

# Living Education

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**Oak  
Meadow**

K-12 CURRICULUM AND  
DISTANCE LEARNING



**SUCCESS!**  
**DEFINING, MEASURING,**  
**and MAKING THE MOST of IT.**

**SPRING 2022**

*IN THIS ISSUE: THOUGHTS ON SUCCESS \* EARTH CYCLES: SPRING INTO SPRING!  
FIVE TIPS FOR RAISING HAPPY, SUCCESSFUL KIDS \* SNEAK PEAK: PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM*

# Welcome.

**W**hat is success? Ask a dozen people, and you'll get a dozen different answers. As parents, we all want our children to be successful, and as homeschooling parents, this goal takes on added dimensions. While academic success is important, what other ways might we want our children to be successful? We might measure success by their quality of relationships, community involvement, or communication skills. We might use kindness as a metric or perhaps empathy. How does your family measure success?

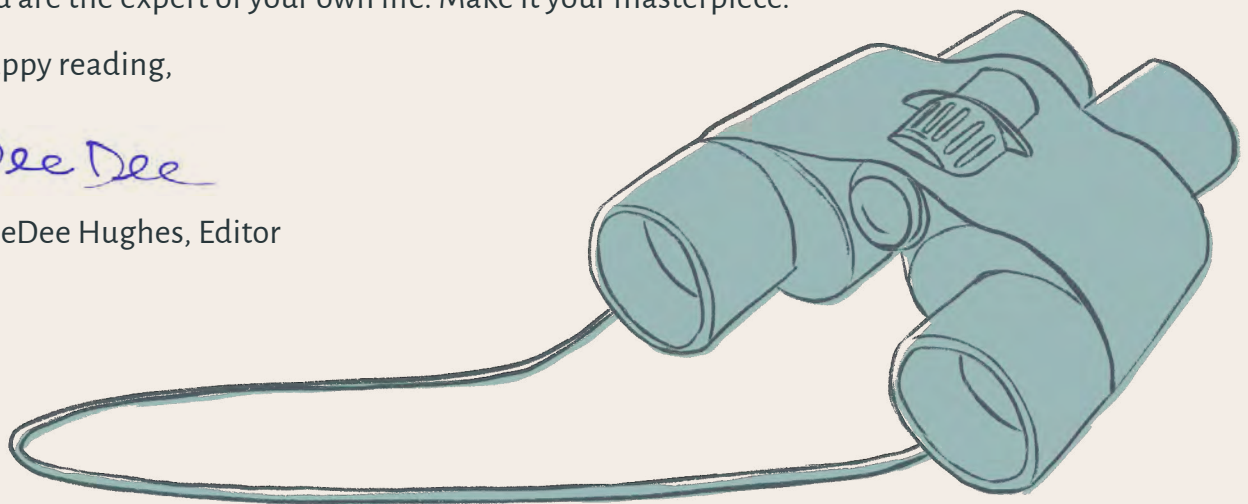
This issue explores not only how we define success, but also how we assess and then build on it. The goal is to support the development of skills that lead to success, however you might define it.

I hope this issue of Living Education helps you and your family embrace—and celebrate!—your own brand of success. After all, you are the expert of your own life. Make it your masterpiece.

Happy reading,

*Dee Dee*

DeeDee Hughes, Editor



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# THOUGHTS on SUCCESS

BY ERIN SHELBY

**W**hat is success? It might not be something you think about often. The good news is that you get to define what success means for you and your child. Here are some questions you might ask yourself as you look at the present, consider the future, and dream about the possibilities.

## WHAT ARE OUR VALUES?

For some, this is an easy question to answer. You might remember clearly why your family started homeschooling. Now, think about what drives your family. Some values include sustainability, self-sufficiency, faith, or frugality. Personal values include kindness, integrity, compassion, service, perseverance, and so many more. Take a moment to think about the kind of values you are instilling in your children on this learning journey. Which values pop out most to you? Which are the most important to you, and why? How can you accentuate these values as you plan for the future?

It's easy to reflect on our values, but it's far more meaningful to live them out. Consider choosing one of your values as a focus for the days and weeks to come. Let's say that sustainability is one of your most sincerely held values. Consider what your sustainable actions are now, and what you can do to be sustainable in the future. Are you already recycling and composting? Sustainability can be lived out by buying secondhand when you can or, if you're up for it, looking into car-lite, car-free, or zero-waste lifestyles.

Choosing a value to focus on just might help others, too. For example, if you're passionate about service, you

might discuss, as a family, who is hurting or in need in your community that you want to help. What talents and skills does your family have that could be useful? If you or your kids love sewing or knitting, a service project of making mittens or blankets for a women's shelter or homeless shelter could be extremely valuable. Or you might decide to volunteer a few hours of your time at a soup kitchen.

Values can vary, and if kindness is one of them, you might be wondering how to create an environment where it is nurtured. You might not have heard of a Kindness Jar, but this could be exactly what you're looking for. A Kindness Jar is an easy way to recognize kindness, reward it, and celebrate it. All you need is a simple jar—any jar will do—and tokens to place in it. A token can be anything you choose that symbolizes a kind deed: glass beads, marbles, beautiful river rocks, or even tiny shells. Any time you see a kind behavior that you appreciate, place a token in the Kindness Jar. Be sure to verbally acknowledge what kind action you saw and call out the person in a positive way for what they did. When the Kindness Jar is full, have a celebration that everyone will enjoy.

## WHAT ARE OUR GOALS?

This question might be trickier, but knowing your values makes defining your goals a bit easier. What do you want your children to learn, accomplish, or be? What knowledge, skills, or abilities do they need? You might want to consider crafting a homeschooling mission statement or a vision statement. This could be just a sentence or two that will summarize the heart of what



your family is striving for the most in education. Here are some ideas:

- To empower our kids to become critical thinkers in a rapidly changing world
- To inspire our kids with a well-rounded education that will motivate them to keep learning for the rest of their lives
- To guide our kids with an education that will prepare them to enter the career path of their choice

Every family has unique goals and values. Thinking about what matters most to you will allow you to zoom in on the uniqueness of your family so you can plan for success.

### WHAT ARE OUR OBSTACLES?

Success is not always an easy, straight path. Obstacles will happen, and kids can learn a great deal from perceived failures. How we deal with failure is just as important as how we deal with success. In times of difficulty, kids can learn character-building traits like patience, perseverance, and the importance of asking for help. They can also learn the lifelong importance of being able to accept constructive feedback when things aren't going their way.

Adults know that success isn't always easy, natural, or an automatic gift. Obstacles, when handled appropriately, can lay the groundwork for future success. How can this be? Obstacles can expose how we think. Instead of saying "I can't do it," transform your thinking into "I can" or "I will." Even adding the word yet to a negative phrase—"I can't do it yet" or "I don't know how yet"—can be transformative. We can develop the mentality that we will overcome obstacles. Changing our mindset might be something we have to work at, but the results are worth it.

Visual reminders of where we want to go in life can help. What kind of visual reminders are you using now to encourage an attitude of success, gratitude, or victory? Consider creating your own vision board to help you and your child to stay encouraged while working through obstacles. Your vision board might just display a simple, encouraging quote of the week, or you could place beautiful pictures from nature on the wall. If your child is inspired by a celebrity, musician, or athlete, you might select age-appropriate posters of this person, and try to find ways of connecting this person's story to your educational goals. With or without visual reminders, you

can help your child develop an "I can" mindset and teach them to use obstacles as a bridge to success.

