

# Living Education

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## TRADITIONS, OLD AND NEW

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**IN THIS ISSUE:** NURTURING FAMILY BONDS THROUGH TRADITIONS \* TANABATA FESTIVAL IN JAPAN  
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# Welcome.

One of the best parts of parenting is introducing your children to favorite traditions you grew up with. Taking children to your favorite childhood places or hearing them sing a song you sang as a child gives a delicious sense of continuity. Many families create new traditions as well, initiating a ritual or event that their children can carry forth into future generations.

When I was growing up, we visited my grandparents' Vermont summer "camp" on the lake every summer, and carloads of cousins would join us in the tiny cottage. We'd paddle around the lake during the day and sing songs at the top of our lungs while Ma played the piano at night. We'd play Kick the Can outside just as it was getting dark. We enjoyed endless, riotous games of Spit (it's a card game, not a spitting game) on the screened-in back porch on rainy days. When my boys were young, my sisters and I met at the camp with our kids and introduced them all to the same things we enjoyed as kids. It's hard to describe the immense sense of love and contentment this brought.

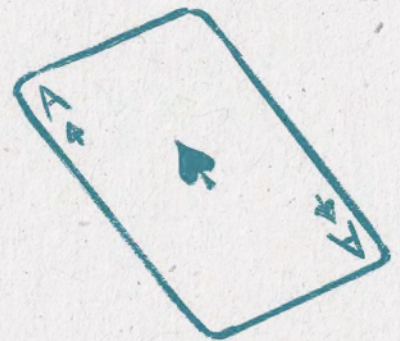
Whether your traditions are beloved ones handed down by your family and friends or new ones that you create to mark milestones, celebrate holidays, or spend time together, they matter.

In this issue of *Living Education*, you'll read about family traditions and maybe find one or two that you might want to try. From ordinary daily rituals to annual festivals and events, there's something for everyone.

Happy reading,

*Dee Dee*

DeeDee Hughes, Editor





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# TEA and SCANDAL:

A Tradition of Comfort and Connection

BY KRISTY ALLEE





**M**y tradition of afternoon tea began with my grandmother. As a grandchild of English and German immigrants, my Nana had fond memories of having tea and cakes with her grandmother when she would visit her after school. She had her own special cup and was allowed to pick strawberries and sweet pea flowers from the garden to put on the table while her grandmother made tea. My Nana lovingly shared this tradition with me during my after-school visits. I had special jobs, too, like collecting eggs and picking lemons from her tree to make our cakes. While we sipped our tea and ate little cakes, Nana would quilt and share stories of her grandmother and her childhood. One of the many things I learned during our afternoons together was that when someone made tea and shared it with you, it was because you were special and loved.

After my Nan's passing, I kept our tradition of afternoon tea, although it often changed over the years in ways both large and small. As a teen, I sipped tea in order to remember my Nana and feel her love and presence once more. As a frazzled new mother, I sipped tea to center myself and bring moments of calm to my days, sometimes including friends, neighbors, and other new moms. As a homeschooling mom with young children, I introduced my little ones to afternoon tea, with treats, special cups, and stories about my Nan and my childhood. This tradition wove its way into their hearts and lives and gave us something to look forward to each day. It gave us time to slow down, connect, and show love while we prepared our tea and baked treats.

When my children were in their final years of high school, our youngest child was born, and our tradition of afternoon tea grew to "scandalous" proportions. My

eldest children and I used to love watching Agatha Christie mysteries together on PBS. One day, while watching an episode, Ms. Marple headed to the vicarage with a group of friends for "Tea and Scandal." Our afternoon tea tradition was promptly renamed, and the kids decided they wanted to share it with their friends as well. We decided that once a week, on Sundays, we'd extend an open invitation for friends to come to our house for "Tea and Scandal." At first, we had a small group of 4 to 5 teens and young adults show up, laughing and curious, making jokes about "scandal" while hungrily devouring pots of tea, scones, and the delicious sense of connection with our family and with each other. From there, it grew, and within a year we had a group of 10 to 20 people who regularly came for Sunday tea. There were special cups as Christmas gifts one year, and the tea friends became part of our daily lives and honorary family members. Our little tradition had grown to include a new generation, longing for connection, comfort, warmth, and to know they were special, included, and loved.

After a major move, a pandemic, and many years, our tradition is still alive. Once again, it has changed as children have grown into adults, moved away, and have had children of their own. Our little tradition has come full circle. I am a homeschooling mama once again, and a homeschooling Nana, too. Again, I am sitting at my kitchen table in the afternoons, with my husband, youngest child, and grandchildren sipping tea and telling stories of my grandmother and my childhood. Though it is now a modest affair, it has legendary status in the minds and hearts of our children and their friends who remember it fondly and speak of it often. Tea and Scandal and the legacy of love and connection it inspires lives on.



## NANA'S LEMON BERRY TEA CAKES

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1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.
2. Line a cupcake pan with paper liners or coat with butter to prevent sticking. You may have enough batter to make more than 12 cakes depending on your pans. (I usually get 14 to 16.)
3. Combine flour, sugar, powder, soda, and salt in a large mixing bowl and whisk to combine. Add the lemon zest and mix again. Make a well in the center and set aside.
4. In a smaller mixing bowl, combine the buttermilk, eggs, and oil or butter, and whisk until well combined.
5. Add the wet mixture to the dry, and stir gently to combine. Do not overmix or your cakes will be tough. Gently fold in the berries.
6. Fill the cupcake pan compartments  $\frac{3}{4}$  full and sprinkle with demerara sugar if you're using it.
7. Bake for 15 to 17 minutes, or until golden and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
8. Remove the tea cakes from the pan, and set on a wire rack to cool. If muffins are to be glazed, cool completely before frosting or the glaze will melt.

