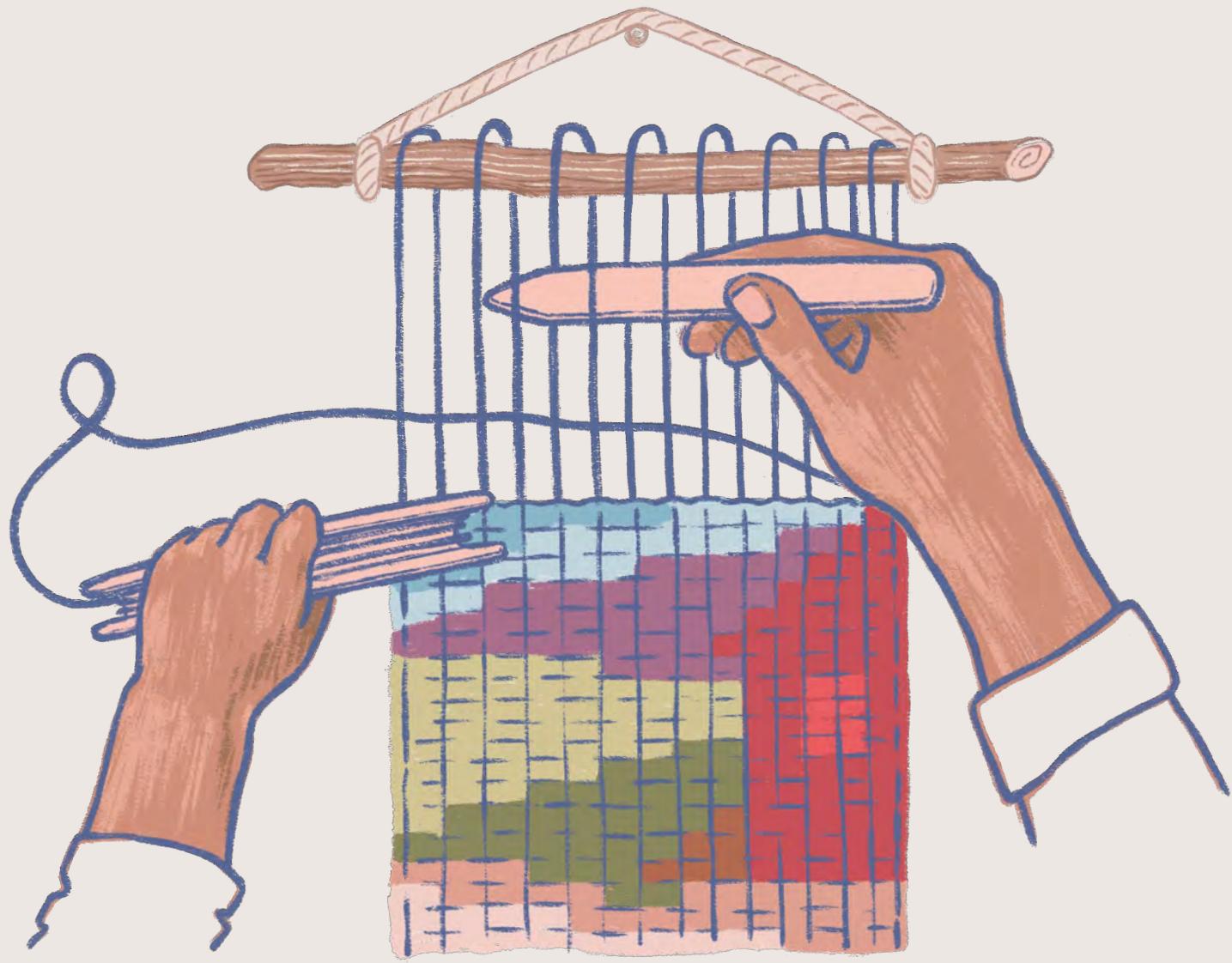


# Living Education

ISSUE #132

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## WEAVING A HYBRID LIFE

AUTUMN 2021

IN THIS ISSUE: ADVENTURES IN HOMESCHOOLING \* PASSWORD TO THE WRITER'S CLUB  
AUTUMN CRAFTS + ACTIVITIES \* K-8 LITERATURE THAT CELEBRATES DIVERSITY

# Welcome.

Life is a tapestry woven of the threads of our family, experiences, interests, jobs, relationships, and all the other bits and pieces that make up our days. As author Annie Dillard wrote, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."

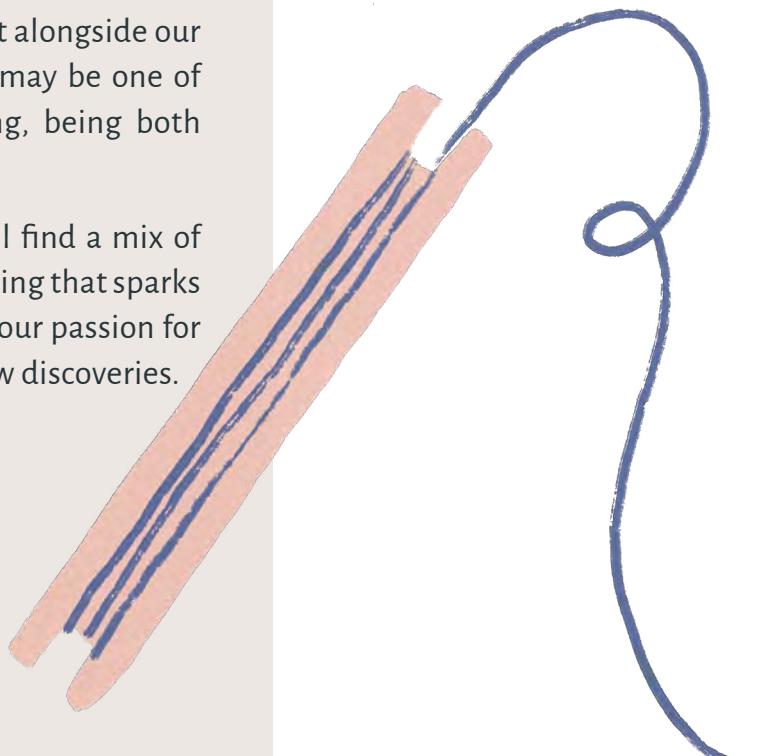
In a sense, every life is a hybrid of the many pieces of ourselves, but families who are homeschooling their children have a special kind of hybrid life. Many of us are parent, teacher, and student all rolled into one as we find ourselves learning right alongside our children. While being both parent and teacher may be one of the most challenging aspects of homeschooling, being both teacher and student is one of the greatest joys!