Kids—and adults—who are already in the groove of success might not need inspirational quotes or mantras, but when you're feeling like an underdog, it helps to set an intention to have a positive mindset. I'm not an athletic person, but I've always found it fascinating that Michael Jordan didn't make the top-tier varsity basketball team when he was a high school student. Despite what was a disappointment for young Michael, he was dedicated to achieving his goals even though it took more effort than he initially expected. He made things happen by working toward his goal, and he said "I can" instead of "I can't." Without a doubt, that practice, as well as taking feedback from a coach, helped him get to where he wanted to be. When your child faces difficulty, consider how you can help them accept feedback from trusted adults so they live out their talents and achieve their potential, just like Michael Jordan did.

### SUCCESS IS NOT OUR IDENTITY

It can be a struggle for many of us to accept that success (or failure) doesn't make up all of who we are. Jobs, money, relationships, and possessions are widely accepted markers of success in our society. If we feel like we're not a success, it can be tough to understand that these things aren't the ultimate badge of our personhood. Kids and adults alike can learn that kindness, patience, integrity, respect, and showing care for the vulnerable members of society are all traits that transcend a person's status on the social ladder. These traits, I believe, are the true hallmarks of success.

Obstacles, which are inevitable, can motivate us to learn and grow. Using your unique perspective, values, and goals, you can help your child toward a future of success.

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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, a new publishing company.*



# SUCCESS IN THE UNEXPECTED SUBJECT: PHILOSOPHY

BY E.R. ZAREVICH

There is something of a stigma attached to the subject of philosophy. It's considered by many to be irrelevant for a school curriculum and less advantageous to a modern young learner's development than mathematics and computer science, which are fundamental subjects in their own right, but not the only ones that deserve attention. The most common criticism of philosophy is that pursuing and studying it as a major at university won't lead to gainful employment.

As an educator, I feel it is my duty to champion this unexpected but essential subject. There is not only much to be learned from philosophy but much to be accomplished with it as well.

The purpose of philosophy is to teach learners the value of personal growth and consistently questioning established truths. Parents who want their children to grow up to change the world first have to teach them how to recognize a world problem in the first place. They also need the tools to practice self-reflection, as a mark of maturity is the ability to accept and improve upon one's imperfections and shortcomings. You can offer your children these gifts by teaching them the rudiments of philosophy, which can easily be incorporated into a homeschool curriculum.

**To begin, I suggest choosing one or two philosophers who have tackled complex subjects you would like your students to understand and expand upon.** Present a summary of their ideas, and then ask your students to respond to these ideas orally or in writing. You may be surprised by how well your students can grasp sophisticated ideas and offer their own input. Young learners, with practice, often relish responding to such challenges, especially when they are given the opportunity to express their own opinions.

For instance, let's say you want to teach your students the philosophical-economic concept the tragedy of the

commons. To summarize, the tragedy of the commons is a situation where a community has enough of a resource to service everyone, but one party takes a disproportionate amount of it. Think of a lake in the middle of a town. Imagine that there are enough trout swimming in it to feed every person, but only if they go fishing just enough to feed themselves. However, one or two greedy parties take all the fish, despite not needing so much to survive. How could this issue be resolved? How could this party be blocked from unfairly overfishing? Or how can they be compelled to share what they have with the rest of the town?

These are the questions you can put forward to your students. You can ask them to write a response about where in the world such unequal distribution of resources currently exists. Your child may have to do research on the subject, which is a great way to teach them the value and importance of reading comprehension and finding credible sources. You can also ask them to write a fictional story where the metaphor of the tragedy of the commons is the central theme. Or they might stage a debate, write and perform a play, or create an infographic or artistic piece that expresses the concept. The takeaway will be your students becoming more attentive to universal predicaments. At the same time, they will also develop empathy. Their concern will soon be for those in the world being denied their share of the fish, not for those hoarding all the fish.

**For students who are a bit older, there are many fascinating and more mature philosophical concepts that could be the basis of a lesson plan.** For instance, you might teach them the idea of "Bad Faith" from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. To summarize, "Bad Faith" is the human condition where people bind themselves to specific jobs, schools, or traditions because they're too afraid and too stubborn to explore other possibilities. The infamous example Sartre uses is that of a waiter in a

The purpose of philosophy is to teach learners the value of personal growth and consistently questioning established truths.



French café, who performs his role too eagerly and too devotedly, completely chaining himself to his identity as a waiter while excluding every other possibility in life. He appears to thrive in his job, but Sartre questions whether the waiter is just playacting and secretly dreaming of another sort of existence. What if what he really wants to do is be a jazz musician, and enjoy fame and fortune? Or what if he'd like to escape the smoky, noisy atmosphere of the café and instead work outdoors, as a fisherman?

This is a great philosophical conversation for high-school-level homeschooled students when they're at an age where they may be pondering their own career goals or purpose in life. Like Sartre, they may be inwardly questioning the status quo. You can ask your student to reflect on the waiter's situation. Do they believe the waiter is truly happy in his job, or has he just convinced himself that it's the only option for him? You can also have your students identify examples of "Bad Faith" that they see in society every day. This will encourage your students to become more observant of other people and the world around them. They will learn to perceive, and understand, what real, authentic happiness looks like.

It is a myth that philosophy is not an employable subject. Philosophy is a perfectly worthwhile starting point to launch young people into a fulfilling career. Students who study philosophy often move on to successful careers in academia, publishing, or politics, where they can apply their advanced knowledge and critical thinking to their work. Some may even move into social work or psychology, where they can take their ability to assess common human situations and enact problem-solving to help other people. **Whatever path to success your student may choose, freely and in good faith, it can start with learning about philosophy.**

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*Emily R. Zarevich is a teacher and writer from Burlington, Ontario, Canada. Her work has appeared in JSTOR Daily, The Calvert Journal, and The Archive, among other websites and magazines.*



# PLANNING FOR SUCCESS:

## USING A WEEKLY PLANNER TO TRACK, MEASURE, AND CELEBRATE SUCCESS

BY DEEDEE HUGHES

**A**s a homeschooler, you are the parent, teacher, and school administrator all rolled into one. In the middle of juggling science experiments, spelling lists, math practice, research reports, art projects, and all the rest, you still have to track and assess your student's progress. You might already have a good system for measuring and recording academic progress, or you might wish there was a more efficient, effective way to do it.

There is! Consider the weekly planner.

No matter where on the organized/spontaneous spectrum you land, you can find support and a sense of ease by using a **weekly planner**. Once you get in the habit of spending a bit of time each week planning the week's goals and recording accomplishments, you'll have an easy-to-reference record of your student's successes as well as areas that need work.





There are many ways to use a planner. Here are some tips for getting the most out of it.

**Identify the week's goals.** Look over what you would like to accomplish in the coming week in each subject. This is what will go into your planner.

**Prioritize the assignments, activities, and projects for the week.** Write down the top-priority tasks first, dividing them up according to subject and spacing them over the days of the week. By putting the high priority tasks at the top of the list, they are most likely to get done. Let's say there's a book report in English that must be done this week because your student will be beginning a new book next week. The book report will go at the top of the list for English and be scheduled early in the week. This gives some wiggle room if it takes longer than expected.

