

Living Education

ISSUE 122 FALL 2016
A PUBLICATION OF
OAK MEADOW

Finding Your Tribe



In this issue:
Community-Sourced Learning
Benefits of Differences
Ingredients of Community
Worldschooling
Homeschool Theatre

Table of Contents

3	Letter from the editor
4	Looking Beyond Alike: The Benefits of Differences <i>by Maren Grossman</i>
6	The Ingredients of Community <i>by Katie Mitchell</i>
8	When Things Aren't Working: Learning to Let Go <i>by Susan Warf</i>
10	Earth Cycles
12	Filling In the Gaps: Community-Sourced Learning <i>by Sharon Whalen</i>
14	Evening out with a Scientist: Enriching the Learning Experience with Community Mentors <i>by John Dorroh</i>
16	Discovering Connection through World Travel <i>by Liz Jackson</i>
18	Worldschooling: Travel Learning from a Student's Perspective <i>by Miranda Boyink</i>
20	Curriculum Spotlight
22	"What Can I Do?" <i>by Deb Velto</i>
24	Homeschool Theatre: Why It Matters <i>by Erin Shelby</i>
26	When Finding Your Tribe Means Finding Yourself <i>by Angela Awald</i>
28	LE/Fall 2016 News
30	Oak Meadow Craft

LIVING EDUCATION is the educational journal of Oak Meadow and welcomes submissions from our readers. Send all inquiries and submissions to livingeducation@oakmeadow.com. We look forward to sharing your story!

A publication of Oak Meadow
ph) 802-251-7250 fax) 802-251-7258
info@oakmeadow.com
visit us online at www.oakmeadow.com



Finding Your Tribe

Letter from the editor

In some ways, it could be easy to think that homeschoolers are already a tribe unto themselves, a ready-made group of like-minded people in any online or local community. But homeschooling appeals to a very diverse group of people, and finding your tribe among them can enhance the experience, making it richer and more meaningful for both you and your children.

So what does it really mean to find your tribe? And where do you look? Many areas have robust homeschooling networks. And through blogs, social media, and other forms of electronic communication, there are now more opportunities than ever to connect with other homeschoolers in every corner of the world. Having so many options available can be exhilarating – and downright overwhelming.

After all, finding your tribe means more than just joining a group of like-minded people. It's about recognizing and making a genuine connection that goes deeper than choosing to use a certain curriculum or living in the same town. It's about building a community around shared values and supporting the best in each other. It's feeling like a part of something with a larger purpose. It's knowing you belong.

In this issue, our contributors share how they found their tribe. Some found theirs through a transformative experience, like international travel. Others found theirs in an unexpected way or place.

Although the exact circumstances of finding your tribe may be different, you'll read how certain qualities are the same. In addition to being curious, determined, open-hearted, and accepting of differences, each writer did a fair amount of searching, questioning, and reflecting.

Read on to learn about their experiences and get suggestions for finding your tribe, whether it's the online or real-life variety.

And remember – it's also possible that your tribe could find you.

Looking Beyond Alike: The Benefits of Differences

by Maren Grossman

Recently a friend told me that she was thinking of homeschooling her daughter. She asked me what is the hardest thing about homeschooling, and I immediately answered, “Dealing with other homeschooling families.” When it comes to homeschooling, finding your tribe can be the hardest part of the whole business. Everyone goes into homeschooling for their own reasons. Everyone has their own ideas about how homeschooling should be done. Everyone has Very Strong Opinions.

Based on my own journey, the best advice I can give to another homeschooling parent who wants to find her tribe is this: Don’t look for your tribe among like-minded people.

When I began homeschooling 10 years ago, I thought that I had found my tribe. I was part of a large community of homeschoolers. We all had kids roughly the same age. We all went to the same church. We met frequently for playdates and potlucks and co-ops. We were all passionate about our kids, passionate about homeschooling, and passionate about our faith. We were very like-minded, but ultimately this very like-mindedness destroyed our sense of community.

Here’s the thing: When a group of people are that similar, small differences become chasms. One family celebrates Halloween; another doesn’t. One family unschools, while another is dedicated to a given curriculum. Someone’s kids all read by age 3. Another family has a kid who still isn’t reading at 10. Judgments and insecurities feed on one another, and before long friendship has given way to obsession about minutiae. The like-mindedness that forms a community can also dissolve it. If your relationships are based on similarities, then they can be destroyed by differences. Like-mindedness does not a tribe make.

If you want to find your tribe, this is the best way I know how to do it: Get to know people who are different from you. Ten years ago, I expected to find my tribe in people who were, more or less, just like me. Today I’ve found my tribe in people who, on first glance, might seem glaringly different from me. My tribe includes people who are atheist, Jewish, Muslim, and Protestant, as well as people who are Catholic, like me. It includes homeschoolers, public school families, and friends without children. It includes people I’ve known for twenty years and people I’ve known for two.

What makes these friends my tribe? I would say that these people are my tribe precisely because all our differences

are right there on the surface. One of my closest friends, a self-described fanatical atheist, knows that we go to church, that we pray before meals and with our kids at night – and he loves us anyway. We know he’s an atheist, and yet he and his family are emphatically some of our best friends.

I’m not going to say that these differences don’t matter. On the contrary, I think that this difference is profoundly important for our friendship. With our differences on the surface, and with our friendship founded on a meaningful respect for each other in spite of our differences, we are able to move beyond caring about what we have in common to caring about each other.

I still occasionally dream of finding that tribe of like-minded people who are more “like me.” But the truth is that friendship is an unexpected gift that appears in unexpected places with unexpected people. I’m learning to embrace that, to trust the friendships I have, and to recognize my tribe when I see it – even if it’s a little different than what I might have expected at first.