In keeping with the theme of a hybrid life, you'll find a mix of articles in this issue. Hopefully, you'll find something that sparks your interest, fires your imagination, and feeds your passion for creating a meaningful life full of learning and new discoveries.

Enjoy!

*Dee Dee*

DeeDee Hughes, Editor



# TABLE of CONTENTS:

04

## Finding the Passion in our Hybrid Life by Landis Carey

*Passion for learning and  
extraordinary gratitude...  
and it's not even 7:00 a.m.*

06

## Earth Cycles: Autumn Leaves

*Check out ideas for a Leaf  
Slide, Leaf Maze, and Fall  
Scavenger Hunt.*



10

## Adventures in Homeschooling by Erin Shelby

*Tired of the same old, same old?  
Here are some ideas for  
homeschooling adventures you  
can have without leaving home.*

12

## Curriculum Spotlight: K-8 Literature that Celebrates Diversity

*Can literature help students develop  
greater empathy, understanding,  
and respect for others? You bet!*



14

## Invisible, Intentional, Industrial: Developing Strong Writers by Lindsay Banton

*Developing strong writing skills is  
an essential element of education  
and one many homeschooling  
parents struggle with. What  
makes a good writer?*

16

## Password to the Writer's Club by E. R. Zarevich

*Where can young writers find a  
supportive audience? Try a  
writers' group!*

18

## Archives: Five Ways to Keep Your Balance in an Unbalanced World

*Here are some tips to help you  
maintain a sense of balance in the  
midst of your busy, messy,  
wonderful life.*

20

## Autumn Craft: Community Quilt

*Making a patchwork quilt is a great  
way to bring people together.*



# FINDING THE PASSION IN OUR HYBRID LIFE

BY LANDIS CAREY

The sun is rising over the hills as I head down the country road that leads me back to our house. I've already gotten in over 8,000 steps, and it's not even 7 a.m. It's crisp and the air is cool, but temperatures will warm later this morning, and I'm hopeful we can throw open the windows during our morning lessons.

I hear the roar of it before I see its signature yellow coming around the bend. The school bus is already en route to get children to school. As it passes, I'm filled with extraordinary gratitude. My three kids are still cozy in their beds, their little bodies growing and their minds dreaming of adventures that await. My husband has a hot cup of coffee sitting on the table next to him while he reads and listens for the house to wake up. The only alarm clock that's ever set is the one on my wrist that urges me out of bed for my early-morning walks.

Walking helps me prepare for the day ahead, and it's when I reflect. Most mornings, my mind wanders to our homeschool. How are our efforts serving the kids? How are they serving me? My husband? I know our cats love the many snuggles they get as a result of my nine-year-old and seven-year-old being home. It's never a question of whether we will continue homeschooling—I know we will. My reflections most always dance around the activities and additional content we layer into our homeschooling, above and beyond our Oak Meadow curricula.

This particular morning, I'm pondering whether my nine-year-old is learning enough history. Should I guide him through more? Should I see what classes Ootschool

offers? I ask these questions not because of any "shoulds" of external standards; rather, I ask them because he's found a deep passion in history, and I want to stoke his interest. I'm also thinking about summer reading and the reading contest we started in January. My newly-reading seven-year-old has read more books than anyone else in the house! He found a deep love of all things Mo Willems, especially *Elephant & Piggie* and his brother has tackled a good number of novels since January 1st. What creative awards can I think of for our reading party in December?

My mind switches gears to my older son's sudden interest in learning to type. Do I support that at this time? Would that be considered screen time? I'm not sure, but then I ask myself, "Why not let him try?"

We are an enrolled family with Oak Meadow, using the first and third grade curricula as our foundation, and we layer online classes, in-person nature days, sports teams, and art classes on top. My kids have explored drawing, baseball statistics, and *Little House on the Prairie* with other children in online classes. They have joined baseball and soccer teams and have both gained tremendous skill in their chosen sports. Some of their afternoons are spent with a local environmental conservancy group doing wonderful outdoor explorations and play. They learned to tie dye at a local art center, and they often join me in my pottery studio to play with clay. Piano lessons are on Thursday mornings at 11:30, a time slot that ensures the boys are awake and ready to learn.

My boys have transformed into confident and curious learners in our two years homeschooling. They've found



passions, and they've ditched anxiety. They've built a tree fort on their own. They've made a cardboard puppet stage complete with curtains and put on plays.

Our schedule is completely malleable and allows us to deeply explore our interests and even leave behind things that aren't serving us. We are not bound by bus schedules and marking periods. We are free to learn, but what's most important is we are free to find our passions. Oh, and this includes me as well. We are active participants in our own lives.

Last year, I took an editing course with UC Berkeley Extension, and I loved it. It challenged me in incredible ways, and I learned a lot. Our boys have benefitted from my reignited love of grammar, and it's been a lot of fun to share it with them.

I've digressed. Back to how the day is going.

My littlest, our four-year-old, is now at her local preschool. After walking her down the block, we gather around our table to see what the day holds. We begin with stories from the library and an in-depth discussion about *Farmer Boy*, neither of which is part of our Oak Meadow work.

After lunch, my younger son isn't connecting with a new math concept the way his curriculum is presenting it, but I'm not concerned because we are free to quickly forge another path. This is when my endless gratitude returns. We don't get stuck; we keep moving, and I get to be there to witness it all. How long would it have taken for

**“  
Stoke your  
children’s interests  
whenever you can. If  
you do, that’s how  
they find their  
passions.”**

someone to realize he was stuck if he had been in a classroom setting?