**Chunk up larger projects into smaller tasks.** Maybe an animal research paper is on the science list this week. Day 1 can be for locating research materials; Day 2 can be for reading research and taking notes; Day 3 is for organizing the notes and creating a detailed outline with topic sentences for each main idea; Day 4 is for the rough draft; and Day 5 is for revising, editing, and proofing the final version of the report. Each of these tasks will take about the same amount of time, making a big, daunting project suddenly feel doable.

**Use the planner for long-range planning.** Let's say you are doing a project on decomposition, and your student has just buried a variety of items in the backyard that will decompose at different rates. In six weeks, your student is supposed to dig them up and observe what happened. Flip forward six weeks in your planner and jot down a note. Now you don't have to think about the experiment until it's time to dig it up.

**Let your planner help you take an unscheduled day off or take advantage of an unexpected opportunity.** If something comes up, or if you and your kids just need a day without expectations, go for it! Spontaneity is one of the greatest joys and benefits of homeschooling. Your planner makes it easy for you to go off and enjoy yourselves, and then get back on track afterwards. Everything is still there—you just shift the tasks over one day.

**Use colored pens to keep track of multiple students.** This lets you see who will be doing what on a particular day. Seeing everyone's schedule at once helps you coordinate visits to the library, field trips, larger projects, and time for one-on-one student support.

**Get the kids involved.** Involving your students in creating the weekly plan gives them a sense of ownership, encourages autonomy, and teaches time management skills. They learn how to divide tasks into smaller steps, budget their time, and prioritize what needs doing. And—here's the fun part—they get to check off items as each task is completed to celebrate their successes! Have a planning session at the beginning of each week to go over the goals for the coming week. This helps everyone understand the game plan and start the week with purpose.

**Note important milestones in the planner.** For record-keeping purposes, you can highlight larger projects as they are completed each week or month; this makes it easy to flip back through the planner and find them when it is time to create a homeschool portfolio or report to a supervising teacher.

**Celebrate a successful year.** At the end of the year, your planner becomes a record of your child's academic accomplishments. Make sure to take time to savor and celebrate all the hard work!

Using a planner may take a little time to get used to, but it's well worth it. Once you get comfortable and find a pattern that works for you, the planner will help you prepare for success so you have more free time to enjoy your homeschooling life.

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*DeeDee Hughes is Oak Meadow's Director of Curriculum Development. DeeDee loves to make lists and check things off, and always tries to remember to celebrate successes! This article originally appeared as a guest post at Only Passionate Curiosity.*



## How do you want to be assessed?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> lab work   | <input type="checkbox"/> writing            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> small group work      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> artwork |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> journaling | <input type="checkbox"/> written tests      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> oral reports          |   |

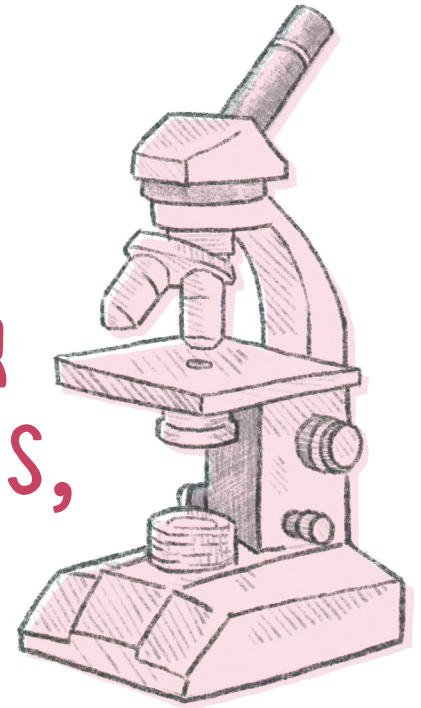
96.  
DNA RNA

97.  
Pancreas  
Gland Sec

100 Human  
Chromosome  
(Female)

# OFFERING STUDENT CHOICE FOR ASSESSMENT IN SCIENCE CLASS, OR ANY CLASS

BY JOHN DORROH

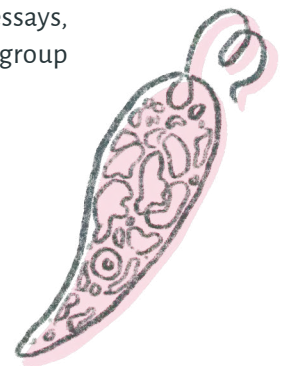
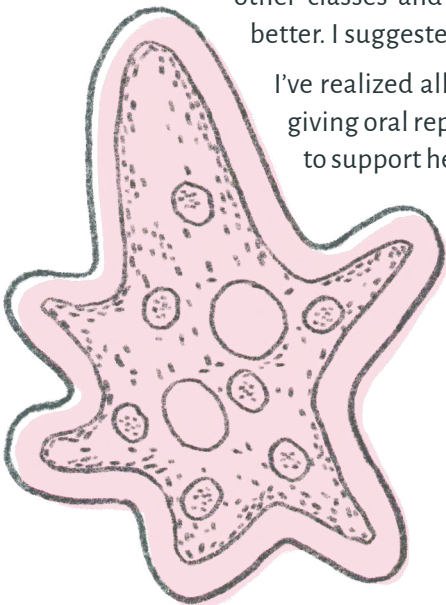


## *What happens when students are given a CHOICE about how they demonstrate their knowledge?*

One day while I was giving a lecture about plant reproduction in a biology class, I noticed a few students doodling rather than taking notes. I felt a bit insulted but decided to let it go. At the end of class, I asked one of the doodlers if I could look at his notebook. I was surprised to see detailed sketches of leaves, stems and other plant parts. They were as good as most professional illustrations in textbooks and links.

He told me that he'd been experimenting with his note-taking. "I'm good at art," he said, "so I decided to try it out." He shared that he'd been sketching his way through other classes and felt that he was understanding and remembering the content better. I suggested that he continue, and he promised to keep me posted.

I've realized all along that each student has "gifts." For example, Jessica enjoyed giving oral reports and voluntarily incorporating video clips and digital evidence to support her stance on a particular topic. Ty crafted beautifully written essays, and another student had a gift for leading her small group through some sophisticated problem solving.



## HOW STUDENTS SHOW WHAT THEY KNOW

I made a list of the ways I had evaluated my students' progress throughout the semester. There were seven: artwork, oral reports, lab work, small group work, a writing cluster (DFPE, or drama, fiction, poetry, and essays), journaling, and written tests.

The first day of the new semester I announced that we were going to explore a new approach to assessment. "Each of you will have choices just like you would at a restaurant. A menu full of choices."

One student asked me what was the catch?

I explained that everyone would choose at least three modes of evaluation from the list for a nine-week grading period. The most exciting feature was not having to take written tests. There were other modes to take its place. The students who liked taking traditional tests could choose that for one of their modes. Also, once their selections were made, they were locked in for the duration of the nine-week grading period. They could choose a new combination at the beginning of the next grading period.

Some of my students were overachievers, wanting to select all seven modes. I strongly cautioned against it, explaining how much extra work was required. Even though all deadlines for each mode were staggered to prevent conflicting due dates, the potential existed for overload.

