is spending a whole day away from our school table worth it?

Immediately, I saw a change in my children. Our five senses were awakened in new ways because of our experience in this group learning setting. With their eyes, they saw other kids their age writing out sentences to diagram and noticed their handwriting. Sometimes it was beautiful, and other examples were sloppy. We watched as a friend mentally computed his math facts with a fully focused face. With our noses, we fought to keep our wits about us when the overpowering smell of science dissections filled the room, an odor that had never passed through our kitchen at home. With our ears, we heard another reader stumble over tricky words like we sometimes do at home and found grace for ourselves. We learned how to focus when the room was noisy or when we were distracted by the habits of people around us. We had more patience for our own nervousness when someone else was a bit uneasy about giving a presentation to their peers. We tasted treats brought in by classmates from around the world. We experienced touch while working in tight quarters in between two friends. Each of these little points of observation combined to show us that we are right where we need to be. We don’t have to be perfect; we don’t have to get it all right all the time. We just need to do our best and keep learning. Unrealistic comparison began to die and within a few weeks I could sense we were each taking a big, deep breath of relief.

In many cases, learning through experience teaches us about the topic in which we are studying. However, in our case, we experienced ourselves in a healthy comparison to how we are similar to other people. I fully support being individuals and expressing our own style with wacky hair day, zany sentences, or who we pick to research for the end-of-the-year assignment, but knowing your struggle to produce a great sounding sentence is similar to a peer’s relieves the pressure to get things right all the time. Experiential learning has meant using our senses to appropriately assess where we stand in comparison to peers. Our senses have been reawakened to positive results of healthy comparison. There have been countless “This is hard for you, too?” moments this year.

Another surprising and profound learning experience has been an improvement in work ethic in our home. My older kids have acquired a sense of ownership for their education that they did not previously possess. They realize that their schoolwork will take a little longer each day and have expressed a desire to arrive to class prepared and ready to learn. Their experiences in the group have changed their independent work. They make connections between school subjects, deepening their learning in new ways. I am thankful they are learning this as middle schoolers as opposed to college students.

I am a loud cheerleader for staying in your lane, not getting distracted by what is going on to your left or right, and focusing on doing your own thing. However, I have learned that experiential learning can come through watching our peers doing their work at their pace. We get to cheer others on in their academic pursuit. The experiences available in group learning provided my children with the chance to practice real time course corrections when listening to classmates respond by modifying their own answers or adding further information to a conversation in class. We can learn a great deal through the observation of others. The trick now is to balance it with a pride in our own work, knowing we are doing a pretty darn good job. Experiencing group learning grabbed our senses, caused us to question our comparisons, and proved to me that I never want to dissect anything in my kitchen! 🌿



Lindsay Banton is a homeschool mom to three kids, married to a fabulous man who roasts coffee at home, and is constantly working to grow her boot collection. She and her husband are veteran campus ministers at a university in New England.

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Curriculum Spotlight

Oak Meadow is always developing new and engaging learning experiences that encourage students to reflect, analyze, and form their own opinions. Here is a sampling of our newest high school courses (all are single-semester courses).

American Literature: The Westward Journey

Students explore diverse perspectives during the 19th-century Westward Expansion in this single-semester course. By studying first-hand accounts of exploration, immigration, innovation, and forced assimilation, students gain a deeper understanding of the past and present character of the United States.

Sample assignment from lesson 2:

Reread the passage in Muir's journal on pages 73 and 74, from the entry of June 16, beginning with "How many centuries Indians have roamed these woods nobody knows . . ." and ending with the sentence about nature "patiently trying to heal every raw scar." This passage compares the ways in which native peoples and European immigrants have influenced the landscape. What are your thoughts on this? Why do you think natives and immigrants of the 1800s were so different in the way they viewed and treated the land? Organize your response in one or two paragraphs.