I'm still mulling this over when my older son presents me with a few things he has typed. Earlier that morning I'd handed over an ancient laptop and showed him a few quick steps in the word processing program. Now he's handing me a love note and a play he's written. Both are very simple, both have typos, and both have misplaced underlined text, but what in the world does it matter? It doesn't! He's incredibly proud of his new skill. It seems this summer we will be adding typing work to our swimming, art, baseball, and soccer. The thought makes me smile.

Stoke your children's interests whenever you can. If you do, that's how they find their passions.

---

Landis Carey lives in New Jersey with her husband and three children. She began homeschooling in 2019 to reconnect with her children after she battled a rare cancer. Today she is well and thriving alongside her children as they find their passions and deepen their connections. Writing and walking are her therapies. She makes pottery when time allows. Follow her on Instagram at [@landiscarey](https://www.instagram.com/landiscarey/).





EARTH CYCLES:  
**AUTUMN  
LEAVES**



**W**hen autumn arrives, nature puts on a show in the Northern temperate climate zones.

If you live where autumn leaves turn colors and fall all over the ground, try these fun outdoor activities.

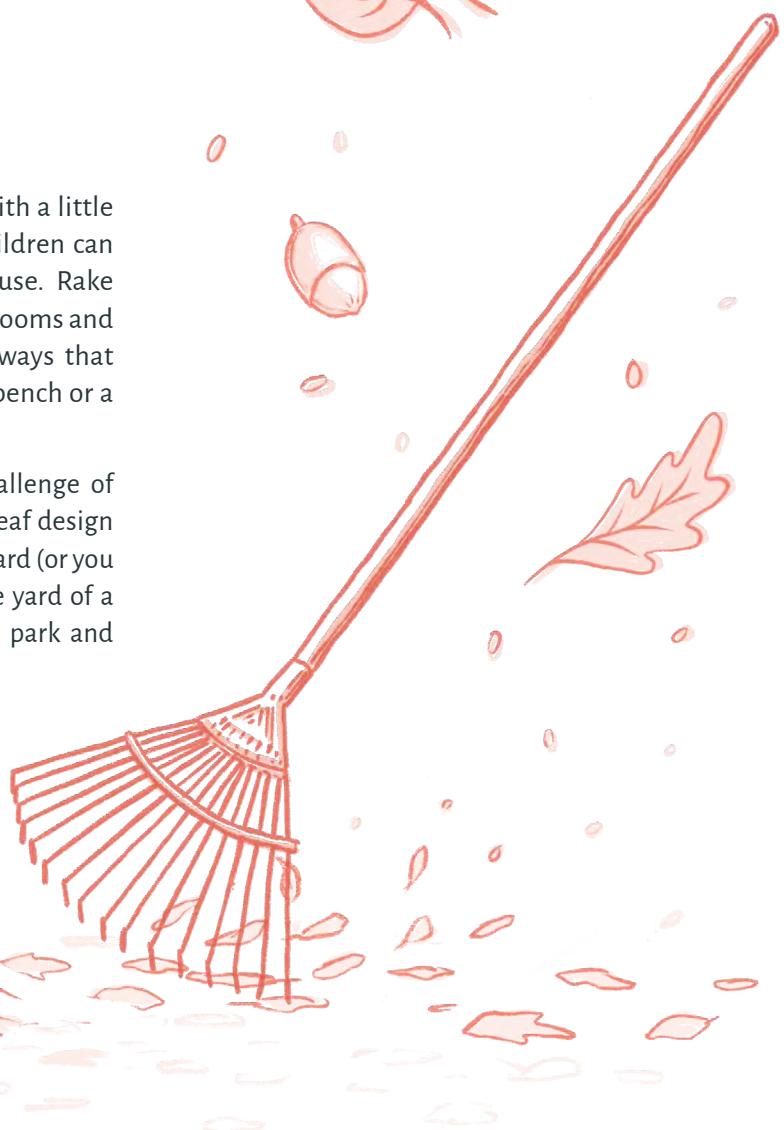
### LEAF PILE SLIDE

If you have leaves on the ground and a slide, you can rake up a big pile and place it at the bottom of the slide. Keep adding leaves until the pile is high enough to cover the entire end of the slide. Each time a child slides down, they land in a flurry of leaves that cushions their landing. Rake the leaves into a pile again for the next child.

### LEAF HOUSES, SPIRALS, AND MAZES

Raking leaves may sound like a chore to some, but with a little imagination and a child-sized rake, you and your children can transform a lawn covered in leaves into a leaf house. Rake passageways leading to rooms that connect to other rooms and more passages. Or rake a giant spiral or long pathways that wind around trees, bushes, and eventually lead to a bench or a picnic spot.

If you have older children, they might enjoy the challenge of creating a maze on paper and then replicating it as a leaf design on the lawn. If you don't have a deciduous tree in your yard (or you don't have a yard), you might ask to rake leaves in the yard of a friend or neighbor, or you can take your rakes to the park and leave behind a leaf design for all to enjoy.



## FALL SCAVENGER HUNT

For an activity the whole family can enjoy together, try a scavenger hunt. You can make a list of items to find and have people pair up to see which team can find everything on the list first. Or you can make it a more cooperative game by having everyone work together to find the list of items. If you have pre-readers, you can draw simple pictures of what to find or cut out photos and create a Bingo-style card. Check off each item as it is discovered.

Create your scavenger hunt list based on your locale and the season. If you live in the forest, your list will look different than if you live in grasslands, desert, city, or near the ocean shore. Depending on the items you choose, you might have players collect items, which you can later use for craft projects or decorations. You might also have scavenger hunts based on living things that players need to search for and check off the list without disturbing the plant or animal. Another option is to bring a camera and take pictures of each item found.

This is an excellent activity to do when taking a walk or hike. It can be done in a familiar area or when you are exploring somewhere new.

Here is a nature-based list of possibilities that you can tailor to your environment.