The first time we used menu selection, there were glitches that we had to address. For example, students didn't understand the need to be engaged in small group work if they hadn't selected it. I justified this requirement by reminding them that even though the football team played only once a week on Friday night, all team members had to be at practice every day. Most of them bought it or at least humored me.

## FACT QUILTING AND OTHER NUTS AND BOLTS

So, how did menu-selection lead to success in my science classroom? Here's an example:

One of our objectives for cell physiology included the role of enzymes. Our textbook had less than a paragraph on that topic, so we had to use other print and online sources. I distributed a large blank index card to each student and instructed them to find five to ten facts about enzymes from any combination of resources. "Write down each fact on the index card," I instructed. "Number them consecutively, and record where you found each,

including the page numbers." After they finished, I read the facts aloud so that we could begin to eliminate duplicates and group them into broad categories that served as topic headings in columns. For example, "Plant enzymes," "Animal enzymes," "Enzymes in medicine," "Enzymes in food," etc.

I had students transcribe their facts onto the board under the appropriate columns. What we ended up with was a wall of facts about enzymes. Susan J. said it reminded her of quilts, so we dubbed it "fact quilting."

To make it even more interesting, groups of 2–3 students wrote skits, using the facts from any five "quilts." Evaluating the skits was uncomplicated. If I had asked each group to include 20 facts, and all 20 facts were there, they received 20 points. If the formatting was properly done, they received points for that. The groups were given an extra point or two for volunteering to read, or "act out" their skits. These points were easily converted into letter grades based on the total possible points.

To assess their work in art and writing—not generally a common practice in science—I developed fact sheets, one for art and one for the writing cluster. It was a tricky twist to convert subjective artwork into some sort of objective grade.

Let's say that a student creates a clay model of an animal cell. I needed a way to make sure that the student understood what each organelle looks like and what its function is. I instructed them to write down 10 facts from the content for that particular objective that were evident in the model. For example, Fact #1 might read, "Unlike plant cells, animal cells lack a cell wall. Instead, they have plasma membranes." The student then sticks a toothpick flag in the plasma membrane that matches the fact's number, #1.

I used a similar approach for DFPE. If a student wrote a skit based on viral reproduction, they attached a Writing Fact Sheet, underlining each fact, and appropriately numbering them for a seamless accounting.

Writing in science journals (EM notebooks, or Expressive Mode) is mostly subjective. How could I assign a grade to students' thoughts? Often I used specific prompts that had to be addressed. If the student adequately addressed the prompt, full credit was given. At other times I asked that they write a minimum half-page response. If they did, I gave them full credit.

To make sure that students were meeting the objectives, I conducted “You Got It?” sessions. A couple of times each week, I asked 10–15 questions orally to make sure that we were on the same page. If I sensed gaps in understanding, I knew what content I needed to stress one-on-one as they worked on their projects.

To make certain that parents and guardians understood the system, I held three open houses. To explain how their children’s work was being assessed, I took them through an abridged version of each mode.

### WHAT STUDENTS CHOSE

It wasn’t a surprise to me that few students wanted to continue with written tests. About 95% of students chose lab work as one of their three assessments while only 6% chose written tests. The first semester looked like this:

- lab work 95%
- small group work 93%
- journaling 90%
- oral reports 40%
- writing (DFPE) 15%
- artwork 12%
- written tests 6%

As you can see, the most popular combination was lab work, small group work, and journaling. That meant that each mode counted one-third of their grade for the nine weeks. The more modes selected, the less each one counted.

The students seemed to gravitate toward the modes that best suit a typical science classroom—lots of lab work with time to discuss and to collaborate on multimedia reports. To me, it seemed more like what a science class should look like, rather than answering questions at the end of the chapter and taking too many written tests that often don’t address critical-thinking skills.

### A REALITY CHECK: WHAT DID STUDENTS AND PARENTS THINK?

What did the students and parents think about using alternate forms of assessment? In short, they liked it.

More than one parent told me that her daughter talked about it at the dinner table, something she’d hardly ever done before. Another parent told me that he had seen a turnaround in his son’s attitude toward science since we had been using the new system. There was a buzz about what we were doing in class.

I discussed my intentions of changing my assessment system with my principal long before I began using it. He was generally supportive but concerned that each student might not meet all of the standards and objectives. I made it a point to provide him feedback at least once a week. He visited my classroom often to see for himself and urged me to write articles about it for publication.

### WHY CHANGE?

My original goals for this menu-choice system included giving students some control over how they would be evaluated. It would give them ownership and put the responsibility of learning on their shoulders. I also hoped that they would discover for themselves which modes matched their gifts. Almost everyone appreciated being able to change modes at the end of the grading period to try something new: a different avenue to success.

The students continued to surprise me with their creations and apparent comprehension of the content. Making the switch created an environment that fostered authentic understanding of the scientific principles and concepts at grade level and above. And perhaps the best effect was that I saw students thinking and behaving like scientists. What better outcome could a science teacher hope for, right?

I have helped teachers adapt similar assessment systems into other content areas: social studies, language arts, and even mathematics. It’s not a cookie-cutter approach, but with a bit of tweaking, students and teachers in almost *any* class can benefit from a menu-selection assessment system. At least it worked for us.

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*John Dorroh taught secondary science for almost 30 years before he worked with school districts and universities in several states, sharing with them various ways to incorporate reading and writing strategies into all classrooms. Many of his workshops involved alternate assessment and critical-thinking skills. He is a published poet and flash-fiction writer.*



# SUPPORTING SELF-DETERMINATION

BY MEG VOSTAL

I am a homeschooling parent of a teenager, and the teen years have brought changes to our homeschooling dynamic. I've seen my son start to reach for more independence and to separate himself a bit from his dad and me. I've read about and anticipated this shift with my son as he approached his teen years. And yet, I've had a hard time watching my child push away from me. But I need to remind myself that when my son rejects my help, it's actually a sign of his success.

I work in the disability community and becoming self-determined is often a goal for people with disabilities. Self-determination means taking purposeful action that causes improvement in quality of life. It's about knowing what you want and feeling in control of your ability to try to make it happen. It's important to understand that self-determination isn't measured by outcomes: the metric isn't accomplishing the goal, it's having the agency to work toward the goal.

As adults, we may take some of our self-determination for granted, but it's a skill we've developed over time to help us be successful and happy. In this way, self-determination is a worthy target for all kids. It involves several skills that we can teach at any age. As kids get older, they can grow their self-determination to fit new demands and challenges. The components of self-determination may vary slightly among experts in the field, but typically the concept involves the following:

- **Choice Making.** Our ability to make choices is critical for a sense of control in our lives. These choices can be

small (e.g., which flavor of hummus to buy) or choices can be complex (e.g., where to live and work). With younger kids, choice-making might mean selecting a book to read or what clothes to wear; for older kids, choices can become weighty. Choosing friends, activities, and learning preferences are all useful choice-making practice for older kids. Being given a choice is powerful stuff that can result in increased academic performance.

