

# Living Education

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**Oak  
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K-12 CURRICULUM AND  
DISTANCE LEARNING



## HOMESCHOOLING WITH MEANING

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**IN THIS ISSUE:**    *THE GIFT OF PRESENCE \* CONNECTING WITH ART*  
*THE "HOME" IN HOMESCHOOLING \* RESTORING SPIRIT THROUGH OUTDOOR PLAY*



# Welcome.

**H**ow do we make meaning of our lives, and how do we bring that meaning into our homeschooling life? After all, homeschooling is not just about academics. It's a way of life as well as a way of learning. As a homeschooler, you have the unique opportunity to share life lessons with your children along with life science, literature, and line graphs.

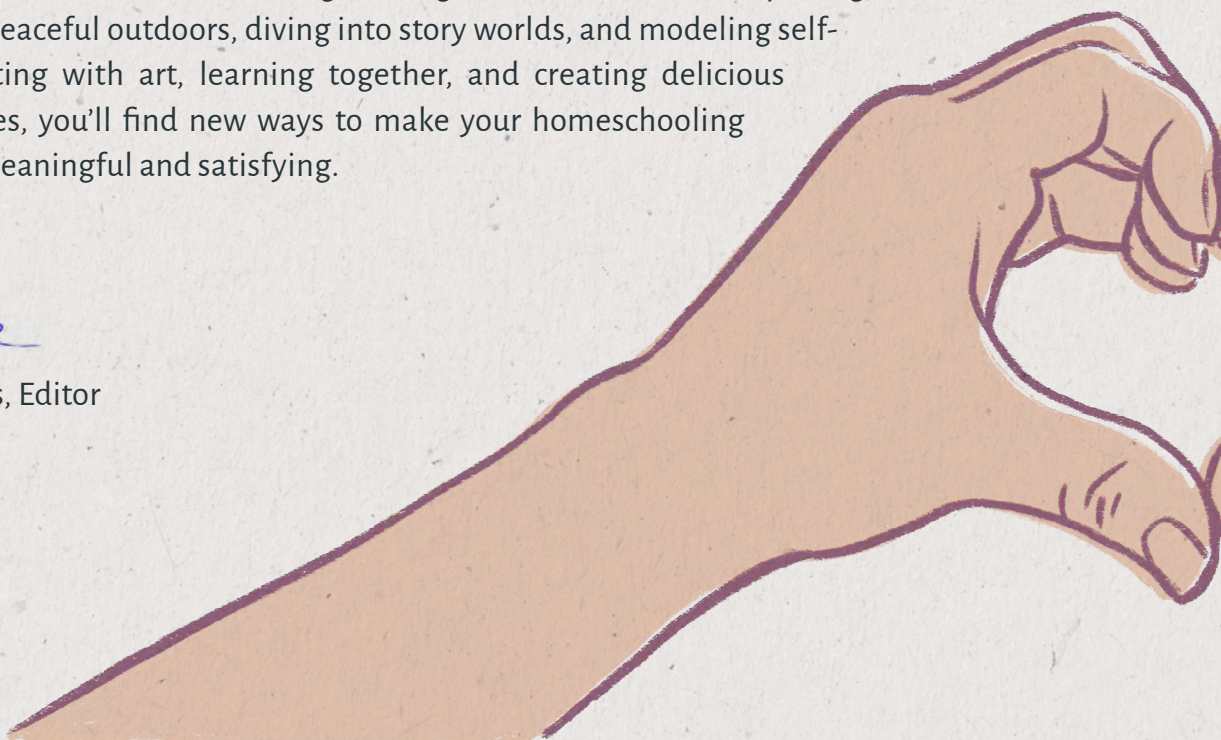
Showing our children how to live a meaningful life is part of the parenting—and educational—process. Active explorations might center around civic involvement and advocacy, handcrafts, culturally relevant skills or events, homesteading, travel, or environmental stewardship. You might work these into your regular schedule, find ways to explore them through your academic curriculum, or focus on a particular theme each month or year to deepen your child's learning. Homeschooling offers a unique opportunity to combine academics with other skills and activities that engage our curiosity, spark our interests, or are just plain fun. It also lets us show our children what we value in an active and meaningful way.

Every family brings meaning into their world differently. In this issue, we'll explore ideas and share stories about meaning-making in real time. From exploring the liberating and peaceful outdoors, diving into story worlds, and modeling self-care to connecting with art, learning together, and creating delicious edible sculptures, you'll find new ways to make your homeschooling journey more meaningful and satisfying.

Happy reading,

*Dee Dee*

DeeDee Hughes, Editor





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A photograph of a child standing on a large rock in a pond, surrounded by autumn trees with yellow and orange leaves. The child is holding a long stick or branch over the water. The scene is peaceful and scenic, with the water reflecting the surrounding foliage.

# RESTORING the SPIRIT THROUGH OUTDOOR PLAY

BY SATOMI IZUMI-TAYLOR, PH.D.