Maren Grossman lives with her family in central Pennsylvania. An M.A. in philosophy, she homeschools her three children, teaching them to love Shakespeare and old movies. She reads a lot, knits a lot, and plays a lot of board games.



The Ingredients of Community

by Katie Mitchell

I have been a homeschooler, unschooler, worldschooler, and self-directed learner my entire life. Even from a very young age, I didn't need my parents looking over my shoulder or peer pressure from classmates to motivate me to work. I was perfectly content on my own – until I wasn't.

When I was about 11, I realized I no longer wanted to spend my days alone. I wanted a group of friends that shared my interests, a community. So I talked to my parents and soon set out to start at a private co-op school at age 12. "This is it," I thought. This was where I would make the lifelong connections I desired.

This private co-op school met twice a week, and we all participated in classes together. I remained at this school for three years, and those may have been the worst three years of my life. Through this experience, I realized community is not achieved from sitting in a classroom, being forced to memorize Latin conjugations. I stuck around out of hope and mere desperation. This clearly was not my tribe.

My feeling of frustration pushed me into full "take-charge" mode, and I began thinking of ways to find community in new

places. I began to think of all the different things that bring people together: struggles, shared interests, travel...travel. That was it! I was certain travel would be the perfect way to cultivate community.

I applied to travel to Paris with the Girl Scouts, to Nepal with a group of 12 other teens, and to the Mexican jungle for a yoga retreat. To my disappointment, I was not accepted to any of these programs. It was a frustrating year. How could I make it work?

Doing research online, I came across Project World School, a company that takes teens into various foreign countries for a month and immerses them in the culture, while having a large emphasis on community. I applied, and three weeks later I was in Ecuador, studying the coast and building a network of other traveling learners.

My experiences in Ecuador changed my perspective. I discovered that I truly loved travel and the community experience that automatically results, no matter how temporary. This trip reaffirmed that this was what I wanted to do, and there was no



way I was stopping or giving up this passion anytime soon. So I applied for more trips, and this time I was accepted.

After Ecuador, I lived in Colorado with a community of 25 other adolescents pushing ourselves, challenging ourselves, and doing a lifetime's worth of growing together for three months. I was thirsty for more.

Afterward, I went back to Project World School, even more determined: I was not only going to travel on more of their retreats, I was going to study and learn how they created these magical temporary learning communities.

The cofounder of Project World School and I discussed working together, and she created a position for me within the company. I officially became Project World School's first intern and assistant. I learned how to facilitate their retreats, actually attended their retreats, and traveled with them as they roamed the world for more than six months. Through this internship, I was able to explore my place in the world and facilitate the experience for other adolescents on their quest to do the same.

Through this work, I have a new understanding of how a true sense of community is created – and how oversimplified my idea of community was in the 5th grade! A lot more goes into creating a community than just being in the same space doing the same work.

Part of what I've learned by being an intern at Project World School is that the ingredients of community are trust, challenge, and learning together. A successful community of adolescents comes together out of support in a time in their lives when they need it – like while traveling in a foreign country or unfamiliar environment.

As David Siegel writes in his book *Brainstorming: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*, adolescents start to push away from their parents in their teens as a subconscious method of survival, and they need to fall into another support group in order to continue growing and evolving. The new support group? Their peers.

I've learned that in order for a teen to grow and thrive, a safe, supportive community is the key. Teens must explore more of their interests and be in a safe place to do so; a learning community. Within these structures, peers are able to learn through experience and discuss what they are learning.

As a young learner, I did not have this type of community and suffered because of it. I did not feel welcome to practice or attempt what I wanted to learn out of fear of failure and being teased. Now, as a member of many learning communities all over the world, I have trained myself to be open to new experiences and to know that no matter what, I'll find a safe community of supportive people who want me to succeed.

Finding your tribe isn't always easy, but it is important and worthwhile. Experiencing community as an adolescent is vital to healthy human development. Community builds a confidence that adolescents need to grow—to not only help themselves in the moment, but well into their futures.

Katie Mitchell is an 18-year-old travel and education writer. She has been a self-directed learner her entire life and finds great joy working with other adolescents to create communities. You can connect with her through her website everythingkatiejane.com.



I struggled to find friendships after high school, mainly because I had no clue who I was and the friends I chose in high school were more out of necessity than compatibility. As I began the journey of homeschooling, I chose a homeschool group based on the recommendations of people I went to church with. The group I chose was very organized and curriculum driven. I am very much a free spirit, so this group did not fit well with who I was. I felt I was in a constant battle of who I wanted to be and who I thought others wanted me to be. I was frustrated with my children and frustrated with myself. One day while teaching my son to read, I was angry that it wasn't going how it was "supposed" to go, and I tore up the book. Unfortunately, it was a special book his great-grandmother had given him when he was a baby. I knew that this was not working.

When Things Aren't Working: Learning to Let Go

by Susan Warf

I decided to join a homeschool co-op group that would teach your child for you for two days, and all I had to do was the homework with my child. That illusion wore off very quickly when I realized the homework was so much more than I would have required. Tensions were very high, and every Thursday someone was crying. I had had enough.

I was set on sending my children back to school, and I even toured the local school. Then grace stepped in and I heard for the first time about unschooling. I was baffled. How will they learn? Will they play video games all day? What about math? How will they get into college? I picked the brain of someone I met via Facebook and it helped. I still wasn't convinced, but I was very apprehensive about sending my children to public school.

I ended up giving unschooling a try and signed up for a few different homeschool groups that were more laid back. I tried to hold a playgroup on Fridays, but no one showed up. I decided to try again, and I also attended

a playgroup another mom had started. It was a time of transition and letting go of so many expectations.

But...this is when I found my tribe. I do believe it was an answer to my prayers, because I felt very alone for a while, especially during our first year unschooling. I still get looks and questions when I tell people we're unschooling, but I am more confident now because I have experienced the joy unschooling can bring to a household.