- **Self-Prompting.** Most of us wouldn't make it through our days without prompts. Perhaps we set up our phone to let us know when an email comes through or hang the dog's leash by the door to remind us to go for a walk in the morning. When kids learn to develop systems to remind themselves to accomplish tasks, they exert more control over their daily lives. This can be as simple as using an alarm clock to wake up or could involve the use of lists or reminder apps to give a nudge toward task completion. Parents may need to help kids set up self-prompting systems, but removing ourselves as the "default prompter" is a good way to promote kids' self-determined behavior.

- **Self-Monitoring and Assessment.** Anyone who is a list maker practices self-monitoring. Every time we cross an item off a list, we've monitored progress on our tasks. Writing a list is self-prompting and crossing items off is self-monitoring; they go hand in hand. For instance, an assignment checklist acts as a prompt for tasks and as a way to monitor task completion. Self-assessment gives kids the chance to reflect on their



performance or their feelings about a task. Rubrics or learning checklists promote self-assessment as students track their skill development. It's important to note that self-assessment doesn't have to be competitive or comparative, such as measuring against a standard. It can also just be taking time to reflect on your thoughts and feelings.

- **Self-Reinforcement.** Sometimes, when we complete a challenging—or dreaded—task, we treat ourselves. Perhaps we enjoy a smoothie after a tough workout or take time for a bath after a long day. Self-determined kids know how to support their work by choosing reinforcers that make task completion more likely. When my son started algebra, he wasn't used to showing his work on his problems. He now grabs a small piece of chocolate to reward himself when he remembers to show his work; his self-reinforcement has helped him develop a good habit. Other kids might reinforce themselves by hanging a new picture they drew on the fridge, reading when they're done with schoolwork, or playing outside when chores are finished. The important part is that as parents we give our kids the opportunity to choose their treats and allow them to access the reinforcers themselves. When parents step back from delivering rewards, kids can learn to shape their own behavior.
- **Self-Advocacy.** The final component of self-determination is about knowing yourself and learning to ask for what you need. Helping our kids understand both their strengths and their challenges gives them a chance to fully embrace who they are. As parents, we may tend to celebrate our kids' gifts to support their self-image. But when kids know where they may struggle, it lets them learn to speak up for themselves, asking questions or requesting help when needed. Taking time to talk through what's helpful for kids (e.g., reading a text out loud or exercising to promote good sleep) makes the connection between supports and outcomes explicit. When kids know what supports they need, they can learn to ask for what they need. In this way, self-advocacy is also an effective way to help our kids learn to set healthy boundaries. Kids who know who they are and what they need may be less likely to “go along” or minimize their own needs. Self-advocates are comfortable asserting themselves in positive and productive ways.

## WHERE TO BEGIN

If your kids are young, you may see skills in just one or two of the areas above. With a little parent support, these skills will develop naturally over time. If you think your kids could benefit from devoted attention to these skills, it may be useful to focus on just one skill at a time. While these skills don't need to be done in a specific order (self-reinforcement, for instance, can lead to better self-monitoring and assessment), it may help kids develop these skills if you talk about them by name. That way, when you see your kids practice these skills, you can label the behavior they're doing to help cement their progress toward self-determination.

Thanking your kids for self-prompting, modeling self-assessment, or applauding self-advocacy are all ways to recognize kids' self-determination. When these skills combine and grow, kids can become fully self-determined. And I think kids' ability to be determined—focused, motivated, and purposeful—is worthy of applause as a goal in itself.

When I hear my son say, “I've got this, Mom,” I have to remember that whether he actually “has it” or not isn't the point. The point is that he has the skills to assert control over his life and make an attempt to be independent. In this case, success isn't about the outcome; it's about having the determination to get there.

## Works Cited

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*Meg and her husband enjoy homeschooling their teen son, Charlie (even when his self-determination can get very determined). Meg is a former teacher and school counselor, and is now a faculty member in the College of Education and Human Development at Bowling Green State University. Her research focuses on relational trust and collaboration.*



EARTH CYCLES:

# SPRING into SPRING!

*SPRING HAS US LEAPING FOR JOY!  
SPRING INTO THE COLORFUL SEASON WITH THESE FUN ACTIVITIES.*

## SPRING SCAVENGER HUNT

Have a scavenger hunt to look for signs of spring. Draw or collect images of things you may find in your area during the spring season. Make a card that has a grid on it, and add a drawing of each item once you find it. Or glue the pictures onto the grid ahead of time, and add a check mark beside each one as it is found. Here are some things you might look for:

- something that flies
- leaves on a tree
- flower blossom
- bird nest (do not disturb the nest)
- animal on the ground
- animal in a tree
- animal in the air
- insect on or under a rock or log
- something unexpected

This can be done as an activity for a specific amount of time or as an ongoing daily activity for a week or two.

## FLOWER HUNT

Go on a scavenger hunt to find flowers. Here are some suggestions of things to find:

- flowers of different colors (red flowers, orange flowers, etc.)
- large and small flowers
- flowers with a certain number of petals
- a sweet-smelling flower
- a flower with straight leaves
- a flower that grows close to the ground
- a flower that is on a tall stalk or bush
- the child's favorite flower or a flower that is their favorite color
- flowers growing in a large bunch
- a flower growing with no other flowers around

Add any other ideas you can think of to your scavenger hunt list.





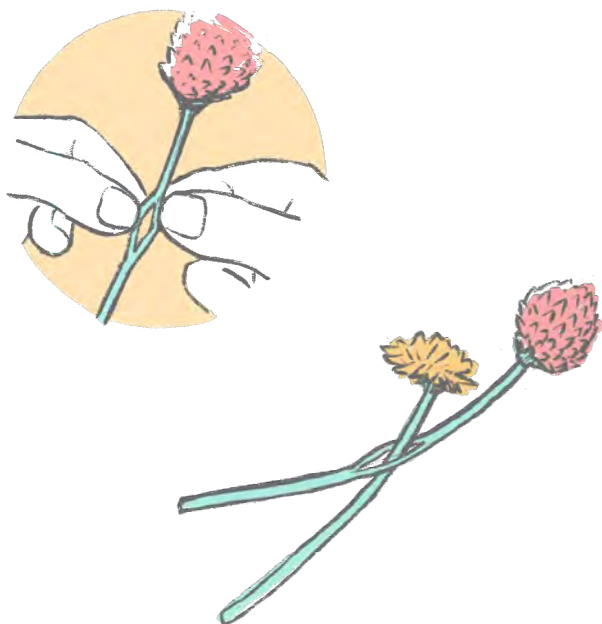


## LEAF AND FLOWER CROWNS

Crowns are a fun way to extend imaginative play or just add a festive element to the day. Young children can help collect flowers and, as their small motor skills develop, they can learn to weave the crowns. Older children can make crowns for younger children, promoting a sense of community among the group.

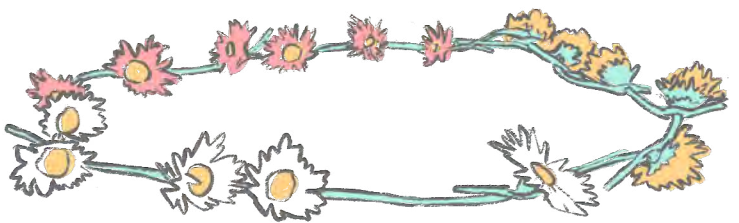
### Materials

- collection of leaves with long stems
- collection of flowers with long stems



**Leaf Crowns:** Collect leaves with long stems. Poke the stem of one leaf into the leafy part of another, weaving the stem over and under the leaf, like sewing. Use the stem of that leaf to add another leaf. Add leaves one at a time until the length is long enough to encircle the child's head. Connect the crown by weaving the stem of the final leaf into the first leaf.