**W**e know that children are active learners who need to move and learn from moving. To educate active learners in all developmental dimensions, such as physical, social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and spiritual, we need to provide holistic experiences. We need to offer children opportunities to stretch their minds and bodies as well as recognize their feelings and work on social skills. One way to promote their emotional and social competence is to support children's spiritual development through outdoor play. When playing outdoors, children feel liberated. Being outdoors can enhance opportunities to learn to respect and to develop a love for nature. It can also develop children's natural curiosity, imagination, wonder, and the desire to discover nature. When children grow up with an appreciation of nature around them, they are more likely to become adults who advocate for preserving nature.

## OUTDOOR PLAY

Nurture children's spiritual development by providing loving and respectful relationships in nature-rich learning environments. Offer children opportunities to play outdoors for five-to-ten hours a week to support their development of spirituality. Have magnifying glasses for children to get an up-close look at nature. Use a hula hoop to outline a circle on the ground where children can dig a hole in the corner of the yard. Supply some tools, including shovels, buckets/pails, spoons, cups, etc., and see what happens. Let children photograph or draw pictures of their work so they can see what they did and talk about it later. Reflecting on their accomplishments can promote children's spirits.



## NATURE BRACELETS

Tell children that they are going to make bracelets with leaves or flowers from the garden. Cut a piece of masking tape to fit their wrists, taping the ends together with the sticky side out, and invite them to choose what they want to stick on their bracelets.

## SHINRIN-YOKU (FOREST BATHING)

Shinrin-yoku, also known as forest bathing, refers to spending time in a forest. Take children to a forest environment where you can spend time in silence and immerse yourselves in nature. Encourage children to enjoy nature without talking for a while. In comfortable, protective clothing, you may just wander aimlessly for 15 minutes. This lowers stress levels and increases positivity and well-being. Teach children to use their five senses to enjoy what nature offers: listening to birds chirping and the wind blowing; touching trees and the ground, feeling the sun-shine and wind; enjoying the smell of trees and bushes; and viewing the colors and shapes of nature. Shinrin-yoku is effective in improving mental health, and it costs nothing.

## NATURE WALKS

Take children outdoors for nature walks so they can collect natural treasures, such as rocks, leaves, flowers, pine cones, acorns, and more. Bring these outdoor discoveries back home for more in-depth exploration and for sharing with others. Children can place their treasures in nice baskets in front of windows, on top of desks, on easy-to-access shelves, or on top of coffee tables to explore with magnifiers.

Create children's natural treasure books where they can reflect back on their nature walks. Children can place flowers/leaves in a thick book to press and leave them to dry for a few days. After drying them, children can glue them to notebooks and laminate the pages. Ask what they want to write describing each page. If they have rocks, pine cones, or acorns, children can place them in ziplock bags. Older children might like to photograph or sketch their treasures to create a nature book. They can also use their nature collections as part of a clay sculpture or make impressions of them in clay to create art.

## WINTER ART

During winter, children can collect outdoor objects and decorate them with tempera paint. By freezing natural items such as berries or seedpods in see-through containers filled with water, children can also experience the effect of melting. Pop out the frozen items, and place them on trees where they can also observe birds and other animals reacting to these items.

A Christmas tree can find a new life after the decorations come down by being placed in the yard for children to build with. They could create pathways or forts using the branches. If possible, provide logs in a yard and let children play with them. Make sure logs are the right size for their reach and abilities.

Children can expand their creative abilities when relating to natural environments. When we respect and honor children, they tend to engage with respectful behavior. When we interact with children in a dignified way, their spirituality can be enhanced. Children's outdoor experiences need to be meaningful and developmentally appropriate. This can be as simple as providing time in outdoor spaces where they can sit and enjoy the shade, water, trees, shrubs, flowers, grass, logs, soil, and rocks. Through experiencing beautiful aspects of nature, children can expand their sense of self and responsibility as well as develop their will and motivation. Experiencing nature is deeply and internally connected to spirituality. So, let's play outdoors with children!

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# EARTH CYCLES: QUIET TIME OUTSIDE

BY DEEDEE HUGHES

**H**aving a daily quiet time is a lovely way for everyone to recharge in the middle of the day. After lunch is often the best time for this. While young ones nap, older children can enjoy some peace and quiet or their parent's full attention. Moving quiet time outside occasionally (or frequently!) brings a new way to enjoy the fresh air and change of scenery. You might be able to do this on your porch or in the yard, or visit a park or nearby open space for quiet time. If you are going to a new place, first let children actively explore and play, and then give them lunch or a snack before settling down to quiet time.

If your family is new to quiet time, start with a small amount of time. Set a timer for fifteen minutes, and then expand the time over the course of one or two weeks. To keep wiggly children contained, you can use a hammock, outside lounge chairs, treehouse, a tent or wind shelter, or a blanket on the ground that everyone is instructed to stay on ("Pretend we're in a boat at sea, and we all have to stay in the boat."). Have a basket of books or stuffed animals at hand to help set a calming atmosphere.





Some simple rules can help create a peaceful environment:

- Close your eyes and take five deep breaths to start quiet time.
- Quiet time is for whispering or listening.
- Let others rest without being disturbed.
- Quiet time ends when you hear the chime.