The friends we have now aren't all unschoolers; some are very structured and some are somewhere in the middle. There are a few things I think make our group work. The number one rule is: keep drama to a minimum. If we have an issue, either child or adult, we try to bring it out into the open. We usually do this on Facebook messenger, because I personally think it's better to type these issues out rather than voice them, because there is less emotion. We meet each week and let the kids play. And when I say play, I mean for hours. We do give them projects, but the

projects are something they choose to do. We go on lots of field trips, as many as we can find. We're also figuring out who is good in certain areas and harvesting those talents for the good of our children. We aren't afraid of change; if something isn't working, then we stop doing it. My children haven't been interested in everything that has come to our group, but it's kind of like Brussels sprouts—I make them try it once. I'm not sure if the comfort of feeling that I fit in came because I changed, or if I changed because the friendships came.

My greatest joy is knowing that my children are finding out who they are at a young age. They are choosing friends and bonding based on shared interests and compatibility. They are growing and learning in a way that works best for them, and they are watching their mom grow and learn at the same time. My children are learning how to develop and maintain relationships based on love, respect, and understanding. We should all be so lucky.



Susan Warf has been homeschooling for seven years, helping her three beautiful children become productive adults who are confident in who they are and have a good idea of who they want to be. She is an advocate of unschooling and natural remedies, and active in local politics.

Earth Cycles

As autumn approaches, many of us have overflowing gardens. It's fun to celebrate the bounty!

Here's one harvest festival idea (from Oak Meadow's grade 3 curriculum).

Build a Sukkah. A sukkah is a traditional hut built to celebrate the harvest holiday of Sukkot and to commemorate the temporary dwellings the Jews lived in during the 40 years they wandered in the desert. Using the directions below, you can build one yourself, and then enjoy hanging out in your sukkah or even sleeping in it, weather permitting.



Materials:

- 4 garden trellises, 4' x 8'
- 6 hinges and screws for them
- 2-3 bamboo sticks or boards, 8' in length
- Roll of garden twine
- Leafy stalks, fruits, gourds, items of the harvest, etc. to decorate



Instructions:

1. Lay two trellis sections side-by-side, with long sides touching. Join the two sections together with 3 hinges. (They should then be able to fold over on each other.) Repeat with the other two sections. Now you have two hinged sections.
2. Take each pair of trellises and unfold it to an L shape.
3. Carefully lift the sections to standing and put them together to form the back corners of your sukkah.
4. Move the hinged sections closer together until the two sections overlap about 6 inches. This will become the back wall of your sukkah. Use twine to bind the overlapping trellises together at top, middle, and bottom.
5. Lay bamboo poles across top, resting on both side walls of the sukkah. Tie tightly into position with twine.
6. Cover roof with leafy stalks, grape vines, etc. Thread leaves through walls, and hang fruit, gourds, items of harvest to decorate.
7. Bring in a picnic blanket or a small table and chairs, and enjoy a lovely snack in your sukkah!

Here are some other great ways to enjoy the special atmosphere of autumn.



Bring fall indoors with leafy streamers and banners. Collect an assortment of beautiful leaves in fall colors, and then string them together with a needle and thread or yarn. (Some leaves will be more fragile than others, depending on how dried out they are. Children might need help with this part to avoid frustration.) Hang the leafy streamer above your table or in a doorway, so you can enjoy the beautiful colors of the season indoors.

Observe a favorite tree as it changes through the season. Choose a nearby deciduous tree that loses its leaves in autumn. Once a week, take a photo of the tree from the same spot, observing the changes week by week. Take your sketchbook with you and sit down in a comfy spot to sketch the tree every few days. Watch as the tree's "bones" are revealed, and marvel at the beautiful shape of its branches underneath its dressing of leaves.



Make a leaf house. For a big playhouse on the lawn, rake leaves into the shapes of rooms and hallways. If your lawn is big enough (and you have enough leaves), make several houses with pathways connecting them, and then visit one another. Bring snacks outside to enjoy in your leaf house.

Make pumpkin pancakes, apple bread, zucchini muffins, and other harvest treats. This tasty way to enjoy nature's bounty also helps children make the connection from farm to table by eating what's in season. Picking food from your garden or buying it from a farmer's market emphasizes the connection to nature even more.



Filling In the Gaps: Community-Sourced Learning

by Sharon Whalen

Is something missing from your homeschooling? No matter where you live, chances are you have a community full of wonderful resources if you know where to find them. Search your community for ways to support your children's interests and fill in any gaps in your homeschool!

Get to know your neighbors: Think about how you can collaborate with your neighbors. Many neighborhoods have some sort of committee, and often kids can join. Also, if you know the gifts and talents of your neighbors, they may be willing to tutor your child in a subject. One of our neighbors has an invaluable personal history, and my children have adopted her as an additional grandparent. She teaches them about many different subjects and a lot about life. They love to visit her and go almost every day.

Enlist family and friends: We also have a fantastic network of friends who are willing to share their talents and spaces. Simply hanging out with another family can teach your children valuable lessons: They get to see how other families work together and how they live, which may be different from what they know. Kids can also learn about other cultures and traditions by spending time with other families. If you live in the city, try to visit someone who lives on a farm for a day or vice versa.



Check out your local parks: In the United States, we have local, state, and national parks all around the country. The best part is that the park system offers programming for people of all ages – often for free. The national and state parks also usually have terrific web pages with loads of information about an area, including the flora and fauna, local resources, good hikes to do with children, and much more! Volunteering in your local community presents the opportunity to make new relationships and discover even more.

Find a mentor: Sometimes finding a mentor is an easy task, and other times it is tough. However, the process alone is often worthwhile. My son recently took an interest in blacksmithing, and we visited a blacksmith in town who taught him some amazing history. My daughter is interested in costume design, and she is working with our local theatre to shadow the costume designer during a production.