Think About It

In life, it's important to avoid making assumptions about what "everyone" thinks or feels. For example, while the Shoshone and WallaWalla were welcoming to the white travelers, perhaps others did not want them there; likewise, while some Blackfeet and Sioux may have not wanted peace with other nations, others may have. Some of the established families in *My Ántonia* were welcoming to the immigrants, and others were not. Some immigrants were eager to learn the language and customs of their new land and take on a new identity; others held fast to their traditional ways.

Imagine yourself as someone whose generations of ancestors have lived in one place for hundreds of years. How might you feel about newcomers arriving? Would you feel one way if these newcomers wanted to adopt your culture and differently if they wanted to maintain their own traditional ways? Now imagine yourself as a newly arrived immigrant in a country far away. Would you want to become part of the established culture, or would you rather maintain your own cultural identity? Would you automatically trust the established population, or would you be wary of their motives and ways? Think about your response, and ask someone you know for their thoughts.

Sample assignment from lesson 10:

Many people view Lewis and Clark as explorers paving the way for others to migrate westward. However, what if you looked at Lewis and Clark's party as migrants—newcomers to a land already inhabited? How do these "migrants" differ in their behavior and attitude than the immigrants in *My Ántonia*? Think of how the families already established on the Nebraska prairie treated the new immigrants, and then consider how their behavior compares to the way the Native Americans treated the newly arrived white men. As we've seen in *My Ántonia* and *Sacajawea*, often newcomers are given very practical, essential help, without which they wouldn't have survived. Other times, the newcomers are not welcomed or treated well.

With these thoughts in mind, answer the following questions:

- What kind of help was offered to the Bohemian immigrants in *My Ántonia*? What help was given to the members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition by some of the native tribes they encountered?
- At times, the newcomers were seen as a threat or looked down upon. What evidence is there of this kind of tension in *Sacajawea*? What difference did it make that *Sacajawea* was traveling with Lewis and Clark's party?

Forensic Science

Students gain hands-on experience analyzing evidence and re-constructing crime scenes. Using historical data, students develop their observation and critical thinking skills as they explore the field of criminal justice. A lab kit and lab manual are included in this single-semester course, which can be done at home by independent study students or in a classroom setting.

Sample assignment from lesson 2:

Activity A: How Accurate Are Eyewitness Accounts?

In this activity, you take on the role of interrogator. Your goal is to challenge your own eyewitnesses on their accounts. Ideally, you want two or three people to unknowingly participate in your scenario. You want to be able to compare eyewitness accounts of multiple people from the same event to see where inaccuracies may lie.

Before You Begin

Think of a scenario you want to create. For instance, you might let the dog loose during dinner, bring in the mail in an overly dramatic way, or even stage a fake altercation with a sibling. Be creative, but safe. The scenario is entirely up to you. The idea is to create a scene that is out of the ordinary. Plan the exact time, place, what you (and if you have any accomplices) will be wearing, etc. What is the script for the encounter?

The Scene

Come up with a short disruption of some sort (five minutes or so), and then act it out for your two or three unknowing participants. Don't announce what you are doing. Really try to play it off as a real thing. Consider filming the event. This will help you recall exactly the events and what was said.

Follow Up

Let some time pass (at least an hour) before you let your participants in on the gag. But here is where the real lesson starts! Each of your participants needs to complete a series of questions related to your staged event. Ask them to identify the following, without input from anyone else. Tailor the questions to your scenario; you will likely need to modify or add your own questions.

1. What is today's date?
2. At what time did the event occur?
3. What was the weather at the time?
4. What was everyone wearing?
5. Describe the height, weight, hair style, eye color, etc., of those involved.
6. Describe the actions or events that took place.
7. What, if any, conversation took place? How long did it last? What was said?
8. How confident are you in your recounting of what happened?