Once quiet time is established, it often becomes a favorite time of day. Here are some ideas to help create an outdoor quiet time the whole family will enjoy.

**Get cozy.** Bring a blanket, pillow, and stuffed animals. Set up under a shady tree if it's hot or in a sunny spot if it's chilly. Make sure to bring an extra blanket or two to snuggle under. Lie down, and watch the clouds and birds float across your field of vision.

**Listen to the quiet.** If you are in a natural area, getting situated outside can cause the local wildlife to either flee or go quiet. In the first few minutes, soak in the quiet with no talking. Children might like to cup their ears to make "wolf ears" to listen more closely.

**Listen to the sounds.** Once you've been in place for a bit, the natural sounds will start to reassert themselves. If you are in a town or urban setting, there may be many interesting human-made noises to hear. Have children silently keep track on their fingers the number of different sounds they hear.

**Tell stories.** Instead of bringing books, quietly tell stories from your childhood, either favorite stories that you remember or favorite experiences you had. Children also love to hear stories of their own younger selves.

**Make up a story together.** After spending a few minutes listening and watching the sky, begin a story about something you have observed. Tell the first part of the story, and then invite someone else to add the next part. Keep taking turns until the story finds a satisfying ending.

*DeeDee Hughes is Oak Meadow's Director of Curriculum Development. She loves spending time outdoors, enjoying the sights, smells, and sounds of nature while gardening, hiking, or just soaking up the atmosphere.*





# The “HOME” in HOMESCHOOLING



BY REBECCA BARKER

Just as every homeschooling experience is unique, so are the ways each family adds meaning to it. It's right in the name: homeschooling. Home is in every way a meaningful example of responsibility, connections, economics, agriculture, experimenting, problem solving, personal connections, and most of all love. Letting your kids be involved in your day-to-day life experiences, from grocery shopping to vacation planning, allows them new perspectives. We find meaning in our days when we embrace being home and explore beyond the book!

Homeschooling gives our family the freedom to learn within the comfort of home. Although that comfort does often mean school days in our pajamas, it also means the safety to make unlimited mistakes, the ability to explore or take breaks, the silly jokes and custom interests incorporated into learning that drive connections and create memories. For instance, my son (10) is an avid Super Mario Bros. and video game fan. Therefore, when I write sentences for him to correct, they often involve his favorite characters. His preferred way to practice math facts is with our “Mario Land”-style board game where he gets to move action figures through addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division spaces to defeat Bowser by solving problems and saving the Princess. By adding his favorite things to our curriculum, we are able to create interest, engagement, and joy in learning. For us, meaning is found in the moments that we have fun.

We are pandemic homeschool transplants. My son was public schooled for three years, and I often compare our days at home to the hectic and impersonal days of the past, where I'm sure he used most of his energy trying to be independent and failed to pick up many of the larger tidbits sent streaming his way. Today, he and his five-year-old sister share a common learning space where we actively incorporate joy!

Both kids now share a bond that comes by being together. They are aware of each other's struggles and encourage one another's victories. Our favorite times are often when we come together to learn about science, play a game on the floor, or read a great story together. Projects such as drawing the phases of the moon or acting out the Pony Express suddenly become more interesting because we are doing it together. My son confidently learns topics in his text or through a YouTube resource while my daughter joins in for the art, play, and practice of it all. We joke and play music. We do math problems and bake brownies. We have snack picnics in the hallway while reading aloud. And we smile, because we are together, we are home.

The act of school itself isn't a chore—it's part of what we do. As a homeschooling mom, I'm able to sprinkle connections to what we are learning throughout our daily life. Knowing the curriculum puts me in tune to highlighting it within our home. Planning a road trip vacation, for instance, is a helpful exercise in sequencing





As a homeschooling mom, I'm able to sprinkle connections to what we are learning throughout our daily life.

events and researching attractions as we plan our trip, pack our bags, and with great excitement, work together to ensure our days ahead are filled with fun. Reading aloud our favorite graphic novel series doesn't just provide a few laughs but engages conversations reviewing the story and making future predictions. We analyze movies for plot, characters, and story elements. We take nature walks and discover our backyard with new adventurous eyes. We play homemade board games that practice math facts. We have fun.

When my kids need some support, have a triumph to celebrate, or want to share an idea, I'm there to experience it. Meaningful moments define our home and our homeschool. These moments are found while learning mindfulness, problem solving, and all the basics in between. They're in being able to share life's ups and downs and deal with them by example, showing either how to handle challenges or the fact that even Mom

makes mistakes. They're found when our cat curls up on the book bin, thus ending the practice of handwriting for the day because she's just too comfy to move.

These moments are in the everyday lifeblood of our crazy, imperfect, positively personal, simply fantastic home, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

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*Rebecca Barker is a homeschooling mom of two, wife, and writer. She and her family live in a big blue house in Illinois, where they play, learn, and explore together. Rebecca is an accomplished writer who is excited to share her adventures that go along with being a mom, while encouraging others to get creative and Be Brave Mom at [www.bebravemom.blogspot.com](http://www.bebravemom.blogspot.com).*







[FROM THE ARCHIVES]

# THE GIFT OF PRESENCE

BY LAWRENCE WILLIAMS

It's funny, but when I think about presence, the person I think of is Aunt Blanche, my grandmother's sister. The older I get, the more important Aunt Blanche seems to be for me, because when I was with her, it seemed like nothing else mattered. I can vividly recall many of our times together, but I especially remember the day she taught me to fish. I was six years old, and it was a hot August day on the farm.