### Tips for the littlest tea drinkers:

If your little ones are very small and tea isn't a good choice, I would recommend warm milk instead. I often add vanilla bean and maple syrup or a spoonful of molasses and a sprinkle of cinnamon to make it special. I also love small enamelware mugs that are sturdy and not as easily broken so the very young can still have their own special cup.

### Ingredients:


- 2 cups flour (all-purpose flour, whole wheat pastry flour, or a mix of the two)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt
- The zest of 1 large or 2 small lemons
- 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  cups buttermilk (you can also use  $\frac{1}{2}$  regular milk and  $\frac{1}{2}$  Greek yogurt)
- 2 eggs
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup neutral oil (I like avocado) or melted butter
- 1 cup berries (whole blueberries or chopped raspberries, strawberries, or blackberries)
- Demerara sugar to sprinkle on top or make a thick glaze with lemon juice and powdered sugar

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*I introduced my little ones to afternoon tea, with treats, special cups, and stories about my Nan and my childhood. This tradition wove its way into their hearts and lives and gave us something to look forward to each day.*



# NURTURING FAMILY BONDS through TIME-HONORED TRADITIONS

BY S. BINUJA

**F**amily, the cornerstone of our lives, is a source of unending support, love, and togetherness. It is in the embrace of family that we find solace, encouragement, and a sense of belonging. Within this warm cocoon of kinship, traditions are woven and passed down from generation to generation like precious heirlooms.

## THE EARTHEN POT TRADITION

In my family, there are traditions that have not only stood the test of time but have also strengthened our bonds: the practice of eating together as a family and cooking in earthen pots, a legacy from our ancestors. These traditions have left an indelible mark on our family, building a sense of unity and love.

Cooking in earthen pots is a practice that connects us to our roots. The earthy aroma of food simmering in these pots invokes a sense of nostalgia and a connection to our ancestors who relied on these same vessels for their nourishment. It's a reminder that, though times have changed, our family's values and traditions remain steadfast.

Making heritage cooking in earthen pots is not only an act of preserving our cultural heritage for future generations but also a way of connecting with the generations that came before us. It's a beautiful blend of tradition and sustenance.

In today's fast-paced world where the demands of work and daily life can pull families in different directions, our tradition of eating together has been a consistent anchor in our lives. Every meal becomes a sacred ritual, a time when we put aside our individual pursuits and come together to share not only food but also stories, laughter, and the events of our day.





### BUILDING STRONGER BONDS

Every morning, we gather for a 15-minute family conversation, offering support and encouragement for important decisions. These morning family conversations hold a special place in our hearts. In the rush to seize the day, we pause for 15 minutes to connect on a deeper level. This time is not only about discussing daily tasks but also about providing emotional support and encouragement. Each family member has a chance to share their thoughts, dreams, and concerns. It's a forum for us to rally around one another, offering advice and comfort when needed.

These traditions have strengthened our bonds, nurtured open communication, and created a safe space where we can be vulnerable and honest with each other. Gathering around the dining table, we leave behind the distractions of the digital world and engage in meaningful conversations. We laugh together, reminisce about shared memories, and discuss important family matters. The morning conversations have become a source of strength for us. Knowing that we have each other's unwavering support, we can face challenges and make important life decisions with confidence.

These traditions have given rise to cherished memories that we hold dear. The aroma of a meal cooked in an

earthen pot or the feeling of being heard and understood during our morning talks are memories we will carry with us throughout our lives. In a world that often pulls us apart, it's family traditions like ours that bring us closer.

As we pass down these traditions to the next generation, we hope to instill in them the importance of family and the beauty of preserving our heritage. Eating together as a family, cooking in earthen pots, and engaging in morning conversations may seem simple, but their impact is profound.

In these small but meaningful rituals, we find the essence of what it means to be a family. They remind us that family is not just a group of people who share a home—it's a circle of love, support, and connection.

*S. Binuja is a versatile content writer known for her insightful articles published in leading newspapers across India. Beyond her literary pursuits, Binuja finds joy in the melody of music, exploring new cuisines in the kitchen, and immersing herself in the pages of captivating books.*







# TANABATA FESTIVAL in JAPAN: Passing on Old Traditions to Younger Generations

BY SATOMI IZUMI-TAYLOR & CATHY D. MEREDITH

Children are full of wonder and are open to possibilities. We can help keep alive their sense of openness and awe by introducing cultural traditions to them. Rooted in cultural heritage, such traditions are a part of all of us. Children need to see and touch things to fully understand what is real and meaningful. Through traditions, we can nurture children's respect for diversity and the awareness of interdependence.

One way to inspire children's openness and respect for others is through social studies, which permeate everything we do. They include our cultures, communities, foods, customs, occupations, holidays, languages, as well as our diversity, respect for others, and our social/emotional growth. We want children to be culturally competent so that they are able to confidently interact with people of other cultures. Local museums, art institutes, historical centers, parks, and garden centers are wonderful resources for involving children in learning about people, places, cultures, and the environment.

A good example is found at the Japanese-inspired Tanabata (Star) Festival at the Botanic Garden in Memphis, Tennessee. It was created to honor Japanese culture as a part of Asian art educational programming for children and families. This festival has been celebrated and handed down to many generations not only in Japan but also in the United States. The Tanabata Festival takes place on the 7th of July each year. This tradition has been celebrated by our family for many years, and we always look forward to celebrating this.

## WHAT IS A TANABATA FESTIVAL?

This festival was introduced to Japan by China in the year 755. It celebrates the story of a weaver princess, Orihime, and a cow-herder prince named Hikoboshi. They were hard-working youngsters who lived peacefully and industriously beside the "heavenly river" of the Milky Way. One day they met and fell in love. Because they were spending too much time together, they neglected their own work. Orihime's father, who was the sky king, was furious that they were no longer industrious, which created problems for others in the community, so he separated them.