- Pine tree
- Something red
- Something yellow
- Something orange
- Interesting rock (this is open to interpretation!)
- Feather
- Tree with a hole in it
- Dried seed pod
- Bird
- Squirrel
- Ant
- Stick shaped like a Y
- Dried grass that comes up to your knee
- A sapling taller than you
- A hole in the ground made by an animal
- A tree with a trunk too wide to reach your hands around (or for two or more people to reach around holding hands)
- A rock large enough to stand on
- A fallen tree

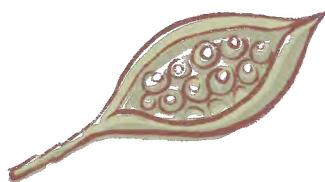
For a new twist on this activity, create a **Gratitude Scavenger Hunt**.

- Find something you love.
- Find someone to shake hands with.
- Find something that makes you smile.
- Find something that makes you feel happy.
- Find something or someone to hug.

Brainstorm with your family to add other items to the list. This game is sure to bring big smiles and warm hearts!

# FALL SCAVENGER HUNT!

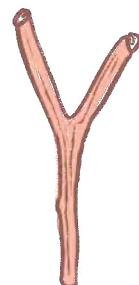
DRIED SEED POD



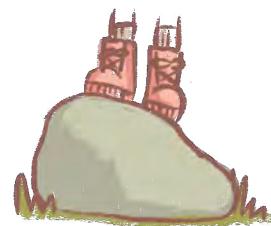
SOMETHING YELLOW



STICK SHAPED LIKE A "Y"



ROCK BIG ENOUGH  
TO STAND ON



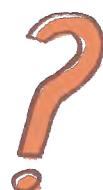
SQUIRREL!



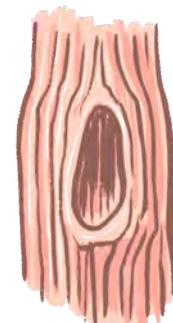
FEATHER



SOMETHING ORANGE



TREE WITH A HOLE IN IT



# ADVENTURES IN HOMESCHOOLING

BY ERIN SHELBY

*TIRED OF THE SAME OLD, SAME OLD WITH YOUR HOMESCHOOLING? READY FOR SOME ADVENTURE? CONSIDER THE WAYS THAT THE WORLD, TRAVEL, AND OTHER CULTURES MIGHT SERVE TO INSPIRE YOU THIS YEAR. HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED ON YOUR OWN ADVENTURES IN HOMESCHOOLING.*

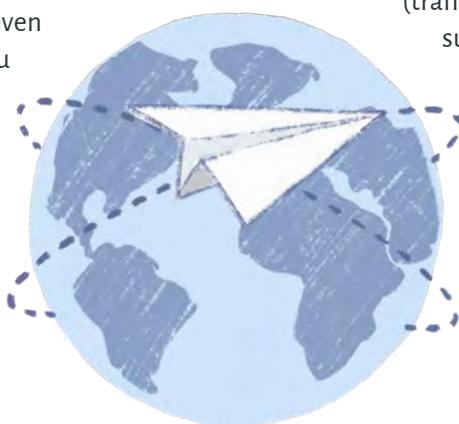
## BUY A GLOBE

You can find information about anything you want online, but there's something special about seeing and feeling the shape of the planet with your own hands. Do you have a globe, an atlas, or a world map in your home? As a kid, I loved getting a globe as a gift. Even better, mine was a glow-in-the-dark globe. Purchase your own model of the world—it doesn't have to be expensive—and you'll have lots of fun! Test and stretch your student's knowledge of where states, countries, continents, mountains, and oceans are located. You can even discover places in the world that you weren't even aware of! Take turns with your child closing your eyes, spinning the globe, and putting your finger down. Where did your finger land? What can you learn about that part of the world?

## ORDER TRAVEL BROCHURES

Does this sound a little old school to you? It is! Getting paper mail might be old-fashioned, but young kids in particular might like getting something in the mail just for them.

Start by writing to the department of tourism in a state you'd like to learn about. If you wish, you can do this for all fifty states. By requesting free information, your mailbox will start to fill with free brochures (translation: free resources!). You'll be surprised by how much free material you can get about national parks, historical sites, and important monuments.





## TRAVEL THROUGH FALL

Fall is an amazing time of transition. In many places, the heat of summer has stopped, leaves are changing color, and the harvest of pumpkins is taking place. As adults, we often take for granted the changing seasons. Young kids have to learn the differences between the seasons and what it means for leaves to change color and temperatures to drop. If the leaves don't change color where you live, consider taking a trip northward to explore seasonal changes firsthand.

You can also observe the change of the seasons every day even without traveling. Create a weather journal with some basic facts. What time did the sun rise? What time did the sun set? What is the temperature outside? Purchase a thermometer, if you don't already have one, and place it in your garden or patio. You can also take pictures or videos to capture the slow changes occurring in nature. Take snapshots of the grass, trees, or leaves, and compare how they've changed over time. Create a poster or slide show that highlights the seasonal changes.

## TRAVEL THROUGH TIME

Have you ever wanted to travel through time? It isn't completely impossible. You can always step back in time with a novel that's set in a different era and enjoy it as a family read-aloud. TV shows and movies that are set in prior times can be a great learning experience to show us the social customs and norms of the past. They can also reveal the struggles and expectations that people were up against. If your teen hasn't yet seen *Fiddler on the Roof*, how might they react to the idea that in those days their parents would have to choose their marriage partner? For many young people today, it's a wild idea! Traveling through time in this manner can help us better understand the struggles and victories of our ancestors.

## CELEBRATIONS, OLYMPIC STYLE

Do you enjoy the Olympic games? Why not use the games as inspiration for a global adventure at home? Students can choose their favorite Olympic sport and find out which countries medaled in the sport in the most recent games. Watch videos of the winning performances, and learn about the city that hosted the games. Then research the culture, cuisine, and music from some of the countries that were represented. Make a celebration of it and cook recipes to salute the accomplishments of these countries. For example, if you're looking for British recipes, you can visit [BBCGoodFood.com](http://BBCGoodFood.com) for ideas. If you're looking for Greek or Italian dishes, try [AllRecipes.com](http://AllRecipes.com). You might also like to watch a cooking and travel show that features food from the regions you are celebrating.