Before we had finished breakfast, we knew it was going to be a scorcher. As we were clearing the dishes off the table, she asked me if I wanted to go fishing. It sounded like a great idea to me, even though I'd never been fishing before and wasn't quite sure what it meant. She took me out to the barn and showed me a damp, fertile spot of ground on the shady side of the barn. With a trowel she got from the barn, she started digging, and soon she uncovered a long, juicy worm. She put it in a Mason jar she had, then she gave me the jar and the trowel.

"Now you just find as many as you can," she said, "and I'll go get the fishing poles."

I kept digging, and before long I had pulled about twenty worms from the dark, rich soil and put them in the jar. A few minutes later, she came back with her straw hat on her head and two fishing poles.

She took one look at the worms and laughed that deep, gravelly laugh of hers. "That's good," she said. "Now put the lid on the jar and bring it along."

I did as she said, and we got into her car and headed for Lake Phelps, which was not far from the farm. You had to go through Frying Pan and Gum Neck, where Uncle



Durwood lived, and then just a bit farther down that same road, which was long and straight and lined with trees.

At the lake, she led me to the end of a long dock, took one of the poles and carefully grabbed hold of the hook.

"Hand me a worm," she said, and I reached deep into the jar, grabbed one of the nice fat ones, and handed it to her. "This is what you do." I watched as she carefully inserted the hook deep into the worm. The worm wiggled and squirmed, but she just kept pushing the hook in, slow and steady, until it was about halfway on the hook.

"Now here's the important part," she remarked. "This is what makes the fish bite." She gave me a big grin when she said that, and I felt like she was about to let me in on a secret known only to a few fishermen in the whole world. She gathered a good wad of spit in her mouth and, as though she was giving the worm a final blessing before she put it in the water, she spat out her wad upon the worm, covering it from head to toe. For a moment, maybe stunned by the blessing it had received, the worm stopped moving completely, then suddenly began wiggling like crazy.

Moving away from me, Aunt Blanche swung the pole in a wide arc over her head, and I watched the hook and worm fall into the lake with a glorious *plop*! In a few seconds, a fish grabbed the hook and she pulled it in.

"That's all there is to it," she remarked. "Now you do it." She handed me the other pole, I did exactly what she had done, and it wasn't long before I pulled in my first fish. After that, we fished together, pulling in one fish after the other, and about an hour later we left with a beautiful string of fish for dinner that night.

I remember this fishing lesson as clearly as though it happened yesterday because it was so simple, so direct, so *real*. Maybe that's why I think about Aunt Blanche when I think about being fully, completely present in something. Aunt Blanche wasn't cluttered with complex concepts, a crowded schedule, or a distracted mind. She was able to be really present with the people in her life and the things she did. Her presence just flowed so effortlessly into everyone around her.

When I look back on it now, I can see that it was her clear and uncomplicated presence that taught me things that continue to enrich my life to this day. Aunt Blanche was able to do even little things with love and presence. By doing that, she taught me that *what* you're doing—like

teaching a boy to spit on a worm—is not nearly as important as what you *bring* to what you're doing.

If we can slow down in the course of our day and just take the time to sit on the floor to build a block tower or play with stuffed animals, we can bring our presence to bear on the moment. If we can simplify our lives in small ways, such as only checking our email at a few set times during the day (rather than attending to it continuously), we give ourselves more space to be fully present with our children. Arts, crafts, nature-based play and exploration, or reading together are all wonderful avenues that bring forth clear, undiluted presence.

As Aunt Blanche taught me, if you bring love and presence to the small things you do, then the great things unfold by themselves quite naturally in the fullness of time. This is not just the secret to good fishing: it is the secret to a good life.

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Lawrence Williams was the co-founder of Oak Meadow and a trailblazer in the world of homeschooling. This article first appeared in The Heart of Learning.





# The WORLD of STORIES

BY STEPHANIE THOMPSON

Settling down into our little reading nook with a girl nestled under each arm, I exhale contentedly. As I begin to read, there's a thrill of calm joy among us that stems from a sense of belonging and shared focus. This is an almost daily scene in my home. While not unique to our family, it is a treasure I constantly remind myself to savor—not only for its sentimental value but just as much for its value in nurturing the hearts and minds of my daughters.

We are all shaped by stories. While stories are often art imitating life, those that surround us as we grow up influence the formation of our character and perspectives in big ways. As I revisit stories I enjoyed as a child, I recognize how much I learned about people, places, historical periods, and cultures. Stories are often a child's first window into the lives of other people. As homeschooling parents who are privileged to teach our children to read, we have the delightful challenge of supporting each child toward that day when they can open a book and look through the window for themselves.