Now, the princess and prince can meet only once a year at the Milky Way on the 7th of July. It is said that when there is rain on the 7th of July, they will not be able to meet because the sky shows no stars. Although it is a story of two star-crossed lovers, it teaches us how working diligently is important, and every job is needed, no matter what you do. People celebrate this festival because it improves their working skills and promotes good luck and longevity.

As a family tradition, we decorate bamboo branches because bamboo trees have a propensity to grow upward, straight and strong, stretching to the sky. It was believed they were bearing wishes to heaven on the wind. Also, they could ward off insects and were displayed to protect rice crops, symbolizing hope for a bountiful harvest.

People make wishes by writing on colored strips of paper. Wishes can be anything one wants and can be hung on bamboo branches with hopes that wishes will come true. Not only wishes but also origami creations, colorful



streamers, and paper chains can be displayed. The branches are colorfully decorated with blue, red, white, yellow, and black. Representations of each color are as follows:

- Blue as trees
- Red as fire
- White as money
- Yellow as soil
- Black as water

As part of the celebration, we eat some *soumen* (noodles), okra, *takoyaki* (fried balls of dough with meat inside), *yakisoba* (fried noodles with vegetables and meat), and sweets. We cook everything together as a family and share it with others. It is our way of connecting with one another and enjoying being together while watching decorations flutter against the sky. At the end of the festival, these branches with wishes are either set afloat on the river or burned. These are both symbolic ways of sending the wishes on their way to the lovers in the sky.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS TRADITION

While the Tanabata festival is cultural in nature, it provides many opportunities to integrate the subjects of language arts, mathematics, science, arts, and social studies. It also gives children a chance to develop self-confidence in understanding and exploring different cultures.

By participating in this festival, children can practice many skills:

- Thinking skills: As children reflect on their wishes, they have to consider what is important to them.
- Writing skills: Writing their wishes promotes language skills.
- Math skills: As children cook with families, they apply math concepts.
- Art and creativity skills: As they create decorations for trees, they engage in artistic endeavors that promote their creativity.
- Historical knowledge: As they hear about the Tanabata Festival, they learn how it started in Japan and how it was passed to generations around the world.

- Scientific knowledge: From the story about the prince and princess meeting at the Milky Way, children can become acquainted with space and astronomy.
- Social/emotional skills: As children hear the story of Orihime and Hikoboshi, they learn about the importance of being diligent in their work and the essential interdependence of all work. As they celebrate and share their trees and food with families and friends, they learn how to connect with one another.

The Tanabata festival enhances the practices that continue to shape and bind intra- and inter-generational kinship connections. It helps children to understand the emotional quality of the relationships between the present and the past. It is a cultural symbol that has meaning and importance to everyone involved.

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# CURBING the EXCITEMENT

BY CANDICE PARKS

**H**olidays, birthdays, special days—these are all things that, for the most part, we are supposed to look forward to. However, another term for “special” could be “not the norm” or “a break from the routine.” For some people, this is no big deal and is actually a nice breath of fresh air. However, for some, non-routine days, even ones that we are excited about, can be rough. That excitement can start manifesting as negative energy that can lead to full-blown meltdowns, for children and adults alike.

While there are no one-and-done methods to completely alleviate tensions, there are some things you can do to help balance the excitement with calm so everyone can enjoy the special days.

## 1. PLAN AHEAD (BUT NOT TOO MUCH)

I know this seems like an obvious thing to say, and also contradictory in a way, but planning when you are calm and can think straight is crucial.

One thing that could help is to pick a day a few months ahead of the event to draw out a map of what the special days will look like. For example, in July, long before all the fall festivities begin, start to plan some aspects of those special fall days. You may not have an idea about costumes for Halloween (we all know these can change at the last minute, depending on interests!), but you could start figuring out what you would like to do. Dates for things like harvest and Christmas festivals and events might not be out yet, but you could look at last year’s dates to get a general idea of the time frame. You are basically just doing the bones here: a list of who, what, when, and where. You can start the beginning stages of planning for special cooking activities, lessons, activities, trips, visitors, etc. Start a Pinterest board to start getting ideas.

So, this can help you prepare, but what about younger ones? Let’s be honest, many events revolve around us trying to entertain our family. So, bring them in on all this planning!

This is a great opportunity to start teaching how to use a calendar. Involve them in the early planning process. When you get to the beginning of a holiday or birthday month, break out the calendar or print out a calendar page for that month. Date it, and then have them mark off each day. This helps anxious ones know what is coming so they can mentally and emotionally prepare. If they start wondering or worrying when the event will happen, you can help them count off the remaining days on the calendar.

You may have noticed this planning step includes the directive "Not Too Much." You have to allow some room for flexibility and change when you plan early because so many changes can happen closer to the date of an event. Figure out what types of things are better left until closer to the date; focus on the aspects that you can plan in advance, such as who will be involved, when people will arrive and leave, and what activities can be done.

It's a good idea to set limits on how many activities you will plan. Sometimes we put a lot of pressure on ourselves and our family to do so much that even the fun events can become tedious. Set a reasonable limit ahead of time, especially when it comes to trying to fulfill what other people want your immediate family to do during special days.

## 2. FIND TOOLS TO AVOID OVERSTIMULATION

Special days are full of wonderful things that can overwhelm your senses. Bright lights, loud noises, and numerous social interactions can all be fun, but they can also overstimulate, leading to stress (and yes, meltdowns).

There are plenty of tools that can help with these stressors. For instance, noise definitely can overstimulate me. Tools like earbuds, headphones, calm music, and figuring out a quiet space to escape to can definitely help. For some people, bright lights may be an issue. The solution? Be cool, and wear a pair of sunglasses. If you can, taking a day to decompress after an overstimulating event, including one with many social interactions, can help you get regulated again.