Take extracurricular classes: Our family does a lot of extracurricular activities. Again, there is so much going on right in our town, but some of these are available worldwide. This year my son chose to participate in Boy Scouts. Scout activities give purpose to all the activities my son loves. He can teach his talents to others, and he has a whole group of people available to teach him as well. Scouts requires my son to learn and practice excellent communication, organizational skills, and how to work well within a group in addition to activities such as knot tying, climbing, camping, and hiking.

Don't forget your virtual community: We are not a huge technology family, but we do use the internet to connect with people. With the internet, the whole world is your backyard! If you can't find a local class or group, many times you can find one online. And with Skype and FaceTime, you can participate in clubs or chat with professionals or experts, no matter where they are.

Sharon Whalen is a stay-at-home mom who homeschools her three very different children. Prior to homeschooling her kids, she was a perpetual student who also worked as a pediatric physical therapist. Check out her homeschooling blog at <http://lakenormanprep.wordpress.com>.



Evening out with a Scientist: Enriching the Learning Experience with Community Mentors

by John Dorroh

This truth is at the heart of one of the most successful learning experiments for my students and me: a year-long project called “Evening out with a Scientist.” I was teaching in a rural secondary school which had acquired a core of business partners who volunteered to become engaged in a variety of ways – mentoring after-school programs, providing transportation for field-trips, providing guest speakers, and establishing a student achievement awards program. I used the same approach when I became more involved with homeschool groups in my area.

Generally speaking, students like guest speakers. Their visits seem to break the routine and give young learners a different perspective on content. Every community has individuals who qualify as “scientists.” Not all scientists wear lab coats and have smoking beakers full of mysterious concoctions. A person who owns/manages a plant nursery could qualify. So could an individual who owns a dairy farm!

How we did it
I shared my vision with my middle and high school science classes and asked them for feedback. Their reaction was bland. I got comments such as “Mr. D., do we have to have nerds coming into our classroom?” and “But I don’t want to be a scientist, so why are you doing this?”

“No, it’s not just me who will be involved in this project,” I explained. “It’s all of us.” I told them that I would arrange the first guest and do all of the legwork. “If you like the results, I’ll ask you to help with the next program. If you don’t like the results, then we’ll not do it again. Deal?”

My sister worked in the imaging department of a military hospital in our area, and I asked her if her friend, Dr. Ray, a radiologist, would like to come speak at our evening program. He agreed and showed up early that evening, excited that someone had asked him to share his experiences.

We met in the school library at 7:00 p.m. Three of our business partners were on hand and provided light refreshments and a

“No man is an island, entire of itself...” wrote John Donne, an English poet in 1624. In the poem he goes on to explain how we are all connected. It matters that we are all part of something bigger than ourselves. What happens to one person affects many.

couple of door prizes. About a week before the program, one of my students asked what we were going to do about advertising the event.

“Is it open to the public?” he asked. “Do you want me to ask my uncle about free advertising? He works at the TV station.”

Other students began “filling in the gaps,” asking questions that needed to be asked. Soon, everything was in place and the students seemed to be excited about “Evening out with a Scientist.”

On the night of the program, the local press appeared and asked if they could interview me. I diverted the attention to my students. An article appeared in the local newspaper, and the students were quick to identify some minor mistakes that appeared in print.

Dr. Ray connected with the audience and his content was appropriate for the different age levels. We had a nice mix of about 50-60 people, most of them students and parents. The mayor of the city became a regular attendee.

We repeated the process for subsequent programs, spacing them about 5-6 weeks apart. Our principal, who was an expert fruit tree grafter, led one of the sessions. The students were amazed to see that he knew more than how to run a school.

We had a team of storm chasers from a local university, an archeologist, and a pilot from the air force base. There was a team of firemen who explained how the laws of physics help them to extinguish fires; and a beekeeper. You get the idea.

How you can do it
You can use this model to engage your students in similar ways. Any discipline works: an archivist for a specific perspective on history (genealogy); an actuarial professional for mathematics; or a published author for language arts. Appoint a small pod of students (and adults if need be) to identify the guest speakers. Secure a meeting place and take care of any transportation needs. Have light refreshments, which can be prepared by volunteers in your group. Decide who you want to benefit from your programs and advertise to that population. Make it a community effort.

For students who live long distances from homeschool groups, use as much technology as possible. (Word of caution: Just as you may have to monitor what your child watches on TV, you must monitor what websites he/she visits. Assume that nothing is 100% safe.) There are podcasts on hundreds of topics. Often through a Skype-type set-up, students can participate long distance and more often than not, at no cost. Join a forum. Check out universities/colleges in the area that offer enrichment programs. It’s important for all students to make connections with other learners and adults.

Questions that could be posed in a self-inventory to help them start thinking include:

- What are my child’s interests?
- Are there groups with similar interests? If so, do they have websites?
- Do my child’s interests merit an investment of time, effort, and energy?
- Are there ways for my child to volunteer?
- Are there groups close to us that meet on a regular basis?

- How do we get started? How do we make an initial contact?
- Do my child’s interests line up with his/her goals?
- How can I support my child without taking over?
- How can I help my child go deeper into the subject of interests?

Teaching your child the value of cooperation is an ongoing lesson. Through cooperation there is collaboration, and therefore community. “Evening out with a Scientist” proved to be invaluable for my students. Years after they graduated, some of them told me that it was one of the most eye-opening events of their education. With a bit of tweaking, this model can be adapted for homeschool groups whether in a city or in a remote setting.



John Dorroh taught secondary sciences for almost 30 years. Now he consults with teachers in several states, sharing with them strategies for helping young learners understand science using reading and writing. He enjoys writing poetry and short fiction, playing racquetball and tennis, cooking, and biking. “Never stop exploring your world,” he tells his teachers and students.