I had a career teaching in the primary grades before deciding to take some time at home with my two daughters. As a classroom teacher, I found deep fulfillment in guiding students toward independent reading. In the first grade, reading instruction can feel a lot like giving that starting push to a new bike rider. The most rewarding part for the adult is letting go and watching the surprised joy on the face of a child who is moving forward on their own. It's exhilarating for both teacher and child. As reading teachers, we are giving access to a window into the world of stories. What a sacred and invaluable gift it is for a child to be able to enter that world on their own.

This is one of many reasons I felt more excited than nervous about the sudden change of plans in 2020. With

the world turned upside down, my husband and I agreed it would be best for me to homeschool my older daughter for preschool. During that year, I became convinced that I could continue for another year. We had always planned to send our children to a public school. Yet after beginning this homeschool process, I thought, "Why would I deprive myself of the joy of being right beside my child as she begins her reading journey?" Eagerly, I went full steam ahead to homeschool my older daughter for kindergarten in 2021.

Both of my daughters are thriving in the atmosphere of learning we have created. Our home library is perpetually growing, and we make weekly visits to our public library. My girls never tire of the old books, and they devour new titles as they come. We are nearing the end of our kindergarten year and have observed, traced, molded, twisted, glued, cut, posed, signed, and printed the forms of all but three letters of the alphabet. We have also sung, rhymed, and tongue-twisted our way to remembering the sounds each letter represents. My daughter is absorbing the language and math in a very organic way—almost as if these symbols, sounds, and ideas were part of our home environment. Nothing is forced.

This home learning lifestyle is an enormous step away from the traditional classroom setting in which I taught for eight years and is a stretch for me professionally. At the beginning of the school year, I told myself I would fully dive into this method







As reading teachers, we are giving access to a window into the world of stories. What a sacred and invaluable gift it is for a child to be able to enter that world on their own.

of early education, trusting the process. Already, the approach feels more natural to me than the very rigid and sometimes forced methods I practiced for so long.

What a breath of fresh, beautiful air it is to simply read to my children! We read fairy tales, folk tales, and Beatrix Potter to introduce the alphabet. I read stories and poetry during circle time and nature-themed stories to emphasize science lessons. While my 3-year-old naps, I read chapter books to my 5-year-old: *Charlotte's Web*, *The Cricket in Times Square*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and she begged me to read the unabridged *Anne of Green Gables*. She sometimes plays or does fork weaving while I read, yet often just snuggles up and listens. Her interest is evident from the questions she asks during and afterwards.

There is already an appreciation for beautiful language and vivid images painted in the mind's eye. As I read L.M. Montgomery's description of Anne's enchantment while driving beneath the white blossom-laden archway, my daughter declared, "This is a beautiful story!" She tries out new words in her speech regularly, vocabulary she can only have learned from listening to wonderfully written stories. My daughter still writes her own stories through pictures, but on occasion, she will dictate as I write down her words. When I read them back to her, she is proud and even entertained by her own ideas in story form.

While there is ample time for active play, art, and gardening, my daughters and I spend more time engaging with stories than we do with any other activity. How appropriate that seems when we consider how people have learned for millennia, whether through oral tradition, printed words, or through drama and music. Stories of those who have lived before us teach us at the deepest

level. When my daughters listen to stories, they are sympathetic to the trials and joys of the characters. They reimagine the stories and narrate them to themselves when left alone with books during quiet times. When they do this for sheer pleasure, they are unconsciously assimilating facets of a story with their own knowledge about the world. This is the kind of learning that will stick with them and continue to shape their worldview. By inviting my daughters into my own enjoyment, I hope to create a spark that will ignite a lifelong love for stories. I look forward to the day when I get to let go and watch my daughter's face light up as she soars into the world of stories on her own!



Stephanie Thompson lives in Sebastopol, California, and is a former classroom teacher turned homeschool parent who is enjoying her time at home with her two daughters immensely. She also teaches at their homeschool co-op and church and loves to help new readers on the side. She is in her happy place while running, reading, cooking, or listening to music—if only she could do all of them at once!

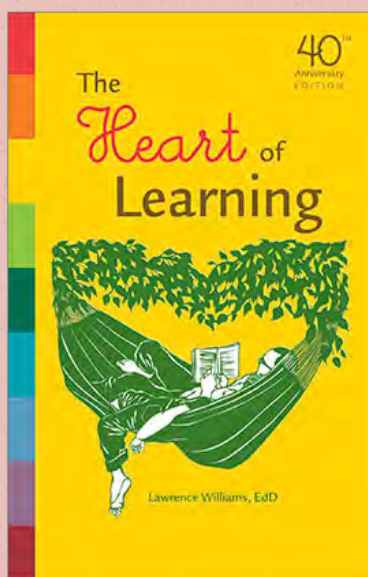




## CURRICULUM SPOTLIGHT:

# The *Heart* of Learning

The Heart of Learning was first published by Oak Meadow co-founder Lawrence Williams in the early 1980s, and a second edition was released in 2013 that contained new sections addressing modern parenting concerns. Over the decades, this book has inspired, encouraged, and informed parents and caregivers tasked with the vital role of homeschooling their children. The excerpt below, from Chapter 15: Sustainable Living and Learning, addresses the importance of caring for ourselves in the midst of caring for others.