## 3. ANCHOR YOUR NON-ROUTINE DAYS

When dealing with a day that is off routine in general, it helps to have some kind of anchor that helps everyone feel at home and in control. These anchors can be created by intentionally doing certain routine things, especially in the morning. If you normally step outside to greet the dog, eat breakfast, walk the dog, and then shower, make a point of doing this on the non-routine days too. Routines are calming, and they help you to feel a bit of normalcy in your day.

Here's another tip: embrace the power of music. Listen to some of your favorite tunes! Music can be calming or pump you up. Listening to something that comforts you can really help keep you grounded when things feel out of control, out of sync, or even just out of the ordinary. Singing and dancing along to music is a good stress reliever for everyone and only takes a few minutes of time in the midst of a busy day.

## 4. TAKE BREAKS

Special days can be noisy, socially overwhelming, and chaotic. Fun can include confusion bordering on pandemonium, which can also make even the calmest person anxious. It's really important to find ways to take a quiet break during all of it. Plan ahead of time where you or anyone who needs a break can go. Taking even a 10-minute break to regroup, collect your thoughts, and take a few deep breaths can do wonders to keep you going during the chaos of all the excitement and fun.

Spend some time to identify what stresses you or a loved one about holidays or special days, and see what you can put in place ahead of time to alleviate some of the tension. After all, everyone deserves to enjoy a special day now and then!

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*Candice Parks worked as a public school teacher for ten years and in a library, and now teaches her children at home. She is passionate about sharing the benefits of homeschooling and how technology can bridge the gap for students with disabilities. Her writing experience includes writing education plans, educational resources, and informational articles.*







# A HANDMADE TRADITION

BY ASHLEY REID

**A**dmittedly, I am a romantic. I have a love for all things traditional, heirloom, or with a story. I love a worn book with notes written in the margins nearly as much as I love a handicraft by the fire. As a child, I loved going to my grandparents' house, digging through drawers filled with miscellaneous items or letters they wrote to one another. I wanted everything to have great importance. I wanted recipes written by my great-great-aunt that were a well-talked-about family secret. I wanted to unwrap a Christmas ornament that was so precious it was passed around and adored before being placed high up on a tree. I wanted special dishware for holidays, a good luck hat, a song to be sung. I desperately wanted to cling to something meaningful and momentous.

But that wasn't the type of family I came from. Happy birthdays and Merry Christmases came and went, and it was fine, good even! But before I had kids, I vowed to make all these grand traditions. Then, like so many prospective parents, I became one and realized that there was already a quite heavy load to carry, without adding more responsibilities to my plate.

Also, I didn't know where to start! Where do you find a tradition? How do you pick and choose something that could become an integral memory for your children's childhood? I felt like I was forcing something that should

have been natural. My intentions, however pure they may have been, had made me scatterbrained with the pressure I put on myself.

My oldest, Luna, is 7 and has always loved working with her hands. Since she was a toddler, she was always in the kitchen whisking, painting, or drawing. An avid sewist and a compulsive crafter, our spare bedroom is always stocked with various art supplies. Luna is drawn to it. For the most part, I have let her do whatever she wants with spare items. She has been digging in bins of spare fabric, felt, pipe cleaners, and paint since before she could walk. Everyone she has ever met has been given a drawing of a horse at least once, and probably a watercolor too.

A few years ago, Luna began to want to give gifts to friends and families for the holidays. And why wouldn't she want to? Nothing sparks joy quite like seeing a loved one's face when they are presented with a gift you picked out specifically with them in mind. Buying gifts is great and, costs aside, requires relatively little thought. But it didn't feel quite personal enough to Luna. She takes joy in covering our entire floor, table, and most surfaces with things she's made. Organically, a tradition began to happen. If you want to give a gift, let's make it.

This is something I have done every Christmas for the kids and most adults in my life for the past few years myself. I try to give everyone at least one handmade



item. Some are complicated, requiring hours of work, and some are simple. The kids have watched me do this every holiday for their entire lives. When I presented the idea to Luna, she needed no further encouragement. First, it started off simple, suitable for her age. A drawing or painting. Then she expanded to cutting out shapes from felt and sewing them together, and beading bracelets and necklaces. She made capes and vests for stuffed animals, bookmarks, air-dry clay ornaments, embroidered items, baskets of homegrown veggies, and more baked goods than I can count.

For the most part, I have let Luna take charge of the gifts she wants to make friends. Sometimes she may ask for help or supervision with sharp scissors or glitter, but mostly she wings it on her own. She often can be found painting landscapes and flowers with her travel watercolor set, the future owner of the artwork already decided in her mind. Together, and with her younger sister, we make holiday gifts for our family and friends. We have made crayons, homemade spice blends, kombucha, vanilla extract, bath bombs, and, of course, cookies.

Our tradition may not be decades old, and it isn't always something you can hold and pass down, yet it feels no less important. It has brought us hours together in the library looking through crafting books. It has brought us time spent with busy hands and heads down as we worked in

amicable silence. It has given us skills and hobbies. Belly laughs and tearful eyes abound when holding something handmade by a child whose heart is never as full as when they're covered in marker and elbow-deep in clay, with the glint of imagination shining in their eyes. The memory it gives is one I will happily claim as my own. So, encourage others to slow down, get messy, and let the paint fly. You'll never know what traditions you might stumble upon.

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*Ashley Reid is a millennial mom still trying to figure out what it's like to be a human. Her daughters are 5 and 7, and certified wild. She lives in Western North Carolina with her husband, kids, cat, dog, and 6 chickens. She spends her days writing, reading more fantasy than she cares to admit, sewing, and healing her inner child by playing in the fresh mountain-fed rivers with her girls. You can follow her on Instagram @moonstarmum.*





# MAKING FRIENDS *with* BOOKS

BY MICHELLE SHREEVE

**W**hen I was a little girl, my mother used to always take me to the Scholastic Book Fair at my school. I would get so excited when my teacher handed out the Scholastic Book Fair catalog that I would circle my book choices before the catalog even made it home to my mother. I would read the catalog over and over, getting all excited, until the day of the Book Fair would arrive. My mother and I would make a special day around the Book Fair. We would wake up and grab milk and donuts at the donut shop right across the street from my school and then head to the Book Fair. We would always grab my book choices first to make sure I got the ones I was looking for, and then we would take our time and browse afterward. I was so excited to bring my new books home. I could hardly wait to start reading them.