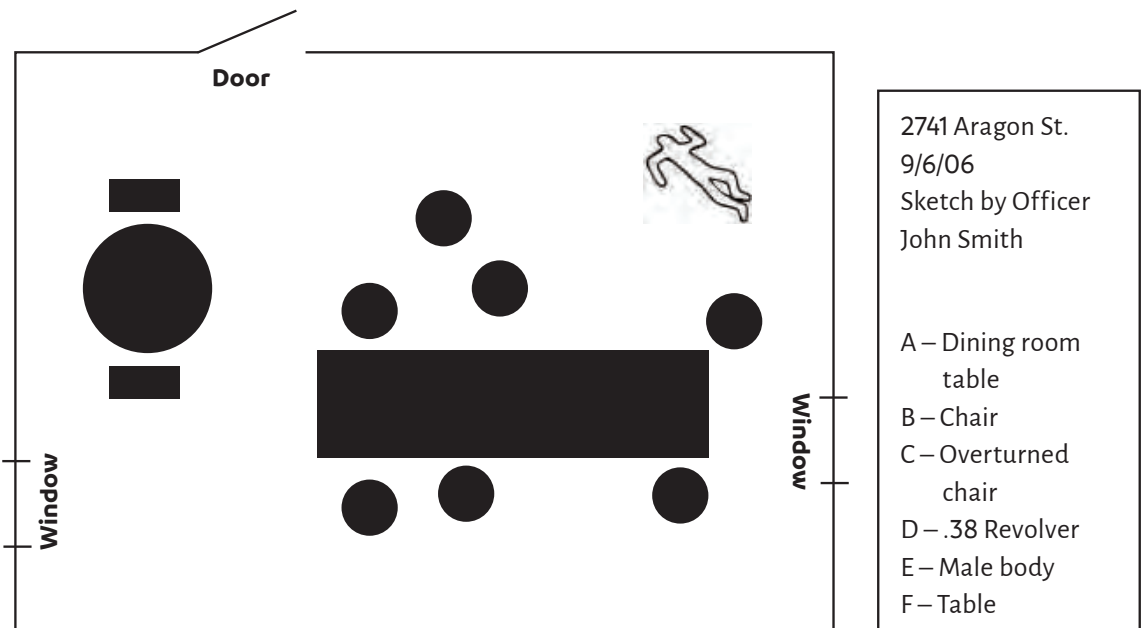
Putting It All Together

Compare the responses from your participants.

1. Were they accurate? If not, identify the inaccuracies.
2. How accurate do you think their answers would have been if they were not asked to recall information until tomorrow? Next week?
3. How accurate do you think their answers would have been if the events had taken place in a darkened room or outside at night? How does the situation influence a person's ability to recall information?

Example of a crime scene sketch from Lesson 2.

Students are asked to label three elements missing from the scene.



Composition I: The Writer's Craft

Students gain a strong foundation of essential writing skills. Writing is explored as an avenue of self-expression, and students use extensive revision practice to strengthen the purpose and clarity of their writing. Using *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*, students study the craft of writing as they develop their own unique voice.

Sample assignment from lesson 3:

Select at least five objects or belongings that are meaningful to you and represent who you feel yourself to be as a person. You might choose a book, painting, piece of jewelry, special rock or crystal, musical instrument, sports equipment, or any other object that is relevant to your life. Take photographs of each of the five objects, and then write a few sentences about the meaning of each object. Why did you choose this object? How does it represent you? How, if at all, do these objects connect to one another? Use precise language and sensory details to convey a vivid description. Create a photo essay by pairing each photograph and text in a cohesive visual manner—it could be a paper collage, a handmade book, a slide presentation, or any format you choose.