Discovering Connection through World Travel

by Liz Jackson

I spent the last year traveling to 13 countries with my husband and our two boys. We embarked on this journey as a family so that we could experience new cultures and meet people from all over the world together. And as the founder and director of Gogi Abroad, a study abroad program that emphasizes experiential learning, I also took this trip with the intention of exploring opportunities to create new community partnerships with a focus on water use, agriculture, and allocation of resources around the world.

It was a transformative experience on many levels. We visited tribal villages and unique communities around the globe. It was eye-opening to work alongside farmers in Malaysia and watch how they worked with their land and approached farming and animal husbandry.

We hiked to tribal villages in Vietnam and Myanmar and learned that the people there lived with very few material things, and no running water or electricity. The villagers there did not have calendars or smartphone to analyze the weather patterns. They followed the phases of the moon, and each generation passed their essential knowledge to younger members of their tribe: Knowledge of the planting season, when the rains would come, and when to harvest depended in part on when different plants bloomed.

We also got to observe sustainable models of managing essential resources such as water, food, and animals among small tribes in Tanzania and in large ones in Israel and Spain.



During our stay with a Maasai tribe in Longido, Tanzania, we got to eat freshly slaughtered and roasted goat in a tent at their weekly cattle market – a culinary experience that took us far out of our comfort zone.



Besides farming techniques and methods of resource allocation, we also observed the ways different cultures create art that expresses their reality. As I worked alongside the Maasai women at a beading cooperative one day, I suddenly realized that I never expected to gain so much from an afternoon of stringing beads as part of a group endeavor. This art form is deeply representative of their culture, and beading with the women brought up a lot of questions about our world we live in and how one discovers a sense of place and identity in a tribe.

I wondered, how are people of different cultures coming together to manage their resources sustainably? How are communities brought together in farming and animal husbandry? How are communities brought together in music and in ritual?

The common thread seemed clear: It was connection through community.

Along this world tour, my family and I learned what it is to know this sense of universal interconnectedness. Even though we didn't speak all the languages or understand all the cultural rules, we did develop a sense of belonging through the awareness that all human beings are looking for the same things in life: collaboration, connection, and community.

Each time we arrived at a new place and settled into each new culture with its people and landscape, we began to recognize that, at our core, all human beings are the same. We are all part of one large tribe that has adapted to survive in different environments. And it is not only possible, but vital

for the future of this world, that our youth explore these concepts of tribal identity and experience connection to our wider human tribe.

Tolerance assumes that there is a fundamental difference between people. On the other hand, cultivating a sense of genuine connection is a far more sustainable model. Through world travel and cross-cultural engagement, we develop a broader lens to view the human experience. Then together we can work as citizens of the earth for the benefit of all.

Note from the Editor: Gogi Abroad's cultural immersion trips to Peru and Belize are perfect for homeschooling students. Visit gogiabroad.com for more information.



Liz Jackson is an experienced, passionate educator and founder of Gogi Abroad. She has been teaching and leading international trips for more than 10 years. Liz's passion for travel and experiential learning is rooted in her own transformative experiences studying abroad as a teenager. She loves witnessing her students' growing awareness of the world as they work with tribes. Liz resides in Saxtons River, Vermont, with her husband and two sons.

Worldschooling: Travel Learning from a Student's Perspective

by Miranda Boyink

My family lives and travels in an RV. We've been living this way for about five and a half years and, while I hated it for most of the first year, I love living this way now. There is so much to learn out in the country!

In the winter of 2013 we camped at Usery Mountain Regional Park in Mesa, AZ. We had stayed at this park the year before, and I was very excited to be living there for a few months. One of the reasons I liked the park so much was because there were many interpretive programs there I liked to go along on and learn about the various plants and animals found in the Sonoran desert.

Two of the other campers there, Mark and Lynn, recognized that I enjoyed learning about the plants in the desert, and they asked me if I would like to help out with the program next time. Mark told me to learn about cholla cactus, and so I did. The next time the program 'New to Arizona' rolled around, I taught people about the cholla cactus.

From then on, I taught about one different plant each 'New to Arizona' program. I did the cholla, barrel cactus, saguaro, prickly pear, ocotillo, and ironwood. I knew almost the whole 'New to Arizona' talk by heart, after hearing it and giving parts of it so many times. Mark and Lynn recognized this too, and they asked me if I would be willing to give the entire program by myself.

I said yes. And so I did. It went very well, and I would do it again in a heartbeat.

In the summer of 2015, we were seasonally in the teeny tiny little town of Fremont, MI. I got my first job interning at the animal shelter I had volunteered at the year before.

I was a vet tech intern, so I watched neutering and spaying, and helped out with various projects. The first day I started working, I watched my first spaying. I almost passed out, even though I wasn't squeamish about animal body parts or blood.

The vet tech we had working at the shelter taught me how to take fecal samples. I really enjoyed going through the motions of the process, and then looking through the microscope at the end, having her explain to me the various cells I was seeing.

In the winter of 2015, we were doing work camping - helping out at a farm in Boerne, TX. It was my job every morning to get up at oh dark thirty and feed the animals. I didn't mind getting up when it was 29 degrees outside, because I loved the animals at the farm. There were horses, donkeys, miniature donkeys, alpacas, llamas, pigs, goats, miniature goats, sheep, and an emu.

While we were on the farm, three lambs were born, and I learned how to take care of them and how to tell if they were male or female.

I also gave vaccinations to five of our seven pigs. I helped draw up the vaccine and administer it. I watched vaccinations being given to the llamas and alpacas, and I could do it in a pinch.

I also learned to drive a tractor at the farm. That was so much fun!