I loved books so much that I treated them like friends on my shelf. My mother always encouraged me to read. She would often have to tell me two or three times that I had to put down my books to get ready for dinner, and I would beg her to let me read one more page or one more chapter first. I brought my books with me everywhere. I read while waiting at the doctor's office, I read while riding in the shopping cart at the grocery store, I read while riding in the car, at home—everywhere.

Thirty years later, I've started a similar tradition with my little one. We often visit our local bookstore, and each time we're there we always grab a cupcake at the cafe. Then, we go upstairs to the second-floor children's section and check out the holiday books first, and then dive into the other shelves of new book releases. We do story time on the weekends at the bookstore. We've also gotten books at the local public library book fair. The only disappointment I have is that they no longer offer the paper catalogs for the Scholastic Book Fairs. However, the memories of the past are still there, and my passion for reading as a child has now transformed into a passion for seeing that look of amazement when my little one is enjoying a book. I think reading to children, especially starting at a young age, is a magical time. They love sitting in our laps and turning the pages with us, and we love reading to them.

What's interesting is my little one treats books like friends too. After all, aren't they? Each book takes us to a different world where we can learn about new things, see different parts of the world we haven't seen before, meet new characters, and more. We teach our children to take care of books, be gentle when turning pages, and keep them clean and organized, sort of like how we tend to the



*We teach our children to take care of books, be gentle when turning pages, and keep them clean and organized, sort of like how we tend to the needs of our friends.*

needs of our friends. A book will always be on the shelf where we left it and can comfort us when we want to visit characters again in our favorite books.

My mother died when I was just nine years old. Although I didn't have her as long as my other little childhood friends had their mothers, those nine years of reading together and going to the book fairs together were some of the best memories I had with my mother. And now my little one can share those memories with me. We even talk about Grandma while we're eating our cupcake at the bookstore.

For Christmas, I'm going to get a recorded storybook for my little one. Recording my voice reading a story is something he can keep forever, and one thing I wish I had from my mother. It would be magical to hear her voice reading a story from my childhood. She encouraged my passion for reading when I was a child, and her encouragement actually led me to read so many books in my lifetime so far and go to college to earn literary degrees. I even ended up becoming a freelance writer and published author.

My mother's influence and encouragement to read when I was young helped shape who I am today. It makes me realize that when I encourage my little one to read and

take him to the bookstore regularly, maybe I'm doing the same thing for him as my mother did for me. Maybe reading his favorite firefighter book a few times a week will lead him down the path to becoming a firefighter and helping others one day. Maybe reading his favorite space book will lead him down the path to becoming an astronaut. Knowing how powerful my mother's influence was on me and my life helps me to feel that maybe I'm helping my little one in ways that can help shape his future. And it all started with a passion for books and reading and having a parent who helped foster that love for reading.

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*Michelle Shreeve has been reading and writing for as long as she can remember. She's the traditionally published author of *Coping with Parental Death: Insights and Tips for Teenagers and Parental Death: The Ultimate Teen Guide*. She has a background in researching and writing about bibliotherapy, writing therapy, and autoethnography, and tries to share what she's learned along the road of life to help others through writing.*





[ FROM THE ARCHIVES ]

# INTENTIONS AND THE LEARNING PROCESS

BY LAWRENCE WILLIAMS

*In this excerpt from an article originally published in Living Education in March 2000, Oak Meadow co-founder Lawrence Williams explores the role of intention in the learning process. Intention can also be applied to sharing traditions with our children because if we want our children to learn our traditions—new or old—we have to intentionally teach them. By making our intentions clear, realistic, and driven by our own commitment, we can create powerful, lasting memories for our families.*

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Recently, I received a phone call from a mother who was concerned that her daughter was progressing too slowly. She had been homeschooling for almost a year and a half, and she still hadn't completed the curriculum that most Oak Meadow students complete in nine months.

"I just don't know what to do," the mother said. "I've tried everything I can think of, but nothing seems to work!"

I've received many calls like this over the years, and the first thing I do is determine if there really is a problem. Parents naturally want their children to move ahead quickly, and they often get concerned if their children seem to be dragging their heels. But, like a plant, learning proceeds in cycles, and sometimes the most important growth is occurring under the ground, invisible to our eyes. Then, one day, the cycle shifts to the visible expression, and learning seems to proceed in great leaps. Over the years, I've learned to trust the

intelligence of nature and not to push these cycles of learning. If we pull up a plant to see if the roots are growing, we destroy the plant.

But, in some cases, there is a problem. Sometimes children have specific difficulties that interfere with learning, and sometimes parents don't really understand how to facilitate the learning process. As I talked with this mother, I could see that she led a busy life, and although she was doing all the right things outwardly to teach her child, she wasn't paying attention to the inner demands of homeschooling. She lacked intention for what she was doing.

When I explained to her what was missing and how to remedy the situation, it was as though a light bulb went on in her head. She saw the problem immediately and knew she had to change her approach.

I didn't expect to hear from her again, but a few weeks later she called back to tell me that everything had turned around. Her daughter had progressed through four lessons in two weeks, and she was now excited about finishing the fifth-grade curriculum and beginning the sixth grade in another month.

What made the difference? Clear, realistic intentions and a commitment to the learning process.