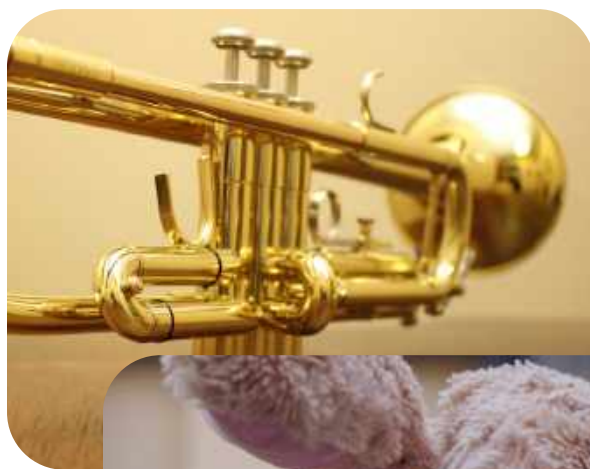


Sample assignment from lesson 11:

There comes a time in every child's life when they are in charge of themselves for the first time. Up until then, the adults around them have made the decisions and guided their actions and even, to some extent, their thoughts. Recall a time when you needed to truly think for yourself. Use the following questions to get you started:

- How old were you?
- Where were you when this experience occurred?
- Who else was there during the experience?
- What about the experience made you feel as though you were being asked to really think for yourself, rather than provide an answer or outcome that was clearly expected of you?
- Did the experience shift the way you think about yourself and the world around you? If you did not notice any differences at the time, are there any you see now in retrospect?
- If you honestly feel that you have never had the experience or opportunity to think for yourself, why do you think that is the case? What has stopped you or gotten in your way?

Write a descriptive paragraph or two about your memory of the experience. Capture specific details to set the scene for your reader. Pose questions about the experience and explore possible answers to those questions. Paint the picture as descriptively as you can!



Psychology: Journey Toward Self-Knowledge

In this course, psychology is approached as both a path to self-knowledge and a way to better understand humanity and the world around us. Students apply scientific processes to explore a variety of topics that can have a direct impact on the quality of their own experiences and relationships.

Sample assignment from lesson 11:

Read the following scenarios, and identify the components of classical conditioning in each one.

- a. Spider-Man likes to take a shower in the men's locker room after working out. During one such shower, he hears the Hulk flushing a nearby toilet. Suddenly, extremely hot water rushes out of the showerhead, causing Spider-Man severe discomfort. As he continues the shower, he hears another toilet flush and immediately jumps out from under the showerhead. Now he jumps from the shower whenever a toilet flushes.
 - Unconditioned stimulus (UCS):
 - Unconditioned response (UR):
 - Conditioned stimulus (CS):
 - Conditioned response (CR):
- b. Raven was happy when she heard about her family's plans to go to a water show. Then she listened to the weather report, which predicted temperatures exceeding 100 degrees. Raven suspected the weather would be hard to bear, but she went to the show anyway. As she watched the water skiers performing taxing routines to the blaring organ music, she got more sweaty and uncomfortable. Eventually, she fainted from the heat. After the family outing, Raven could never again hear organ music without feeling dizzy and faint.
 - Unconditioned stimulus (UCS):
 - Unconditioned response (UR):
 - Conditioned stimulus (CS):
 - Conditioned response (CR):
- c. Catwoman was really looking forward to lunch because her mother had made her favorite tuna salad sandwich. Unfortunately, the mayonnaise she used had been left out for too long and was tainted. Not long after eating, Catwoman felt extremely nauseated and had to rush to the bathroom. From then on, the mere mention of a tuna sandwich made her feel sick.
 - Unconditioned stimulus (UCS):
 - Unconditioned response (UR):
 - Conditioned stimulus (CS):
 - Conditioned response (CR):

Sample assignment from lesson 11:

Activity: Taste Aversions

Taste aversions comprise a unique form of classical conditioning because instead of several pairings during the acquisition phase, the pairing of associations only needs to happen once for the conditioning to take place. This efficiency makes perfect sense when you consider the adaptive support it provides for survival (which ties into the theme of the evolutionary impact on thought and behavior). Do you have a taste aversion? If so, analyze it from the perspective of a psychologist. Identify all the components in the process of conditioning, such as the UCS, CS, UCR, and CR. Describe generalization, discrimination, extinction, and spontaneous recovery, if relevant.