When my family meets up with other families who are thinking about traveling full-time, they are always concerned about their kids. Are their kids going to have fun? Are they going to be socialized? Are they going to learn anything? If their kids are anywhere near the age I was when we first started traveling, I tell them, "They might not like it for the first several months. But there's going to be something out there, somewhere, they are going to enjoy."

Miranda Boyink is an aspiring writer. She likes to knit and read in her spare time, and she likes playing sports. She is interested in becoming a guide dog trainer, and likes learning about vet tech.

Curriculum Spotlight

In Oak Meadow's grade 5 U.S. history course, students learn about life during the pioneer days. One activity encourages students to hold a quilting bee and collaboratively create a beautiful (and practical!) quilt.

Activity: Quilting

Life was hard in the American colonies and on the frontier, but people found plenty of ways to have fun. They often turned work into fun social occasions. These became joyful social events that were important in the lives of the women, whose lives involved so much work and isolation from other women. They had husking bees when they all got together and husked corn. A husking bee included refreshments, music, and games.

They also had quilting bees where women got together to share the task of stitching a quilt. The patchwork quilt originated in America. The quilts were stuffed with wool, cotton, or feathers. The fabric for the patches came from clothing that was outgrown or worn out, or scraps that were left over from other sewing projects. Some quilts were quite simple, while others were remarkably complicated.

Use the instructions below to sew your own patchwork quilt. For your first quilting project, plan to make a quilt the size of a doll's blanket or a dog's bed.

All the sewing on your quilt will be done by hand, in the traditional style. However, you can have help, just as the early Americans did! Gather together as many people as you can. Each of you can make your own quilt as you talk and tell stories, or you can each make one or two quilt squares that will be sewn together into one larger quilt. Have a real quilting bee! This is a delightful way to spend a series of afternoons with some friends.

Materials:

- Fabric in various colors and patterns
- Batting (cotton or wool stuffing for quilts)
- Scissors
- Needle and pins
- Thread to match your fabric
- Seam binding to match the quilt

Instructions:

1. Wash and dry all your fabric before starting.
2. Cut pieces of fabric into squares that are all exactly the same size. Measure carefully!
3. Lay your squares out in the pattern you want. These will form the top of the quilt. If you'd like, you can fold and cut some squares into triangles, and add them into the pattern.
4. One by one, sew all the squares together, making sure to pin the pieces together so they are right side out when they are sewn.
5. When you have sewn together all the squares for the top of your quilt, you will cut one large piece of fabric for the back of the quilt. Make sure this piece of fabric is as large as your quilt top.
6. Place the back piece of fabric on the table face down. Then put a layer of batting and the patchwork on top. Make sure your patchwork top is facing outward! Smooth the three layers as carefully as you can and make them as even as possible around the edges.
7. Starting at the center, pin the three layers together in various spots to keep them in place. Only pin around the edges when your quilt pieces are smoothly tacked down in the middle. If you like, you can actually stitch the quilt together in a few spots in the middle. These stitches are usually made at the corners of some of the squares.
8. Use a basting stitch to sew the three layers together around the outside edges of the quilt.
9. Lastly, add seam binding tape to close and neatly finish the edges. Sew the seam binding by hand (or use a sewing machine).



“What Can I Do?”

Involving younger students in multi-age group learning activities

by Deb Velto

Group learning activities can be fun and fulfilling for everyone involved, but sometimes trying to do a structured project or activity with other homeschooling families is challenging with a multi-age group.

Often the trickiest part is finding ways to include younger members without letting them distract the older students. Instead of trying to keep younger siblings “busy” while the older students work, try involving them in the project.



Here are some simple ideas for involving younger students:

- Give each younger sibling a camera or phone to take photos during the project or activity. Younger children can click away while the older students are working. Demonstrate how to select the best photos and delete others. You will get some nice documentation of the work getting done. Print the photos, and let the younger children be in charge of putting them in chronological order in an album or on a poster.
- Younger children might not understand the life cycle of a frog yet, but they can certainly draw or color a picture of a frog or the lake where you are working. Ask them to come up with some ideas of how the artwork could be used to enhance the project.
- Ask younger children to find books in your home or at the library related to the topic the older children are studying. Have a small reading circle while the older students are working, or ask the older students to read a book to the younger students before or after the project. Even just having the books available to flip through can be enough to keep them quietly occupied.

● There are many online resources for puzzles, coloring pages, and other age-appropriate printouts related to the topic the older children are studying in more depth. If you do have some prep time, tools like puzzle-maker (puzzlemaker.com) let you create your own custom puzzles from simple vocabulary words.



● Put younger children in charge of break time. Help them select and prepare a special snack, or ask them to decide on some fun items to use. Setting out the sports equipment, bubbles, or other items they bring gives them an important job and will also keep them engaged during those last few minutes before the break (when you may need it the most).

● Make younger students the “reporters” about the activity, and tell them their job is to let friends and family members know all about what went on that day. This is a wonderful skill for younger children to develop, and it gives them a reason to focus on what their older brothers and sisters are working on. Give them a little notebook to take notes if they are already writing, or ask them tell you what is happening so you can write it down for them. Help them come up with some interview questions to ask the older students about what they learned.

Giving younger students a fun and meaningful role in the day's activities not only keeps them occupied, it also makes it more likely that they will learn something alongside their older siblings.



Deb Velto is the K-8 director at Oak Meadow. She has homeschooled her own children and taught small group writing and reading workshops for homeschoolers. She greatly enjoys supporting students as individual learners and encouraging them to utilize their unique strengths and passions as tools in their academic growth.

Homeschool Theatre: Why It Matters

By Erin Shelby

As you map out your homeschool curriculum, have you considered incorporating theatre into your child's studies? If you're not a thespian at heart, you might not have given much thought to teaching theatre. But your homeschooler can benefit in a variety of ways from studying theatre. Consider these ways a spoon full of theatrical magic can benefit your child.