At Oak Meadow, we frequently talk about learning as a process. We mention the importance of being able to adapt to the needs of the moment and take advantage of opportunities for learning. We talk about the value of

doing creative processes with your children. We caution that getting too concerned with goals can often cause you and your child to miss opportunities for learning.

From statements such as these, you may think we believe goals have no place in the learning process, but this is not true. One of the most important aspects of the learning process is the balance that the teacher creates between “making things happen” and “letting things happen.” The former involves learning as a goal while the latter is concerned with learning as a process.

Goals and processes should not be thought of as antagonistic to each other. In any good learning environment, they are complementary, with each supporting the other. The key to maintaining the balance lies with *intention*. If we can become more aware of our intentions and work with them consciously, we can significantly increase our effectiveness as teachers.

What is intention? Very simply, it is a decision to make something happen. We all create intentions every day. You might say that you intend to go to the grocery store today. If you have no food in the house, that intention may be very strong, and you begin to do certain things to bring that intention to completion. You may start looking in the refrigerator to see what’s missing, writing down a list of what you will get at the store, setting aside time in your day to do it, considering other errands you may need to accomplish while you’re in town, and a variety of other actions. All these thoughts, feelings, and actions help to transform your intention—which started as an inner decision—into an actual physical event.

In this example, going to the store was a goal, and the relationship between intentions and goals seems obvious. But intentions also play an important part in processes, as well. If you are painting a picture with your child, for example, what is your intention? To impress your child with your talent as an artist? To keep your child quiet for 15 minutes? To enjoy the process of doing something creative together? Your intention during that process can determine the quality of the activity and the extent to which your child is able to learn from that activity.

An effective intention never dominates your child or the learning process. It simply sets the tone and creates a clear space within which your child can learn. Once your intention is set, you can relax and enjoy the process because you and your child are operating within a clear,

protected space that you have created. Intention sets the goals and the boundaries for the activity. Process fills the activity with life. Both are necessary to create learning.

To maintain a dynamic balance between goals and processes, you must develop the ability to create effective intentions—those that can make things happen. Over the years, I’ve noticed that effective intentions have three essential attributes.

**An effective intention is clear.** A clear intention means you know exactly what you want to happen. This enables you to be very focused on what you are doing and gives your child a tangible, recognizable goal. By deciding precisely what, when, and where you will teach, you can arrange your schedule so that you aren’t trying to teach in the middle of everything else.

**An effective intention is realistic.** It is very easy to create wonderful intentions that are completely unrealistic, which only sets the stage for frustration and conflict. Instead, make a realistic assessment of your child’s capabilities and create an intention that is within those capabilities.

**An effective intention requires commitment.** You may be able to create clear, realistic intentions, but if you are not committed to making them happen, they won’t happen. Commitment is not just a decision to “try”—it is the resolution that you do whatever it takes to make it happen.

If you want to create a learning environment that provides real growth opportunities for your children, then you must make sure that your intentions are clear, that they are realistic, and that you are committed to making those intentions happen. By doing so, you will be doing your very best to ensure that learning becomes a transformative experience for both you and your child.

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





# INVITING TRADITIONS *into* EVERYDAY LIFE

BY ALYSSA LONGHI

When folks hear the word tradition, we primarily reminisce about holidays as children ourselves. Holidays can be a time of great celebration, familiar smells wafting through the kitchen, shopping for just the right gift for each person on your list, and evenings spent by the fire wrapping those perfect gifts. The holidays may have doubled as a time for family reunions; you may have traveled hundreds of miles just to be able to sit down for a Thanksgiving meal with cousins you hadn't seen since last year. Grandparents may have flown in to spend just one day watching you open gifts under the tree on Christmas. At the center of each and every holiday tradition, regardless of what (or how) we choose to celebrate, is the same feeling we wish to share with our children: connection, joy, and love.

But what if we encompassed this beloved feeling of tradition and invited it into our everyday lives? I don't mean dismissing the magic of the holidays, but rather elongating it. This concept is as realistic as I am making it sound, I promise! Creating daily or even weekly traditions can help children feel safe and secure in their family dynamic, provide consistency and stability despite the unpredictability that can occur in everyday life, boost self-esteem and happiness, and strengthen their well-being.

These daily (or weekly) traditions do not have to be extravagant or expensive. Daily traditions that take place in my life with my kiddos include eating breakfast together every morning where we check in on how everyone slept. Talking about everyone's dreams can be very fun and insightful! We discuss our plans for the day or the week ahead. After breakfast, we connect with a Morning Basket before beginning our lessons. Our Morning Basket includes creative writing prompts, Mad Libs, a poetry book, and a quick game, like Uno or Sum Swamp. (These activities can be revised seasonally or by age).

In the afternoon, if the weather allows, we take a walk around our neighborhood or head to the woods where we collect things for our school room's nature table, if the season calls for it. Every evening, we eat dinner as a family and talk about our day—our favorite activity we did that day in school, what they enjoyed, or what they didn't. If any disagreements occur during the day, we take the time to talk things over and make amends. Eating dinner as a family can improve a child's communication skills, boost their mental health, create a positive relationship with food by encouraging healthier eating habits, and create a strong family bond. Studies have proven that this one family activity alone has numerous health benefits to children, emotionally, mentally, and physically.



*...There are so many ways in our daily lives we can create traditions for our families to look back on in years to come...*

Before bed, there is always a read-aloud of either a chapter book we are reading together as a family or a few books the kids chose themselves. We then say three things we are grateful for, which can be anything! There are no wrong answers here.

These daily traditions that my family looks forward to cost zero dollars, but the value is incalculable.

Weekly traditions that we honor are Monday library days with their grandmother (which always include a sweet treat!) and Family Game Nights every Friday, when we make homemade pizzas and play a few games we choose that morning. Every one of these traditions is attainable. You don't have to do them all. Choose one—if it happens to work and brings joy to your family, welcome to your new tradition!