**Flower Crowns:** Collect flowers that are abundant, such as daisies, clovers, or dandelions. Cut the stem so it is at least 3 inches long. Using your thumbnail, make a small slit in the upper part of one stem, close to the flower head. Slide the next flower stem through the hole. Be careful when doing this so that the hole doesn't open up all the way along the stem. (If it does, discard that flower and try again.) Continue adding flowers until the length is long enough to encircle the child's head. Join the first and last flowers to make a circle. Finally, weave in all of the stems so they aren't poking out; this will help make the crown more secure.



# WHAT DOES SUCCESS MEAN TO YOU?

We asked Oak Meadow students and teachers how they defined success, and their answers are below.

*How would you complete the sentence? Success is ...*

When you accomplish something you worked for  
(A, age 12)

Embracing failure as a chance to dig deeper and learn something new.  
(OM teacher)

Being cozy  
(O, age 8)

Placing the last puzzle piece in the puzzle!  
(OM teacher)

Reaching a goal  
(H, age 11)

Success means we did it!  
(H, age 5)

**Progress!**

(C, age 7)

**Freedom to do  
whatever you want**

(R, alum)

**When you have to  
work for it.**

(L, age 6)

**"Failing" and being OK with it  
because you learned and grew  
from the experience.**

(OM teacher)

**Being the best person  
you can be.**

(A, grade 9)

**Being kind, especially to  
those who are struggling.**

(M, grade 9)

**Living in a mindset of  
awareness for others around  
me and asking myself how I  
can serve them today.**

(B, grade 12)

**Feeling that you've done your  
best, no matter the outcome.**

(OM staff)

**NOW IT'S YOUR TURN.**

**WHAT DOES SUCCESS MEAN TO YOU?**

# FIVE TIPS for RAISING HAPPY, SUCCESSFUL KIDS

BY ANNA MARKINA



The motivation for success can be as varied as the emotions that drive us. For some, this is based on hope, belief, dreams, or desires. My 12-year-old daughter, for example, perceives success as a feeling of achieving goals, no matter how big or small they are. “It lies not in having particular skills or knowledge, but in the attitude of not giving up,” she says, recalling the time she won a medal in a national dance competition.

More negatively, others are motivated by anger, desperation, or fear of poverty. My good friend, an affluent investor from Indonesia, shares his view of success: “I don’t feel happy with less than two million dollars in my bank account. I came from a poor family and, for me, success is all about money. I would prefer to cry in my Lamborghini than be poor and happy.”

Neither my investor friend nor my daughter associated success in life with achieving high test scores at school. But many of my friends and I remember well how our teachers (supported by parents) drilled the idea “good grades now guarantee a successful future” into our heads. I recall anxiously preparing for my final high school examinations. My mother tried to calm me down by saying, “It’s not like you’re going to give birth, so don’t worry so much—it’s just your exams.” But I wholeheartedly objected that I’d rather go into labor than take the exams. “How will I live if I don’t get straight A’s and a gold medal?” I thought. I learned later that while grades were important, big picture thinking was imperative for personal success.

Despite my concerns, I passed my exams with flying colors and was awarded a gold medal. But did that success in school pave the way to my happiness in adulthood? If you think it didn’t, you are right.

Success does not bring happiness. Happiness brings success. When we’re happier, we’re more successful. A research paper co-authored by Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman stated that personality has a greater impact on success than IQ, and while cognitive skills are important, character skills are essential. Only when I stopped focusing on achieving high scores or pleasing others and started instead to work on personality traits—such as self-esteem, openness, purposefulness, and living in the present—did I become more joyful, happier, appreciative, and, ultimately, more successful.

My son is a big fan of Bear Grylls, who is a survival expert, writer, television presenter, businessman, and great father to his three boys. The famous adventurer felt that school did not prepare him for life outside the classroom. He said in one of his interviews, “When I was at school the people who were brilliant at school were often disasters in life. There’s stuff I wish people had taught me. I wish they’d taught me how to keep fit, how to eat healthy food, how to lead a team, how to communicate with people.”

My husband and I were determined to raise our children around three principles:

- Building confidence to fulfill their potential
- Preparing for life outside of school
- Embracing themselves and others and being happy in the present

Fortunately, on the unconventional journey into parenting and educating our kids, we discovered homeschooling, which allowed us to embed our family values and approach to life into the very core of their curriculum.

These five tips have motivated us as we prepare our children for a successful life:

### **1. AVOID COMPARING YOUR CHILDREN WITH OTHERS**

Provide your children with abstract standards instead of comparing them with others. Refrain from saying, “You’re the best! You got a better score than anyone else!” Kids should feel that they are smart, beautiful, nimble, and kind just as they are, not in comparison to others. Give them feedback about their qualities. Highlight the meaningful moments you have noticed in their work or attitude. Give them specific praise, such as, “I noticed how carefully you checked your math, found a mistake, and corrected it. Well done! Great attention to detail.” This will prompt them to improve themselves beyond simply beating someone else’s result.

### **2. CRITICIZE THE ACTION, NOT THE CHILD**

When a child makes a mistake, don’t reprimand them for it. Don’t connect their mistake to their sense of self. Instead, make a clear distinction between the child and the action. The action is the problem, not the child. If, for example, your child’s handwriting needs work, don’t express your disappointment by yelling “Your handwriting is a disaster! Why are you always so sloppy?!” Instead, try saying, “I see that some words here are a bit hard to read and some letters are squeezed together. That makes the text hard to understand. Let’s look at ways to write more clearly.” This provides your child with positive guidance on how they can improve. This helps them learn to act differently while staying confident and feeling your love.

### **3. ASPIRE TO ALTRUISTIC PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES.**

Making a child feel good in comparison to others can lead to narcissism, which destroys the foundation of self-esteem. When children compare themselves to others, there is always the fear that someone else is better than them. However, we still need to make sure that our children have an idea of what to strive for. When setting a standard, choose not a person, but a positive attribute, such as kindness, love, or generosity. This gives them a clear picture of what they must try to attain within themselves.

### **4. PRAISE YOUR CHILD FOR THEIR COURAGE AND PERSISTENCE.**

We want our children to learn to apply themselves and make their best effort. By paying attention to their persistence and intentions, we teach our children to believe in themselves, which contributes to their future success. It is imperative to support and inspire children. Regardless of their success or results, they should know that their parents are behind them and love them. The only expectation from parents should be for their children to display diligence and effort.

### **5. RADIATE CONFIDENCE WITHIN YOURSELF.**

Your own confidence will help your children bloom into well-rounded adults. Accept their feelings and choices, and allow them to be the judge of what victory means to them. For example, if a child wants to leave a baseball team and take dancing classes instead, do not ignore their feelings by saying, “I do not want to hear anything about you leaving your baseball team. No, you’re staying, I know it is better for you.” Instead, show children your trust, love, and acceptance for who they are. Listen and ask questions to learn more: “I am a bit surprised that you are thinking about leaving baseball. I thought you liked it. What changed? What dance are you going to try? Do you need help finding a good dance school?”