...

No matter where your home is, you are a citizen of the world. You can plan adventures for your family that give everyone a taste of the world, even without leaving home. With imagination and a spirit of fun, you can make homeschooling an adventure! *Bon Voyage!*

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*Erin Shelby has previously written for Living Education. She has been a guest blogger for Medishare.com and Shine-A-Light Press. You can visit Erin online at [ErinShelby.wordpress.com](http://ErinShelby.wordpress.com).*





# INVISIBLE, INTENTIONAL, INDUSTRIAL: DEVELOPING STRONG WRITERS

BY LINDSAY BANTON

Usually attractive interior design uses triangles when decorating because it is pleasing to the eye. Embarrassing family legends grow like big fish stories each time they are told. Inside jokes between friends deepen the relationship because they share exclusive secrets.

Much like the three seemingly unrelated statements just mentioned, good writing is held together by invisible, intentional, and industrial threads woven through the piece. Developing strong writing skills is an essential element of education and one many homeschooling parents struggle with. How can we help our students learn to write well? What makes a good writer?

A good essay holds the attention of the reader without forcing them to remember what was said four sentences ago. To help the reader focus on key ideas or details, a good writer subtly offers reminders throughout the piece. Good writing causes the reader to overlook the effort needed to read and allows them to simply enjoy

the content. And much like a good stand-up comedy routine, a strong essay circles back and repeats for us how it all began in the first place.

Over the years, my husband and I have developed a love for clean stand-up comedy. As you can imagine, finding clean comedy is a hard task, but it is out there if you look hard enough. As people who communicate publicly, we find ourselves studying comedians. How do they keep the attention of the audience? What mannerisms do we observe? How do they move from topic to topic without the listeners feeling lost or wondering how they arrived at a very different subject than they were hearing about just a few moments ago?

Something that we have observed (and now judge all comedians against) is whether a comedian carries a singular thread throughout the entire routine. They might start the show with a bit about the silly things their young children do, move on to traveling and the weird habits of their international relatives, switch to

HOW CAN WE HELP OUR STUDENTS

LEARN TO WRITE WELL?

WHAT MAKES

A GOOD WRITER?

something culturally relevant, take a hard turn to something that seems completely unrelated, then finish the show by circling back to the strange and silly things about their kids. While telling sixty minutes of jokes about all sorts of topics, the comedian's children were invisibly woven throughout the entire show. Like entering and exiting a roller coaster, the listeners are reminded of where they began and where they have ended and surprisingly discover themselves in the same place but enhanced by the journey.

I participated in a writing workshop focused on weaving a tapestry of words to create an intricate and detailed piece of art. High-quality writing is like walking along a well-defined path in a garden packed with a great variety of plants. The path is intentionally well-marked so the visitors know where to walk. However, each turn in the path invites the visitor to wander farther and wonder what comes next. The visitor trusts they will be shown the way through the garden and can simply enjoy the discoveries around each bend in the path. The workshop facilitator provided examples of what he defined as good writing, which, like the comedians I already enjoyed, included at least three parts woven throughout the piece.

Surprisingly I heard much of the same instruction my daughter was hearing in her eighth-grade writing course:

- Opening and closing sentences of a paragraph should have a few words in common.
- Opening and closing paragraphs should also have a few phrases in common.
- The major themes of the piece should be woven throughout.

If eighth graders could be taught to write with intentional flow and stand-up comics use it successfully, I figured it must be a winning formula.

A writing student can practice the habit of weaving one, two, or three topics through each paragraph thus weaving it through the length of the entire piece. Encourage your budding writers to overlap the themes differently each time to prevent cookie-cutter paragraphs. When weaving has happened well enough, it almost becomes unseen, causing the reader to wonder how they arrived back at the starting point without even noticing.

I'll offer an example. The eighth-grade students were assigned to write a ten-page short story as a final project. Being extraordinarily creative, my daughter struggled to

get started because her ideas were all over the board. I helped her pick three things I knew she enjoyed and might provide a good deal of content from which she could develop a story. Once she had a familiar location (the dilapidated shed in our backyard), the characters (the variety of wildlife in our backyard), and the problem (which critter clan had claimed territory of the corners of the shed as their residence), her creative wheels began turning. She developed a story with an elaborate plot, detailed character profiles, and an intricate climax. She knew how to start and where she wanted her story to end. All that remained was squeezing herself in the space in between the beginning and end, then elbowing enough room to fit her ideas in the middle.

Although her fictional story didn't have clearly defined paragraphs like a historical essay might, she wove several common threads through the story. The reader was able to follow her train of thought effortlessly because the tapestry of her story was held together by the common industrial strength threads of location, character, and plot.

Like the interior design that incorporates pleasing triangles, the famous family stories told at all the gatherings, or the inside jokes frequently acknowledged between close friends, a familiar and common thread will hold writing together. The work is of good writing is **invisible** because we don't want the reader to notice the specific-yet-hidden structural support strategy. The work is **intentional** because we want the reader to reach the destination, hopefully wishing the ending hadn't arrived so soon and wanting more. And the work is **industrial** because the framework must be able to corral and support the wildest ideas we can fathom.

By helping young writers understand the invisible, intentional, and industrial aspects of the writing craft, we can nurture their innate ability to express their unique selves to the world.

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*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. You can read more at [www.lindsaybanton.com](http://www.lindsaybanton.com).*

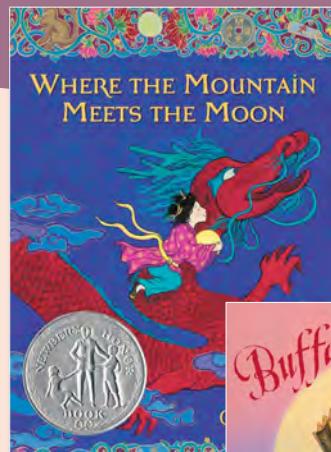


# CURRICULUM SPOTLIGHT: K-8 LITERATURE THAT CELEBRATES DIVERSITY

In Oak Meadow's ongoing efforts to provide a more inclusive curriculum, we have recently updated some of the literature we use. We are replacing older titles, such as *Dr. Dolittle*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Pippi Longstocking*, and *Little House in the Big Woods*, with books that better represent the diversity of our learning community and the world.