An educational classic, *The Heart of Learning* has informed homeschooling families for decades, and continues to provide the foundation of Oak Meadow's K-3 curriculum.



## **GOOD AT GIVING**

Most parents are really good at giving. The needs of everyone else come first. We make sure that our children have neat hair and clean clothes before going out into the world, but often we forget to brush our own hair or look down to see if what we threw on that morning is still clean. We take great care to ensure that the feelings of our children are acknowledged and respected, but we nudge our own feelings aside. We give attention to the health and well-being of others, but ignore our own.

Of course, this is not a sustainable way to live. We can only keep it up so long before something has to change. The point eventually comes when our bodies and our spirits demand a little rejuvenation. Taking care of others is a wonderful task, rewarding in a deeply satisfying way, but if we forget to take care of ourselves, all that selfless giving ultimately backfires. Maybe we get so sick we need to stay in bed for a few days. Maybe we become lackluster, or snappish, or too tired to notice the little things that really matter. When that happens, we are not the only ones who feel the backlash.

The good news is that the decision to homeschool and the accompanying lifestyle doesn't have to mean putting our own needs aside. In fact, if we want our homeschooling to last instead of fizzle out in frustration, we have to find ways to bring balance to our personal and homeschooling lives.

## **MODELING SELF-CARE**

Consider this: Do we want our children to grow up to ignore their own needs, to see their feelings as unworthy of attention, to disregard their own physical and emotional health? Of course we don't. Perhaps seeing things in that light, it is easier for us to begin to place a priority on taking care of ourselves. After all, we have to model what we'd like our children to learn, right? Children learn to take care of themselves by watching parents take care of their adult selves and bodies. The homeschooling lifestyle is not just about teaching academics—we also teach vital life skills every day, with everything we do. Similarly, being a parent is not just about sacrifice; it's about taking care of everyone, including ourselves.

It's easy for most of us to agree that we'd like to take better care of our own needs, but the trick is finding the time. How many of us have a space during the day just waiting to be filled with me-time? Rather than wait for time to magically open up in our busy lives, we have to decide that time for ourselves is important, and then make it a priority to find ways for it to happen . . .



BY ASHLEY REID

Three years ago, my husband and I, along with our two young children, made the move from the beach to western North Carolina, nestled in the Appalachian Mountains. We were ecstatic. We had just welcomed a new baby (Nova) into our lives, making our two-year-old, Luna, a big sister. Big sister, big move, big aspirations, and I had big homeschooling plans. With a new backdrop for our lives, I thought now was the perfect time to begin easing into our homeschool journey. But, being the way I am, I did not ease into the pool of homeschooling—I dove headfirst into the deep end.

I began vigorously researching different styles, curriculum, routines, and methods. I went deep down the Pinterest rabbit hole. Whenever I could, I went to my local library where I spent hours printing out worksheets, looking through stacks of books, and planning unit studies. All the while, I had a baby strapped to my chest and a wild toddler who wanted no part in the calmness of a library. My husband was working full-time, leaving me and the kiddos at home most of the day. Some days, it was all I could do to keep everyone fed and cleaned, and I barely scraped by without feeling overwhelmed by guilt. Luna didn't care about morning tea, or writing, or unit studies, and Nova seemingly needed Mom the moment we started trying to do lessons. As a lifelong maker, I was ignoring my need for a creative outlet, which in turn was depressing me. I knew I was not thriving because of that. I started comparing myself to the Instagram swoon-worthy homeschooling pages, filled with sepia tones and sourdough, and I felt like I was failing my daughter. I knew I had to take a step back.

I chose homeschooling back when I was pregnant in 2016. I wanted that freedom. I wanted us to have that quality time together and memories filled with learning and exploring. But what I was doing was not that picture I wanted for us, or what I wanted for me. The mountains, the waterfalls, a mini homestead, forests, nature, and four seasons. The abundance of nature excited me.

And for me, excitement means opportunity. It was time for a reminder of that.

I am a firm believer in being a life-long learner, and I think there are no teachers as great as the natural world. So, I dropped the workbooks and curriculum, and we got outside. We started taking hikes as a family a few times a week.

At first, they were just that.

Time to explore our new surroundings, get out of the house, and have some fun. Luna asked me about the names of certain trees, and I realized there were a lot of trees in this area I wasn't familiar with. The next time we all went on a hike, I had an idea. I brought crayons and a blank piece of paper, and had Luna do bark rubbings. She was so intrigued, and so was I. We went home and compared the rubbings we made to the trees in our yard, and it clicked. This is what we needed, this is what I needed to thrive as her teacher, to be in it with her.