Our attitudes and chosen ways of upbringing have a powerful influence on our children. All children need love and understanding. Our love for them begets love and compassion in our children, raises their self-esteem and optimism, ignites confidence, and opens doors to happiness and success.

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*Anna-Yuldash Markina is a kind and energetic woman. She is the mother of a girl and a boy, who are both homeschooled using Oak Meadow. They live in a residence surrounded by a beautiful forest. The creator of a unique parenting methodology that helps parents and their children to love each other, Anna-Yuldash Markina is the author of numerous publications on communications. She is interested in investments and enjoys horse riding, skiing, and hiking. Anna-Yuldash Markina reckons that the ultimate measure of good education is the happiness of the kids.*



## [ FROM THE ARCHIVES ]

# KINDNESS MAKES A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

BY DEEDEE HUGHES

*Success in personal relationships is just as important as academic success, and kindness is a key ingredient. Just like we can teach our children to read and write, we can teach them kindness as well. This article was originally published in Living Education in 2012.*

By the time we reach adulthood, most of us have figured out that being kind creates a better environment for ourselves and those around us. We all know that kindness can spread warmth in a friendship that has cooled or smooth tensions in an argument. A smile can actually change the world—kind acts and gentle words have cemented friendships between nations. The ability to respect and be kind to others is something that has value on a personal level, on an academic level, on a business level, on a political level, and on just about any other level you could name.

All parents want their children to grow into loving, kind, compassionate individuals. How can we encourage these qualities?

"The basis of all good human behavior is kindness."

— ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

### SIMPLE STEPS TO TEACH KINDNESS

How we speak to and treat our children matters. Modeling skills such as good listening, how to speak nicely even when you are in a hurry or upset, and the Golden Rule all contribute to creating a kinder Planet Earth.

Of course, demonstrating behaviors like these is one thing—figuring out how to teach these “kindness skills” to our children can take a bit more thought. Here are some suggestions:

- **Speak with respect.** Words are very powerful, so use respectful language when talking to and about your children. Do you describe your two-year-old’s behavior as stubborn (which has negative connotations) or persistent (which is considered a valuable asset)? Is the gaggle of kids in your backyard “noisy” or “enthusiastic”? What about the timid or reluctant child who is simply approaching new experiences in a thoughtful or careful way? There’s a world of difference in attitude behind these word choices. Imagine how your child feels when described as stubborn, noisy, or timid. How would you feel? Becoming more aware of what you say and making an effort to “kind-up” your own vocabulary can make a big difference.

"Constant kindness can accomplish much. As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes misunderstanding, mistrust, and hostility to evaporate."

— ALBERT SCHWEITZER

- **Listen carefully.** Everyone wants to be heard. Listen to kids, and they will listen to you. Be especially careful of interruptions, and if you have to interrupt, apologize first, just as you would if you had to interrupt a business meeting or an adult conversation. When children are older, having regular family meetings can help them learn how to listen carefully and wait their turn to speak.
- **Ask nicely.** Lots of parents find themselves passing along the old saying “You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar” because it is so true! “Ask nicely” is a common reminder in many households. Other parents like to pretend they can’t hear whining, or they insist on a demand being rephrased into a pleasant request before complying. In return, make sure you phrase your commands into gentle reminders and requests. “Dirty clothes go in the basket” usually gets a quicker (and more cheerful) reaction than “This place is a mess! Clean it up!”

- **Help others.** Service is at the heart of kindness. Doing something nice for someone is extremely rewarding so let your child help you when you bring food to a sick friend, pet sit for a neighbor, help an elderly friend with yardwork, or send a thinking-of-you card to someone who has been going through a hard time. Being involved in kind acts can foster feelings of belonging and being needed, and teaches your child that everyone has gifts to share. Kindness should not be forced, however, so let your child choose to be kind. Provide them with opportunities to perform kind acts, but don't make them (after all, that wouldn't be kind).

"What are the things that you can't see that are important? I would say justice, truth, humility, service, compassion, love...They're the guiding lights of a life."

– JIMMY CARTER

- **Embrace the Golden Rule.** Strive to live by the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Being guided by the Golden Rule will help us become more aware of the ever-shifting parent/child boundaries. There's a point at which all of us realize that we need to knock on our pre-teen's bedroom door before entering if we expect them to knock on ours. Remaining patient as our teen is still searching for their cell phone ten minutes after we planned to leave is important if we want them to be patient the next time we're running late.
- **Apologize with grace.** Teaching kindness is easy when everyone is in a good mood, well-fed, well-rested, and patient. But teaching our children what to do when we forget to be kind is just as important as teaching them how to be kind in the first place. A sincere apology shows respect and humility, and can be one of the kindest acts of all. Sometimes these two simple words—"I'm sorry"—can have a magical effect: a cure-all, a peace offering, and a fresh start all at once.

"The ideas that have lighted my way have been kindness, beauty and truth."

– ALBERT EINSTEIN

"No kind action ever stops with itself. One kind action leads to another. Good example is followed. A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees. The greatest work that kindness does to others is that it makes them kind themselves."

– AMELIA EARHART

### ACCEPTING THE GIFT IN RETURN

Is it enough to model kind acts, speak with respect, and be kind to your kids? Not quite—there is one more missing ingredient. Just as part of giving an apology is learning to accept one graciously, part of service is learning to accept the help of others. It's not enough to show kindness to others. We must also accept kindness from others.

Many of us don't like to ask for help. We like to do things ourselves. But we all need one another and helping others is a gift that must be accepted in return. When someone offers their help, accept it with gladness. When your children help with dinner or household chores, express your appreciation and gratitude. When they pick up something you've dropped, get something you can't reach, or carry groceries into the house, give your heartfelt thanks.

"We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love."

– MOTHER TERESA

The benefits of kindness extend outward in a ripple that can spread from self to family, into the community, and around the world. Treating others with respect and kindness honors and affirms their human dignity and worth. It's a lifestyle worth cultivating and consciously sharing with your children. It's also a lovely way to spend your day.