Many of us love classic literature, even while we recognize that many of the stories include outdated values and language that are no longer appropriate today. We encourage families to read a wide variety of books from different time periods and perspectives, using outdated or inappropriate passages to prompt a discussion on your family's values and views. Our goal in replacing these titles in our curriculum with more diverse perspectives and authentic voices is to help all students develop greater empathy, understanding, and respect for others.

We will continue to prioritize diversifying the voices and viewpoints in our curriculum so that we can present a heart-centered education that helps students create a better, more just world. In the meantime, here's a quick look at some of the titles we've incorporated that feature BIPOC characters (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).



## GRADE 2

**The Book of Cultures** by Evi Triantafyllides presents 30 fictional stories featuring children from different countries, followed by a snapshot of each culture with fun facts and engaging activities.

## GRADE 3

**Where the Mountain Meets the Moon** by Grace Lin is a story of adventure and friendship played out across a backdrop of Chinese folktales.

**Wishtree** by Katherine Applegate shows how a neighborhood, dismayed by the mistreatment of a new Muslim family, pulls together to welcome them and show the true meaning of community.

## GRADE 4

**The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street** by Karina Yan Glaser follows a biracial family as they work together to be able to stay in their beloved brownstone home and close-knit neighborhood community.

**The Turtle of Oman** by Naomi Shihab Nye tells the story of the love between a boy and his grandfather as the boy's family prepares to leave their home in Oman and move to the United States.

## GRADE 5

**1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving** by Catherine O'Neill Grace and Margaret M. Bruchac uses beautiful photographs of the Plimoth Plantation and its residents to provide a balanced and historically accurate telling of the first harvest celebration between Native Americans and European settlers.

**Buffalo Bird Girl: A Hidatsa Story** by S. D. Nelson tells the story of a young Hidatsa girl growing up along the Missouri River on the Great Plains.

**The Birchbark House** by Louise Erdrich takes place in 1847 on an island in Lake Superior, where a young Ojibwa girl moves through the activities and traditions of the seasons while dealing with ordinary family life.

## GRADE 6

**Once There Was, Twice There Wasn't: Fifty Turkish Folktales of Nasreddin Hodja** by Michael Shelton is a humorous and entertaining collection of traditional stories from the Muslim world.

**1001 Inventions and Awesome Facts from Muslim Civilization** reveals amazing discoveries and inventions from the Muslim world, many of which are still integral to modern life.

**The Ugly One** by Leanne Statland Ellis takes place in a fifteenth-century Incan village, where a young woman who was badly scarred as a baby gains a sense of self-worth as she trains to become a shaman.

## GRADE 7

**A Single Shard** by Linda Sue Park follows a young potter's apprentice in twelfth-century Korea who discovers hidden strengths when he is sent on an important journey to see the emperor.

**Esperanza Rising** by Pam Muñoz Ryan tells the story of a girl and her mother who are forced to leave a life of wealth and privilege in Mexico and must adapt to life as migrant farm workers in California during the Great Depression.

**Aleutian Sparrow** by Karen Hesse takes place during the Japanese invasion and occupation of the Aleutian Islands in Alaska in 1942, when a young Aleut and her community are forced into internment camps.

**Code Talker: A Novel About the Navajo Marines of World War Two** by Joseph Bruchac follows the lives of Navajos who served as Marines during World War II and played a key role in the outcome of the war.

**Brown Girl Dreaming** by Jacqueline Woodson portrays the life of an African American woman coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s, experiencing firsthand the Civil Rights movement.

## GRADE 8

**Baseball in April** by Gary Soto features 11 short stories that describe the daily lives and adventures of Latino children growing up in California.

# PASSWORD TO THE WRITER'S CLUB

BY E.R. ZAREVICH

**A**s an unsteady but hopeful sense of post-pandemic normalcy looms within public reach, aspiring young writers everywhere will be reaching out for their pencils and pens. They will each have a story to tell, whether it be a uniquely eye-opening experience of the lockdown or tales from the elaborate fantasy worlds they've devised in their heads as a means of escape. I, as a teacher, have both, as do many parents and educators. So do our students. But who can we tell those stories to? Where can young learners—especially homeschooled students without the traditional student cohort to share with—express themselves freely? Where can they find a ready, listening audience?

Enter . . . the writers' group!

Writers have always huddled together for support and strength in numbers, especially during transitional periods when society is experiencing an avalanche of change. Throughout history, writers have gathered in homes, libraries, parks, coffee houses, and taverns. They might have used a password to make sure that only those in the know gained entrance to the writer's club. Today, we can add Zoom and other online platforms (and their passwords!) to the list of ways writers can connect with kindred spirits.

In a post-COVID world where everyone is timidly poking their heads out their front doors to see if the coast is clear, the biggest question is, "Will we meet in person or online?"

Let's look at the benefits of each so you can decide which type of writers' group might work best for your student.

**WHERE CAN YOUNG LEARNERS  
EXPRESS THEMSELVES FREELY?**

**WHERE CAN THEY FIND A READY, LISTENING AUDIENCE? ENTER . . . THE WRITERS' GROUP!**

## IN-PERSON GROUPS

Following nearly two years of social isolation, students will be looking to bond and build relationships. They will bring to an in-person writers' group not just a notebook full of jottings, but also a strong sense of yearning for companionship and fun. That is why an in-person writers' group might not be as productive for young writers, but it can be just as rewarding and fulfilling. There may be more laughter than writing completed, but that doesn't mean it's a wasted couple of hours. An in-person group can provide support on many different levels.