Continuing yearly traditions, such as birthdays and the conventional holidays are still important. However, during the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, it is nice to invite some serenity into the home. Seasonal traditions focused around nature are a great way for your family to reconnect one-on-one and slow down. In the cooler months, we make homemade bird feeders for the birds and squirrels and hang them around our yard, and we make homemade decorations for the trees by

stringing popcorn and cranberries. When Halloween is over, we recycle our pumpkins to the woods for the deer to snack on. In the winter, we make our own beeswax candles, orange garlands, and herbal creations. In the spring, we plan and prep our garden space. In the early summer, we plant our baby plants and watch over them.

We don't just have to wait for the holidays to experience the magic of tradition. There are so many ways in our daily lives that we can create traditions for our families to look back on in years to come and plan to use with their own future families.

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*Alyssa Longhi is a homeschooling mother of two curious little boys, and she has loved guiding her children through the Oak Meadow curriculum for five years. Located in Connecticut, she and her family enjoy hiking, gardening, reading, daily kitchen dance parties, and caring for their many animals on their half-acre homestead.*





CURRICULUM SPOTLIGHT:

# GRADE 1 TREASURE BOX

**In the first lesson of first grade, families enjoy an arts and crafts project that they will use all year: a treasure box!**

The treasure box is used to hold all your child's homeschooling "treasures" throughout the year. These treasures can be any special projects, arts and crafts, or other creations that you or your child love and want to save. These treasures are fun to collect for sentimental reasons, but they are also good examples of your child's creativity or academic progress. As an added bonus, having one place to put all those extra creations can help you control the clutter that so often accumulates in a busy, active household! While not everything your child creates will (or can be) saved, you will probably be able to identify favorites that you want to keep around.

You and your child can explore the treasure box at your year-end celebration, when they will probably be delighted to see their treasures again.

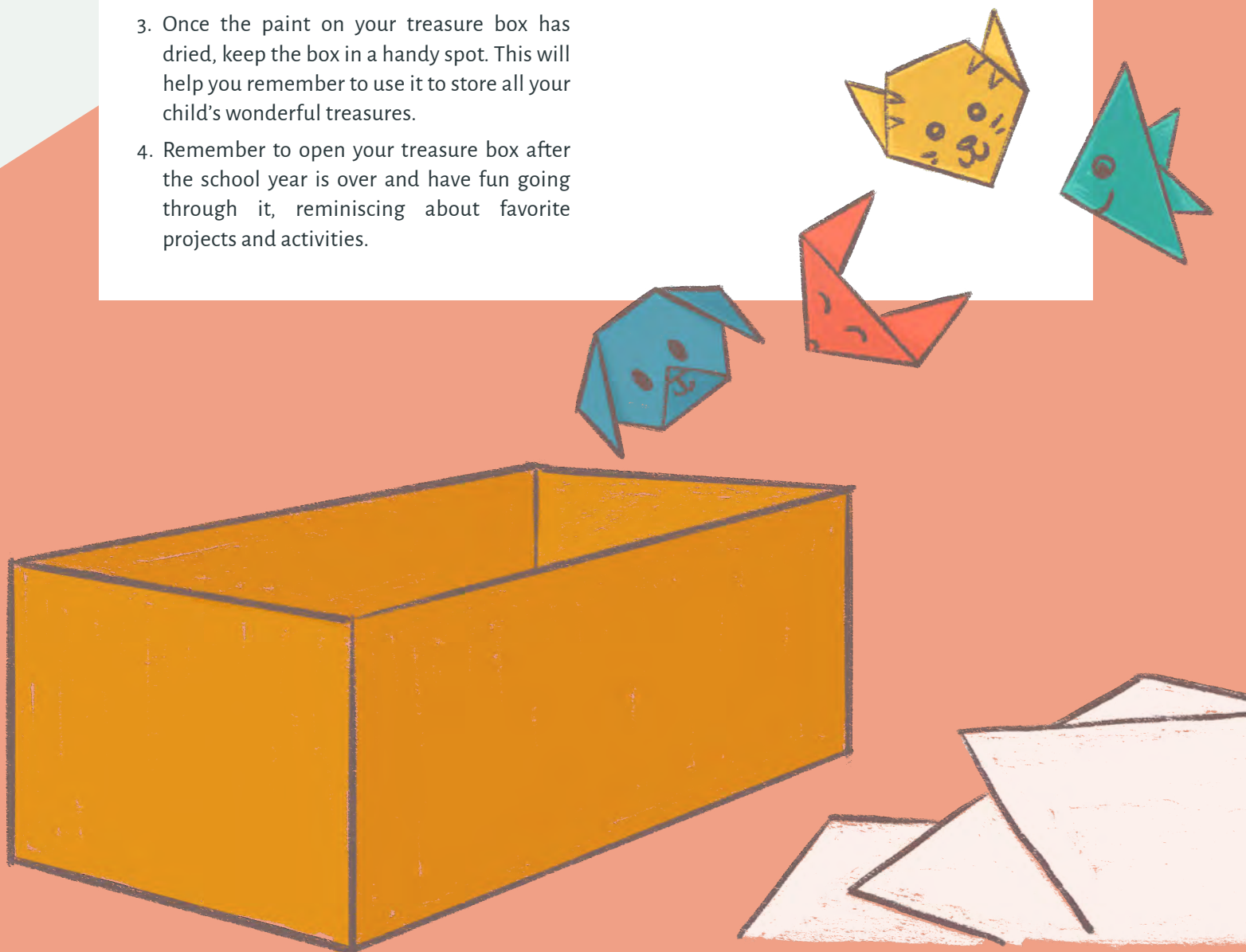


## INSTRUCTIONS

1. To make your treasure box, find a good-sized cardboard box. Don't worry if you outgrow it over the year—you can always make a second one!
2. Cover your work surface with newspaper, and then help your child paint the box. Any type of color or design that your child likes is just fine. You might want to paint "Treasure Box" in bold letters on the side.
3. Once the paint on your treasure box has dried, keep the box in a handy spot. This will help you remember to use it to store all your child's wonderful treasures.
4. Remember to open your treasure box after the school year is over and have fun going through it, reminiscing about favorite projects and activities.