I began including Luna in the things I was interested in learning about. I was always curious about foraging and local plant identification. Together, we gathered wineberries and chanterelles. We would take them





home, wash them, and read about them in a regional guidebook. We would explore new spots in the forest and learn about wildlife, and go home and draw pictures of it. We visited waterfalls and mountains, and asked questions about where the source of the water came from, learning about headwaters, tributaries, and water cycles. We would go to trail heads and read about the geographical boundaries on the map, and go home to make our own maps. I always wanted to be a better artist. So together Luna and I started nature journaling. We often watch videos online of drawing tips and tutorials. Luna loves kombucha, so together we measured the ingredients and made kombucha, experimenting with our favorite flavor combinations. I always wanted to learn how to make sourdough bread, so together we made a starter, tediously fed it, made a loaf of bread, and then let the starter die. But that's okay, we did it together, we learned together, and failed together, because we can't learn all of our lessons in wins.

In the start, I picked a lot of things that I wanted to know about and simplified them for a more suitable pace. But now, Luna and I (and now Nova) learn about a wide variety of things. We have an easy flow where we learn equally about things everyone wants to know about. We have made new hobbies, learned new skills, failed, gotten upset, and flourished. We have learned how to fish (with the help of Dad), cook, make jellies, make fermented food, paint with watercolors, identify birds, garden, make play doh, and, macrame. Luna has taken up my love of sewing, and now patches all the rips and tears in her stuffed animals. She is an amazing artist and

invites me to sit with her and design clothing. I love that she is teaching me about color blending techniques. We are currently searching for a pottery class we can take together. I have also taken the initiative to get back into old hobbies and learn some new things just for myself. Although my children may not be directly learning with me, I hope they learn by watching me try, and fail, and try again, seeing that even grown-ups are still learning.

Realizing that thriving, for us, meant learning together changed our homeschooling journey, and maybe even saved it. Homeschooling doesn't just have to be a strict regimen of sitting and practicing with worksheets. It can be fun—and should be—for both child and parent. I hope that when my kids look back and think about their time exploring, and learning, and figuring it all out, they remember me right there beside them.

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*Ashley Reid is a mother who lives in North Carolina with her husband, 2 daughters, and crazy dog. Together with her husband, they homeschool their children and are building their tiny house. She is a seamstress who appreciates slow fashion and is working towards a handmade wardrobe. She enjoys reading, writing, spending time in the garden, and being outdoors with her family, especially when that involves laying in a hammock and gazing at the trees.*





**ART** can be a powerful tool to engage your learners in a meaningful dialogue with the wider world. Use this activity on your family's next trip to the museum or art gallery to inspire critical thinking skills, reflection, and purposeful connection with art.

This activity takes place in three parts: before the exhibit, during the exhibit, and after the exhibit. Questions and prompts can be discussed or answered in a notebook. Families with younger learners can ask the questions aloud and write down their answers for them.

Reminder: Some parts of critical investigation of art could be hurtful to a curator, an artist, or a fellow art appreciator who is visiting the exhibit. Remind your learners to exercise care and use respectful language while discussing the art pieces during your visit.

#### **MATERIALS**

- description of the exhibit (check online, or give the museum a call for more information)
- notebooks
- pens or pencils

#### **PART 1: BEFORE THE EXHIBIT**

Investigating art is an open exploration. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Family members may have different impressions that lead to rich conversations surrounding the experience.

First, take time to read the description aloud as a family.

Next, answer the following questions:

- What are your first thoughts after hearing the description?
- What do you think you'll like about the exhibit?
- What do you think you won't like about the exhibit?
- Does the description remind you of any other art pieces?



## PART 2: DURING THE EXHIBIT

In this section, you will be describing what you see. Write down as many details as you can about what the art looks like. Note how it's framed, what materials were used to make it, what's nearby, and any information listed on its caption.

Find and describe a piece of art that . . .

- is interesting to you.
- you find confusing.
- you really love.
- doesn't appeal to you.
- feels familiar or reminds you of something else.

Don't forget to include your reaction to the piece! Write down any words, images, or emotions that arise, even if they seem unrelated. Does it make you feel happy or sad? Frustrated? Excited? Does it bring any other images to mind? Are other people viewing the piece as well? How do they seem to be reacting to it? Include this information in your notes as well.

## PART 3: AFTER THE EXHIBIT

Respond to these follow-up questions on the way home, later that day, or on another day, after everyone has had time to digest the experience.

- How did your expectations for the exhibit compare with your actual experience?
- Discuss as a family the art piece that you found interesting. What was interesting about it? What new information can you learn from discussing the piece as a family?
- Discuss as a family the art piece that you found confusing. What was confusing about it? Does your discussion of the piece clear up any of your confusion?
- Discuss as a family the art piece you loved. Did others in your family love it, too? What did the artist do well?
- Discuss as a family the art piece that didn't appeal to you. What didn't you like about it? What could the artist have done to increase its appeal for you?
- Discuss as a family the piece of art that felt familiar to you. What was familiar about it? Did it remind you of anything else? What could this mean?
- Do you think the exhibit was meant to have a greater meaning? What could it be? How can you apply this meaning to your personal life?

## EXTENDING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Want to take your investigation a step further? Use these extension activities to create even more meaningful connections with art.