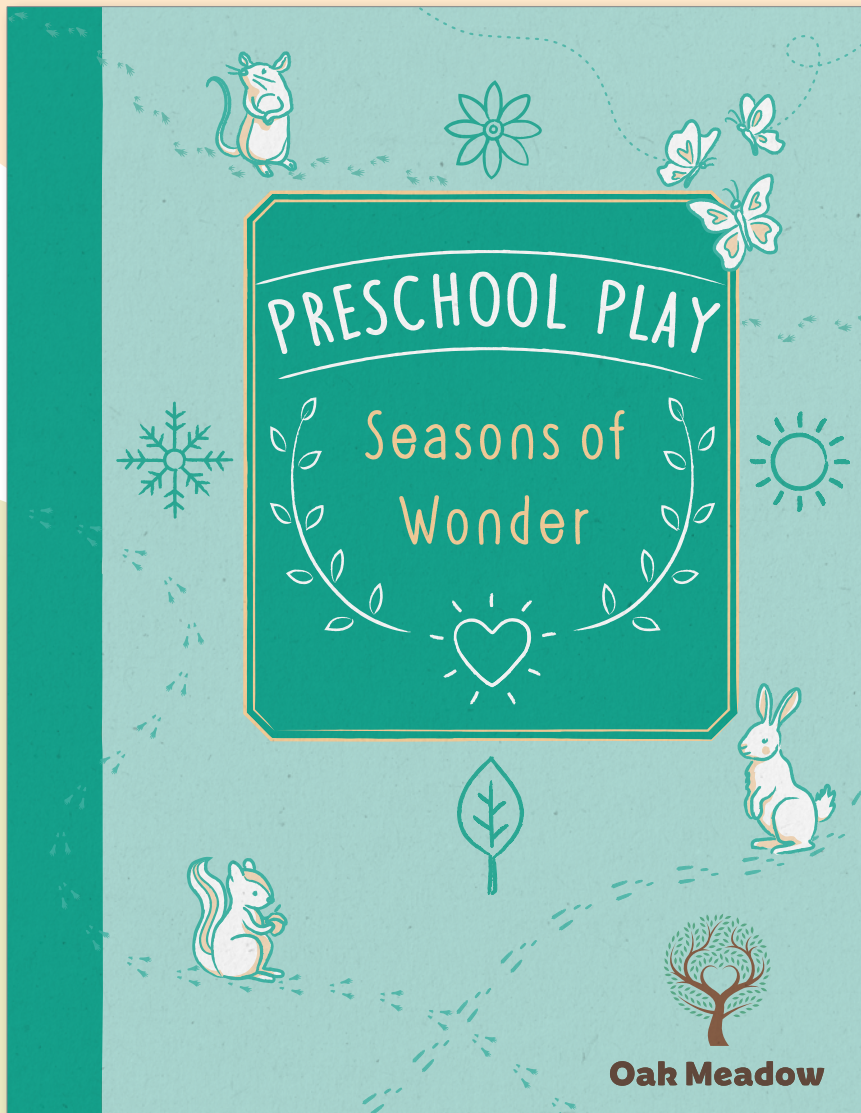
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*DeeDee Hughes is Oak Meadow's Director of Curriculum Development. DeeDee homeschooled her two sons on and off during their school years. She strives to see the kind heart inside every person she meets.*

CURRICULUM SPOTLIGHT:

# PRESCHOOL PLAY

We at Oak Meadow are excited about our new preschool course that is slated for release this spring. Here's a sneak peek with a few of the fun activities to try.



TAKE A  
PEEK  
INSIDE!



### Ten Little Bunnies

(Act out the words using your whole body. For a variation, you can sing the song counting backward: "Ten little, nine little, eight little bunnies . . .")

One little, two little, three little bunnies,  
Four little, five little, six little bunnies,  
Seven little, eight little, nine little bunnies,  
Ten bunnies hopping up and down!

(Repeat first three lines, and add variation to the fourth line)

Ten bunnies wiggling their tails!  
Ten bunnies twirling all around!  
Ten bunnies standing on one foot!  
Ten bunnies listening with their ears!  
Ten bunnies sleeping in their den! (sing this verse very softly)

(Speak) Wake up, little bunny rabbits!

(Repeat first verse)



### Bunny Hop

(sung and danced to the tune of "Hokey Pokey")

You put your bunny ears in.  
You put your bunny ears out.  
You put your bunny ears in.  
And you wiggle all about.  
You do the bunny pokey,  
And you hop yourself around,  
That's what it's all about!

(Repeat the verse four more times, using the following prompts to change the first line.)

You put your bunny nose in . . .  
You put your bunny tail in . . .  
You put your bunny feet in . . .  
You hop your whole bunny in . . .

Sing, play, and explore your way through the year with seasonal crafts, activities, stories, songs – and more!

### BUTTERFLY SYMMETRY

In this activity, you'll use tempera paints or oil pastel chalks to create a mirror image of butterfly wings. This activity encourages pattern recognition, which is important in math as well as reading and writing.

#### Instructions

1. Fold a piece of paper in half and cut a simple butterfly shape.
2. Lay the paper flat and have your child paint one half of the butterfly (one wing).
3. While the paint is still wet, carefully fold the butterfly in half, pressing and rubbing your hand over the surface several times.
4. Carefully peel the paper open and see the mirror image appear.
5. This can also be done using oil pastels, which will leave a faint but recognizable mirror image.

Another idea is to create a simple butterfly shape with symmetrical wing markings drawn in. Color in one wing, using two or three colors on the wing markings. See if your child can copy the pattern to color in the other wing. For younger children, have them color the first wing—they don't have to stay within the lines of the wing markings. You can recreate the design on the second wing to make a symmetrical pattern.

#### Materials

- drawing or painting paper
- crayons, tempera paints, or oil pastels



### FIELD TRIP: FROG POND

If you live in an area where there are small ponds, take a walk around a pond and explore the different plants and animals that live there. Make sure to model respectful behavior, being quiet and observing with your eyes so the animals and plants aren't disturbed.

This is a good time to explain to your child that amphibians, such as frogs, salamanders, and toads, are wild animals and can be highly stressed by being handled. In addition, they breathe through their skin, which is easily damaged by soap, sunscreen, or other substances that may be on your hands. It is safest to observe these delicate creatures without touching them.



\*SPRING CRAFT\*

# Obstacle Course

An obstacle course offers a chance to be creative, active, and playful. It can provide endless opportunities for developing valuable physical skills, including balance, flexibility, coordination, and strength. The whole family can get involved in building obstacles indoors or outdoors based on materials you have on hand.

The obstacles can be placed in a line or a circle so that as your child finishes one obstacle, the next is waiting. An outside course can take up more space, with room to run or skip between obstacles. Younger children can follow an older child or adult so they see how to do each element. Try to include components that require crawling, reaching, jumping, climbing, and balancing.

Older children might enjoy using a stopwatch to time themselves and others. You can also create obstacles that encourage cooperation rather than competition and have players move through the course in pairs or as a group. Remember to make things adult-sized so everyone can join the fun!

**Here are some ideas for indoor obstacles:**

- a chair to climb over or crawl under
- a table to crawl under
- a Hula-Hoop lying on the floor to hop in and out of
- a couch to crawl around or climb over
- a spot on the wall to jump and reach
- several large books or pillows in a line to step from one to the next
- a cloth draped over two low chairs to wiggle under using a belly crawl
- a board lying flat on the floor to balance across

**Here are some ideas for outdoor obstacles:**

- a jump rope placed in a squiggle to follow
- rock to climb or jump over
- traffic cones to run around, in either a circular or serpentine motion
- bushes to crawl under
- a bean bag to throw and hop to on one foot, then pick up and throw again, hopping on the other foot
- tree branch or fence post to jump or reach and touch
- line of rocks, low wall, or board to balance along
- rope hanging from a tree to hold on to and swing
- grass to roll or somersault on

Take advantage of whatever your environment holds and get creative! Once your child understands the concept of an obstacle course, they will probably have great fun developing new obstacles. This is a lot of fun when older children are involved as well. If you have children who have mobility issues or are unable to navigate the course on their own, they can be assisted by other children or adults. Showing children how to assist others can give them the tools they need to develop and express their caring nature.





Wherever your student is going, Oak Meadow can get them there.



**Oak Meadow**  
K-12 CURRICULUM AND DISTANCE LEARNING

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