A Stronger Language Arts Curriculum

At its most basic level, a theatrical production is just a story that unfolds before our eyes. Teaching students how to understand stories is what we strive to do when we teach language arts. Whether a story is suited for a third-grade reading level, or whether it's a racy novel for an adult's eyes only, every story has a plot, setting, theme, and characters, and those elements can make for an interesting or not so interesting story. If you want your student to understand how various elements of a story really connect—and not just on paper—try adding some musical theatre to your language arts curriculum. Consider having your high schooler watch a conflict-filled story like *West Side Story* or *Fiddler on the Roof*. Ask questions to see if they understand how the story connects to the world today, or what struggles and problems the characters are encountering. Look at the words of the songs the characters are singing, and discuss the emotions it portrays. The lyrics tell the story and the songs are the textbook.

Bringing History to Life

In the digital world of today, there are so many ways to teach history to make it more accessible and understood by students. But have you wondered how theatre and history might be related? While it's easy to teach the facts and dates of history – things like the dates of wars or the locations of certain events – other things can be missed. What did people wear? How did people talk? What social conventions did people follow in the course of everyday life? Attending theatre productions or participating in one is a great way for your homeschooler to learn about these aspects of history. Watching a musical like *The Sound of Music* or *The Music Man* can teach historical and cultural lessons.

Theatre Builds Social Skills

If your homeschooler wants to try out for a children's community theatre production, this is a great opportunity to make new friends. Theatre can help quiet kids come out of their shells while helping assertive kids appreciate those who are not like themselves. Whether working on the stage crew or standing center stage, kids who are involved in theatre get repetitive lessons in teamwork and diligence, lessons they'll use the rest of their lives.

21st Century Skills

There's a lot of talk today about 21st century skills such as creativity, so what better way to teach these skills than through a creative art like theatre? The homeschool student who learns about theatre today cultivates problem-solving capacity and imagination that will serve her in the future. Taking the time to explore the careers involved that are associated with theatre, whether or not your child becomes any type of artist, can serve him or her in the long run. Many careers have some type of connection or relationship with theatre: advertisers, marketers, hospitality managers, and wedding planners all in some way use their skills and creativity to make their own magic in the stage of life, similar to what happens in the theatre.

Making It Happen

The beauty of homeschooling means that you have the freedom and flexibility to do things your way. Whether your student gets involved hands-on or serves as a spectator in person or online, you can add theatre to your curriculum and see what happens. Chances are, your child will enjoy it, and you will see the benefits.



Erin Shelby is a freelance writer living in Cincinnati, Ohio. She graduated from Xavier University with a Bachelor of Science in Music Education. Previously an intern for the Educational Theatre Association in Cincinnati, she has also worked on the set of high school musicals, served as a church music director, and worked with young people as a music instructor in a variety of settings.

When Finding Your Tribe Means Finding Yourself

by Angela Awald

When I started out on this homeschooling journey, I thought I knew everything I needed to know. I thought I knew exactly who I was and the direction I was headed. But fueled by the intensity of the decisions before me, I found myself full of questions. (Let's be real: What parent or homeschooler hasn't?) I found myself wondering...pondering...doubting...hoping.

Among other questions, I found myself searching for answers to such questions as, Who am I in this space? Who am I as a mother and educator? What do I believe? What do I value?

While questioning was the first step, I also remember wishing someone would come along and tell me exactly what I needed to do to get this homeschooling thing right, to ensure that my children would turn out okay. But of course, no one could, or ever can, answer that for me. So with each tentative, hopeful step, I came closer and closer to finding myself – and my tribe.

I read books about homeschooling that introduced me to educational views I had never come across in my teacher training. I made connections with other homeschoolers in my area and online. I asked tentative and hopeful questions. I listened thoughtfully to the answers, some of which I still carry with me. Others I let fall away because they did not work for me and my family. But that's okay. I still learned from them, realizing that what doesn't work helps clarify what does.

In the process of researching learning styles and educational philosophies, my true self began to emerge. In each one, I saw a glimpse of myself, but the very nature of making a somewhat countercultural decision to homeschool had left me feeling a bit vulnerable. And then finding so many different opinions and approaches even within the homeschooling community, I could only picture myself as the ugly duckling, searching for belonging.

Thankfully, after more than eight years, I can look back and appreciate all the people who gave their time and heartfelt advice to help me in my search. Some of them were fast friends, while others were steady acquaintances. Still others fleeting introductions, but they all gave nonetheless. And thanks to each of them, I can say I found my tribe.

Each and every person in my tribe reflects a part of who I am and who I aspire to be. They are my confidants, sanity-savers, and friends. They are the ones I know I can call when the going gets tough and I need a sympathetic ear.

I also know I can rely on the larger homeschool community. Time and time again, I see how we uplift each other when we just don't know if we can make it through the dreaded months of February and March, or if we can teach our child fractions successfully. We celebrate even the smallest victories with one another.

Even if our homeschool styles differ or we don't see eye to eye on how best to teach writing, we still have a bond. Our intense desire to be so integrally involved in our children's education makes us who we are. Often the only ones who can truly understand our challenges and struggles are the ones in the trenches with us.

For me, finding my tribe meant finding myself first. So if you are searching, wondering where you belong in the homeschool world, I encourage you with this: Your tribe is all around you. To find it, you just need patience and the awareness that comes on your lifelong journey to find yourself.



Angela Awald, M.Ed., believes that nurturing her six children means showing them that life is about learning – from our mistakes, from each other, and from great books! She considers herself a lifelong learner and is passionate about helping children uncover the joy of learning for themselves. Angela has more than 17 years of experience as a classroom teacher, private tutor, and homeschooling mama. Read more of her writing at Nurtured Roots (www.nurturedroots.net).