Next, interview four people (friends or family members) about their taste aversions. Analyze the components of their taste aversions in the same way you did your own. Share your psychological knowledge about the process with each person you interview.

Finally, record your findings, adding any comments about themes or patterns that emerged from your research. 🌿





Seasonal Table

At the beginning of each season, it's fun to create a table display using the natural materials of the season. Sometimes called a nature table, this space invites a quiet moment of daydreaming, peaceful reflection, or imaginative storytelling. By bringing the outside in, we are strengthening the connections to the natural world.

You and your children can add to your seasonal table throughout the season. Whenever you take a walk or go on a field trip, keep your eyes open for good additions to your seasonal display. Children can carry a basket or cloth bag to make collecting easier. As each new element is added, you might like to rearrange the "scene." Some families like to add small carved figurines to create a whimsical play space while others prefer a simpler approach, using only materials found in nature.

You might want to drape the table with a plain cloth first or use a tray to hold the display. In the summer, your seasonal table might include a bed of sand that holds shells and small pieces of driftwood; in autumn, the display might be set up on a bed of colorful fallen leaves. Your winter table might include a bed of pine boughs, while the spring table might be set upon a bed of moss or in a basket of sprouting grass. On the first day of each new season, remove everything from the table—certain favorite items might be re-added, but a fresh start gives it a new aliveness; it is a special way to bring awareness to each new season.

Another idea is to have a theme for your nature table. For an ocean theme, you might include shells, driftwood, dried kelp, sea glass, a crab claw, and a seagull feather. A table with a forest theme might include a small log with moss on it, birch bark, leaves, acorns, a rock with lichen on it, and a leafy tree branch in water. An animal theme might include animal fur, feathers, teeth, or bones, an abandoned bird's nest, a piece of shell from a bird's egg, and small animals shaped from beeswax.





Image credit: Mae Star Salinsky

Below are some ideas to get you started. Add anything else you find that represents the season to you.

For autumn:

- Pumpkins, gourds, or dried corn
- Dried seed heads
- Colorful fallen leaves
- Acorns or other nuts

For winter:

- Pine branches and pinecones
- Holly branch with bright red berries
- Paper snowflakes
- Interesting rocks

For spring:

- Abandoned bird's nest
- Early blooming branches or bulbs growing in a shallow bowl with pebbles and water
- Beeswax shapes of a bird in a nest with eggs
- Small bowl of water with tiny wildflowers floating in it

For summer:

- Flowers, fresh fruit, or vegetables
- Seashells or driftwood
- Dried kelp
- Daisy chain

You can also think of ways to add colors that represent and express the mood of each season.

- Autumn: deep reds, oranges, and orangey-yellows, and earth browns, like the colors of leaves in autumn and the final garden harvests.
- Winter: pure whites, dark blues and blacks, and charcoal grays, like the dark, early evenings and the blankets of white snow.
- Spring: bright greens, cheerful yellows, and rosy pinks, like the spring flowers that bloom and the new leaves on trees that return to life.
- Summer: sunny yellows and sky blues, like the bright sun-filled days and the clear blue skies.

It's also fun to have a few natural or polished rocks that go with each seasonal color:

- Autumn: amber and polished and tumbled stones that have the autumn hues.
- Winter: crystal and an amethyst (try putting them onto a small mirror to reflect the light of a candle).
- Spring: polished rocks that are rosy, green, and yellow.
- Summer: tiger's eye stones.

Keep in mind a nature table doesn't have to be big. A small vase with a flower, a few rocks, and a picture can be enough to honor the season. Children can add to that if they find something special.

Every seasonal table is unique, so use your imagination and have fun with it! 🌿

Wet felted acorns are always a fun addition to the seasonal table. Check out this Oak Meadow video to learn how to make them!





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