### Activity #1: Art Impressions

Choose a piece of art that really left an impression on you. Wait for a week, then describe the piece in as much detail as you can. Don't forget to include your feelings about the piece. Compare your new description of the piece to your notes from the activity. Has your impression changed? Did your feelings evolve or develop over time? What could that mean?

### Activity #2: Family Art Exhibit

Create your own family art exhibit! Use the inspiration gathered from your trip to paint or sculpt your own art pieces, then display them in the hallway for all to enjoy.

Another idea is to create a mural together, inspired by the exhibit. Just tape a large piece of butcher paper to the wall, and leave a variety of art supplies on a nearby table for everyone to add to the mural over the course of a week or more.

### Activity #3: Family Movie Night

Use the critical observation skills you practiced at the art exhibit to make a deeper connection with a film on family movie night. Read the film's description beforehand, take notes about your impressions during the viewing, then discuss the movie and its greater meaning afterwards, using the prompts above to describe different scenes or elements.

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*Abbey Glasure has over a decade of experience writing deeply researched, human-centric content regarding creativity, wellness, science, technology, and feminism. She lives in New York City and is currently working towards publishing her debut novel. To learn more, visit her website at [www.abbeyglasure.com](http://www.abbeyglasure.com).*



\*AUTUMN CRAFT\*

# Edible Sculptures

BY SATOMI IZUMI-TAYLOR, PH.D.

**H**ave you noticed how some children love to get their hands on soft play dough? How about making some edible play dough with your children? I have tried these recipes with children ages from 2 to 6, and the children were fascinated with the idea that they can create and play with their own play dough and eat it.

You can let children play at will, or you can show them how to model different shapes for different purposes: a bug-themed snack or tea party, birthday cake decorations, letter or number shapes for integrating into a lesson.



## FUNDOUGH TREAT

This is a quick and easy dough that is great for snack-time fun. Any nut butter can be substituted for peanut butter in this recipe.

You might want to keep an eye on the amount of peanut butter children have access to since they really love to work with it and eat it, and they may overindulge. They can be given a small ball at a time and encouraged to make miniature decorations for celery logs or rice cakes.

### Ingredients

- ¼ c. brown sugar
- ¼ c. peanut butter
- 1Tbsp. granola (optional)

### Instructions

1. Measure the brown sugar and the peanut butter into a bowl.
2. Squeeze the mixture with both hands.
3. If the mixture is too sticky, add a little more brown sugar. If it's too dry, add more peanut butter.
4. Add granola if desired for extra texture and nutrition.



## SPICE FUNDOUGH

This is a fragrant dough that activates the senses. Some children do not appreciate nutmeg, so you might let children smell it before using it. You can replace it with ginger, if desired.

Note: this dough needs to be baked before eating, so make sure children understand that.

### *Ingredients*

- 2 c. flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- $\frac{1}{3}$  c. sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{3}$  c. milk
- 4 Tbsp. salad oil

### *Instructions*

1. Mix the dry ingredients together.
2. Add milk and oil.
3. Knead until dough sticks together and forms balls.
4. When the children have finished playing, bake their creations at 350 degrees for 15 minutes (or less for smaller shapes).

## PEANUT BUTTER PLAY DOUGH

Any nut butter can be substituted for peanut butter in this recipe. Adjust the amount of dry ingredients (wheat germ and powdered milk) if the dough is too sticky. The raisins, nuts, seeds, and coconut can also be added to the dough for extra texture and sensory experience.

### *Ingredients*

- $\frac{3}{4}$  c. peanut butter
- $\frac{3}{4}$  c. toasted wheat germ
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c. honey
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c. powdered milk
- raisins, nuts, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, coconut, etc.

### *Instructions*

1. Put peanut butter, wheat germ, honey, and powdered milk in a small bowl and mix them together thoroughly.
2. After shapes are formed, use raisins, nuts, seeds, or coconut to decorate.

## FROSTING FUNDOUGH

This is a sweet dessert treat, best for decorating cupcakes, birthday cakes, and other special treats. Children will need to be carefully supervised so they don't overindulge! Giving them a project—such as plans for certain decorations—will help them focus more on creating than eating.

### *Ingredients*

- 1 can frosting
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  c. powdered sugar
- 1 c. peanut butter

### *Instructions*

1. Have children mix all ingredients together until they have a workable dough.
2. Once shapes are made, set them aside to avoid the temptation to eat them all.

## BAKER'S CLAY

This is not meant for eating, but children enjoy being given the opportunity to make something they can keep. Once baked, the clay objects will last for several weeks or months. Uncooked, the dough can be stored in the refrigerator for repeated use over two or three weeks.

### *Ingredients*

- 5 c. flour
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  c. salt
- 4 Tbsp. oil
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  c. water (you can add food coloring to the water, if desired)

### *Instructions*

3. Mix together dry ingredients. Add oil, then add water slowly. If the mixture is too dry, add more water, a little at a time. If you want to have more than one color, divide the dry ingredients into two or three separate bowls and add different food coloring to the portion of water for each bowl.
4. Knead for 10–20 minutes or until soft. Children can help with this.
5. Use the dough right away or keep in the refrigerator.
6. To save clay sculptures, bake them at 325 degrees for one hour.



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