Students and parents organizing these groups should keep the following advice in mind:

- Choose the venue wisely, and make sure you cooperate with the staff/management. Coffee shops and libraries will often allow local writers' groups to gather for more than an hour. Call ahead to book a table in advance, if possible, to make sure there is space for everyone.
- While there, respect the staff, clean up after yourselves—yes, that includes coffee spills. Keep the volume to a respectful level, even if the conversation gets heated.
- Make sure it's a venue everyone is comfortable gathering in. Visit the venue in advance to check on the location, cleanliness, safety, and health rules regarding masks or other COVID-19 safeguards. Have hand sanitizer ready and bring extra masks for those who've forgotten theirs.
- If the group is more than five or six, it might help to have name tags or have each participant create a name place card to sit on the table in front of them. Bring extra paper and pens in case anyone forgets their supplies.

## ONLINE GROUPS

There are many reasons that an online group might be preferable, most notably because it allows you to expand the group beyond the geographical region. As someone who has spent the past year and a half teaching online creative writing classes and participating in a Zoom-based writers' club, here are the best tidbits of practical wisdom I can offer:

- Research the platform you're using so that you will be prepared to handle the technical aspects and potential difficulties. Zoom, which is a popular platform, has unique issues. For example, the host of a session sharing their screen can accidentally delete any writing that's been done by the other members in the chat box and a glitch in someone's wi-fi can have the same disastrous result for their own writing.
- At the beginning of each session, make sure everyone knows how to display their name, use the microphone and video, and open the chat box.
- Make it a point to remind members of the group to do their writing on Microsoft Word or Google Notes instead of directly in the chat. This way, they have a saved copy after chat disappears.
- Collaborative writing exercises can be done using a shared Google Doc. This not only lets people write text but also comment in the margins on what others have written.

**No matter what life brings, writers must always keep writing, and students of all ages must never stop learning. Everyone is free to choose their own password for a writer's club—just make sure you remember what it is!**

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E.R. Zarevich is a teacher and writer from Burlington, Ontario, Canada. Her articles, short stories, and essays have been published in various magazines and journals.

## GENERAL TIPS FOR ANY KIND OF WRITING GROUP

Whether your group meets in person or virtually, here are some ideas for getting it off to a good start.

- Begin with clear guidelines on group etiquette. THINK is an acronym for helping students check that what they are saying is True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary, and Kind. This applies to both discussions and feedback on the work of others.
- The writing discussions and games should be designed to include everyone. If you are the organizer, think like a teacher. Have a list of writing prompts ready. Some writers like to see the prompts ahead of time in order to come prepared to write.
- Come up with ways for each person to participate even if they are shy about speaking up at first. It's helpful to have ice breaker games for a group just getting to know one another. I recommend the refrigerator magnet poem game, where the members can work in pairs or in groups of three to create a poem using preprinted words and phrases. Or try the tag-team writers' game where everyone passes around a piece of paper and writes one line each for an improvised short story.
- Make sure all group participants understand what to expect by giving them an agenda ahead of time and explain the venue rules. Encourage everyone to have input in how the group runs.



[FROM THE ARCHIVES]

# FIVE WAYS TO KEEP YOUR BALANCE IN AN UNBALANCED WORLD

BY LAWRENCE WILLIAMS AND  
DEEDEE HUGHES

(adapted from an article originally published in  
*Living Education* Jan/Feb 2001)

I once admitted to a wise friend that, as a parent, I honestly didn't know if I was being too strict or too lenient. She said, "That's normal. That's what finding the balance is all about. There is no static balance point. You are always tipping a little too far in one direction and righting yourself, or tipping too far in the other direction and righting yourself." I found great comfort in this at the time, and I still do today.

Finding the balance in parenting and in life is an ongoing process. Am I working too much and forgetting to play?

Am I being an over-involved parent and not respecting my children's abilities and independence? Am I trying to keep them from making mistakes? Am I letting them make too many mistakes? Am I investing enough time in my friendships but forgetting my self-care? Life can feel like doing yoga on a stand-up paddle board (which is just as hard as it sounds!).

When homeschooling, seeking balance in life is essential. If we're out of balance and we try to teach our children, we diminish our effectiveness as teachers. We might miss the subtle cues in the learning process that enable us to be good teachers, or we might cause our children to become more imbalanced also, which reduces their ability to learn effectively.

Here are some tips to help you maintain a sense of balance in the midst of your busy, messy, wonderful life.

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## 1. RECHARGE WITH YOUR POWER SOURCE DAILY.

What energizes you? What feeds your spirit? What helps you feel centered and creates harmony within you? You might reconnect through hiking, yoga, meditation, prayer, journaling, gardening, running, art, or some other activity. Find something that works for you and do it every day. Even though it may be challenging to find time for yourself, make it a priority. Reconnecting with your personal power source every day will help you move through your life with greater purpose and clarity.

## 2. RECOGNIZE YOUR ROLE AS CO-CREATOR OF YOUR LIFE.

Through our thoughts, feelings, and actions, we all create our lives moment by moment. By working together with our children, partners, friends, and neighbors, we become co-creators of the world around us. When unexpected events arise, you have a choice of how you respond. If you respond from an inner sense of balance, you can turn difficult circumstances into new possibilities for yourself and your children. By taking responsibility for creating your world, life becomes an on-going improvisation that is one part strength, one part grace, one part compromise, and all heart. Once you have a sense of actively creating the life you want, you feel more content and centered.

## **3. PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR INTERNAL GPS**

Envision a seesaw with mental activity on one end, physical activity on the other end, and emotions as the balance point in the middle. We all know how easy it is to overemphasize or ignore one of these aspects, and we know what happens to the seesaw when we lean too far in one direction or another. Check in with your internal GPS every now and then to figure out where you are physically, mentally, and emotionally. If you've been engaged for long hours on a computer, you probably need to take a break and do something physical. If you have been running errands all over town with your children, you may need to sit for a bit and read a book. The same holds true for children—remember to check in with where they are and strive for balance in the rhythm of their day.