## MATERIALS

- cardboard box, medium to large
- poster paints
- paintbrushes
- newspaper or cloth to cover painting surface





# WHAT'S YOUR SPRING ROUTINE FOR YOUR HOMESCHOOL?

BY ERIN SHELBY

Do you have a spring routine? Spring is a beautiful time of transition in nature, full of promise. When it comes to learning, this is no exception. If you haven't considered marking the season with new routines for your homeschool, here are a few to consider.

## THINKING BACK

Spring is a good time to think back. What went well so far this year? What didn't go so well?

Maybe you tried a new teaching strategy, and it didn't work the way you hoped it would. Or maybe you bought some books you thought your kids would love, but not a single page was turned.

As you think back, consider what you learned, even from the things that didn't go so well. Perhaps you gained more patience? Maybe your child built more resilience? Or did your family begin to work more as a team?

As you evaluate the homeschooling year so far, leave some reminders for yourself for the future while things are still fresh in your mind. Whether it's on a calendar or in an app, make notes of what you will do or won't do next year.



## THE SPRING CLEAN



Spring cleaning is a yearly tradition for many households. It can be a helpful routine for your homeschool, too. Thinking back to those books that still haven't been read, is there anything else that you thought would be useful but is simply gathering dust?

If you carve out just a few minutes a day, you can declutter. This will save you time by making it easier for you to find what you need. Carefully consider what you're likely to use again and what's best to let go. You can start by creating a "trash" pile and a "donate" pile for a thrift shop. Here's how to get started:

### **Items for the Trash or Recycling**

- Any tools or supplies that are broken, defective, or too hard to clean
- Pens or markers that don't work
- Worksheets that you can't use again

### **Items for a Donate Pile**

- Science lab supplies, musical instruments, and other tools that need to be repaired but could still be used (If you haven't repaired it yet, you probably won't later.)
- Books that no one wants to read
- Workbooks, math manipulatives, or other items that can still be used but your kids have outgrown

## NEW CELEBRATIONS



Winter can feel like a burden for some, while spring is the birth of new life. Flowers blossom, and the days are sunnier. This transition is an invitation to spend more time outside.

Take some time to celebrate this year's progress. Plan some outdoor celebrations. They don't have to be fancy or formal. Whether it's a family grill night at home, a get-together with other homeschoolers, or a picnic at a local park, enjoying some rest can be worthwhile.

It's also a perfect time to create a "Field Trip Wish List." Make a list of all the places you'd like to go. Which museums, historical sites, theater venues, or sports events would you like to visit? As you start visiting your wish-list destinations, you'll create memories and experiences that will last for years to come.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



Build some planning time into your spring routine. Get excited about what's just around the corner. If there's nothing in your routine that you look forward to, maybe it's time to shake things up. Consider making some changes. Maybe you need something new to become inspired, something that will fill you up and give you joy.

As kids start taking on more responsibility for their learning, they'll become a bigger part of this planning process. Making choices on what they'll study the next year can become something they'll enjoy.

Of course, learning doesn't have to stop on a certain date. You can always consider what learning might look like in the summer, whether it's through reading, writing, family trips, or for older students taking on their first job.

Spring is a natural time of transition. This is an enjoyable time for many reasons. By reflecting, celebrating your hard work, and planning for the future, you can make the most of the spring season.

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*Erin Shelby is a former public school music educator. Her work has appeared in Music K-8 magazine, and she has previously written for Living Education. An active blogger, she regularly contributes to StartUpMindset.com. Her short stories have been published in KidsView magazine. Visit [erinshelby.wordpress.com](http://erinshelby.wordpress.com) for more.*







\*SPRING CRAFT\*

# GATHERING TREE

**A Gathering Tree** is a sweet way to commemorate a special occasion. No matter how you do your Gathering Tree, it can create a sense of community, identity, and shared experiences. Having a project to focus on can also provide an easy way to interact for anyone, young or old, who may find larger gatherings or holidays stressful. It's a great intergenerational project too. Children will get to know the adults in their lives better, and everyone will feel like they belong and are appreciated.



# What are you thankful for?

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before a gathering of friends and/or family, create a simple outline of a tree that has each person's name on a fat branch. The bigger the paper, the better—you might want to tape together multiple pieces of paper. If you have a large chalkboard, you can use that instead of paper.

Add the date (or at least the year) beneath the tree or on the tree trunk.

2. Prepare supplies ahead of time, according to how you'd like everyone to add to the tree. Here are some ideas—feel free to come up with other ideas of your own!
  - Your child can ask each person some questions and then add their answers to their branch of the tree. Interview questions might include their favorite food, their earliest memory, one thing they loved to do when they were younger, or a place they love to go.
  - Each person can be invited to write on other people's branches, noting what they like or admire about the person, a favorite memory, or a message.
  - Take a photo of each person and print them (or use an instant camera) to create a literal snapshot of everyone at that point in time, which they can add to their branch.
  - Each person can decorate their branch any way they like. Provide a variety of colored pencils or markers, glue, magazines and scissors, fabric scraps or felt, stickers, feathers, leaves, glitter, etc.
  - Instead of a paper (or chalkboard) tree, use a real tree branch, anchored in a planter, and have everyone make ornamental objects to hang on the branches. Each person can sign their name to their object or write a word that has special meaning for them.
3. When everyone has had a chance to contribute, take a photo of the finished product to share with everyone as a memory of the gathering.

HEALTH

ART

FAMILY





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

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