When one of my sons was younger, he had a difficult time learning math. We would work at it for a while, and then he would get fuzzy and unable to think clearly. When this happened, I learned that there was no point in trying to force him to keep focus mentally because he would just get worse. Instead, we would take a break and do something physical—work on a tree house, take a hike or play football. The object was not to totally exhaust him but bring enough focus upon physical activity to restore balance. Invariably, after a period of physical activity, we could return to math, and he would breeze through problems that stumped him before. When he restored his balance, he was able to think more clearly. Being able to adapt to the needs of your children is one of the great benefits of homeschooling, so take advantage of it.

## **4. ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL**

Our innate capacity to feel is a powerful tool in parenting and teaching. Lead with your heart, not just your head. Sometimes homeschoolers feel it necessary to turn every activity into an academic exploration. Remember that education of the heart is just as important as education of the mind. If you are walking down the street, notice, appreciate, and comment on the beauty of the trees, plants, and sky. Take the time to pause or change direction when your child's interest or passion is sparked by something along the way. Notice and

celebrate the moments of joy, curiosity, and wonder. By opening your heart to simple acts of feeling, you will find that your mind becomes quieter, and you feel more centered and poised. The same holds true for children. Listen to what they're saying and watch what they are doing, but pay attention to what they are feeling too.

## **5. RECOGNIZE YOUR STRESSORS**

We all know parents are part superhero, but even superheroes can get overwhelmed at times. Learning to recognize what triggers a sense of stress for you is the first step in restoring balance. For instance, if you feel you have to check your phone every time you hear the notification chime, try choosing certain times of the day to check your phone, and then turn off the notifications or sound the rest of the time. If you find yourself feeling scattered or short-tempered after a morning of noisy activity, institute a one-hour quiet time in your house after lunch each day or go outside to a place where the only sounds you'll hear are nature sounds. If you feel overwhelmed by household chores, make a schedule so you know when things will get done and make sure everyone in the family does their part. Figure out your stressors and then make a plan to reduce them.

It's no surprise that life often feels unbalanced. We are bombarded by masses of information, constant sounds, demands of email and phone, social media updates, family needs, homeschooling supervision and organization, household chores . . . the list seems never-ending. Give these five steps a try and see if you can find some calm for your spirit in the frenzy of daily life.

When you find your own balance, you'll be able to help your children find theirs. By showing them how to maintain balance in their lives as children, you will be teaching them the most important skill they will ever need as adults: the ability to transform their lives and the lives of those around them.

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*Lawrence Williams was the co-founder of Oak Meadow and author of Oak Meadow's original curriculum. DeeDee Hughes is Oak Meadow's Director of Curriculum Development. Lawrence and DeeDee collaborated on a number of articles and curriculum materials, including the 40th anniversary edition of [The Heart of Learning](#).*

\*AUTUMN CRAFT\*

# Community Quilt

**M**aking a patchwork quilt is a great way to recycle old clothing and fabric scraps leftover from other projects. Quilts can be made of fabric cut into different shapes and sizes and sewn together randomly or can feature an intentional design made of squares and triangles of uniform size.

Making quilts is an easy (and useful) skill to teach children of all ages. Don't worry if you don't have a sewing machine—neither did anyone making a quilt before the mid-1800s! Sewing by hand might take longer but there's no rush. Sewing can be relaxing and enjoyable, especially when you listen to an audio book or have someone to chat with.

While making a full-size quilt on your own is a huge undertaking, making a small couch throw or baby blanket is an easy first project. And making it a community undertaking makes it much more fun. Your family might get together with other friends, neighbors, or relatives to create something as a group.

Your finished project can grace your own home or be given away to someone special you know, someone in need in the community, or an organization that can use it to help others or raise money. When you are finished, don't be surprised if you find yourself eager to start collecting fabric scraps for your next community quilt!



Here are some ideas:

1. Gather a group together for an in-person sewing or knitting day. Each person can create one large square made up of smaller squares and triangles. At the end of the day (or on a second day), have everyone sit in a circle around a table to sew the large squares together into a quilt.
2. Ask for a fabric scrap from each of your friends and family members. Those who don't live nearby can mail it to you. Ask them to include a story or memory about the fabric, if they have one. When the quilt is finished, take a photo to send to each contributor.
3. Provide a small ball of yarn to all the willing knitters in your social circle and ask them to knit a square. Give them the dimensions so everyone's squares come out the same size. Collect the squares and sew or knit them together.
4. Invite sewing family members from near and far to create a quilt square of any design. You can choose a color scheme, if you like, or just see what everyone comes up with. Have everyone make the same size square so the pieces are easy to sew together. Ask everyone to deliver their squares to you for assembling the quilt. Share a photo of the finished project. This family quilt would make a very special gift for a wedding, anniversary, Mother's Day, a milestone birthday, a teen moving away to college, or a couple setting up a household.

For inspiration, read *The Quiltmaker's Gift* by Jeff Brumbeau with beautiful illustrations by Gail de Marcken or watch the following video for a read-aloud of the book.

[The Quiltmaker's Gift \(Marissa Rivera Read Aloud Books\)](#)

For those who are new to quilting, here are some basic instructions to get you started.

## MATERIALS

- fabric in various colors and patterns
- batting (or an old blanket or sheet to sew inside the quilt to give it warmth)
- scissors
- straight pins
- needle
- thread to match your fabric
- blanket binding to match the quilt

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wash and dry all your fabric before starting.
2. Cut pieces of fabric into squares that are all the same size.
3. Lay your squares out in the pattern you want. These will form the top of the quilt.
4. One by one, pin the pieces together so they are right side out when they are sewn. One by one, sew the squares into long rows first, and then sew the completed rows together, side by side.
5. For the back of the quilt, use a large piece of fabric or a sheet. This piece of fabric needs to be as large as the quilt top. If you'd like your quilt to have something inside to give it more weight and warmth, you can use batting, a sheet, or a blanket.
6. To assemble the quilt, carefully pin the top and bottom together to keep them in place, and then sew around the edges.
7. Finally, fold blanket binding carefully over the raw edges, pinning it in place. Sew the binding to the quilt to cover and neatly finish the edges.



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