LE/Fall 2016 News

Meet the Oak Meadow Class of 2016!

On Saturday, June 11, 2016, Oak Meadow held its graduation ceremony at our headquarters in Brattleboro, Vermont. Of the 11 seniors who earned their diploma between September 2015 and June 2016, six attended the ceremony with their families. Please join us in congratulating this hardworking group of Oak Meadow graduates and wishing them well as they embark on new adventures!

Nicholas Alonso (Winter Park, FL)
Zlatomir Fung (Westborough, MA)
Jason Guerino (Vernon, VT)
Fiona Kirkland (Milburn, NJ)
Samantha Laisure (Saugus, MA)
Rebecca Lannoye (Geneva, IL)
Marcella Melanson (Machias, ME)
Samuel Powell (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia)
Bridget Provan (West Milford, NJ)
Charlotte Rodewald (Dubuque, IA)
Leslie Sunderland (Sherborn, MA)

Oak Meadow Student Named U.S. Presidential Scholar

We couldn't be more proud of Zlatomir Fung, the first Oak Meadow student to be named a U.S. Presidential Scholar, one of the highest honors in the nation for high school students. The White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, appointed by President Barack Obama, selects 161 finalists annually from a pool of more than 5,000 eligible candidates. (See U.S. Department of Education press release.)

A world-class cellist from Westborough, Massachusetts, winner of several national and international competitions, and a National YoungArts Foundation winner, Zlatomir enrolled in Oak Meadow in 8th grade so he could devote more time to his music. He's now one of our 2016 graduates.

Along with his coursework at Oak Meadow, he has studied at several music institutes and academies. He performs solo as well as with various orchestras and symphonies, and he is also an avid chamber music player. His academic interests include philosophy and literature, and he also participates in chess competitions.

Congratulations, Mr. Fung!

Open House Is Coming Up

Each year, families from all over the country gather to celebrate homeschooling with Oak Meadow at our annual Open House in Brattleboro, Vermont. It's a great opportunity to meet Oak Meadow teachers and staff, view curriculum and ask questions, meet other homeschooling families, play, sing, and sample delicious Vermont treats. This year our Open House will take place on Saturday, October 1, 2016.

Visit oakmeadow.com for more information.

Oak Meadow Opens New Micro-School

Brattleboro School-Without-Walls (BSW2), a micro-school located at the Oak Meadow offices in Brattleboro, Vermont, launches in September. A combination homeschool cooperative and independent school, BSW2 operates as a modern one-room schoolhouse where high school students learn from one another, yet work through the curriculum at their own pace. Class size is intentionally small, and the school meets only three days a week.

Students are encouraged to pursue their passions and interests by taking classes and courses at various organizations in and around Brattleboro to earn credit toward their Oak Meadow diploma. Morning sessions include academic classes, seminars, and workshops in math, science, literature and writing, history, in addition to health and wellness. The afternoon homework cafe offers open time for study, one-on-one personal support, and group projects.

Visit bsw2.org for more information.

Want to start a your own micro-school, homeschool co-op, or independent learning center?

Oak Meadow has been a leader in independent learning for more than 40 years, and we are the first distance school ever to earn accreditation from New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). We offer guidance, support, and expertise for educators, parents, and homeschooling groups who would like to launch their own learning center. Visit oakmeadow.com and click on the For Schools tab to learn how we can assist you.

Oak Meadow on the road

Last year was a busy travel year for Oak Meadow! We attended several homeschool conventions and educational conferences from Alaska to Shanghai. Oak Meadow educators presented at several of the events on topics such as technology and homeschooling, creating homeschooling portfolios, designing a health program in the early grades, supporting the unconventional learner in college admissions, and foundations of independent learning and student engagement.



Oak Meadow Craft

Make a Crankie Movie

Materials:

long scroll of paper (You can also tape several pieces together to make one long piece.)

cardboard box (The size of the box should match the size of your paper roll. Or cut the paper to fit.)

markers

paints and brushes

colored paper (optional)

glue or tape (optional)

scissors or box cutter

screwdriver

two dowels (These need to be longer than the box is high when placed flat on its long side.)

clothespin (or other item for crank handle)

duct tape

A “crankie” is a hand-cranked movie made from a paper scroll and a simple viewing box. It’s like a paper movie or a moving story with images scrolling past. You make the paper move by rolling dowels attached to the scroll.

Crankies were originally used as storytelling devices. Sometimes there are words on the paper, and sometimes you tell a story based on the pictures. You could also sing a song that accompanies the pictures. Crankies are also fun at group sing-alongs – the crankie shows the lyrics so everyone can sing.

This is an excellent group project for any type of gathering, especially one of mixed ages. Try creating a favorite story at your next get-together with family and friends.

Crankies can be made using any size and type of box: matchboxes, tea boxes, shoeboxes, apple crates, or anything else you have on hand. Experiment and have fun cranking out your own story!

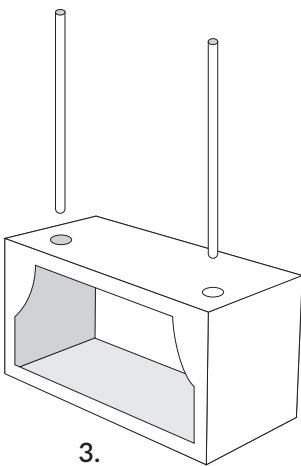
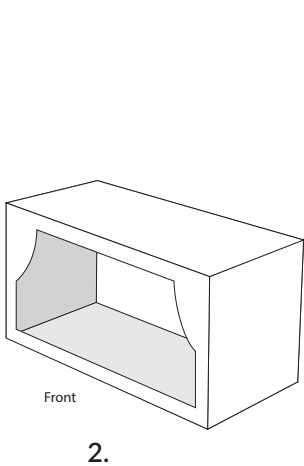
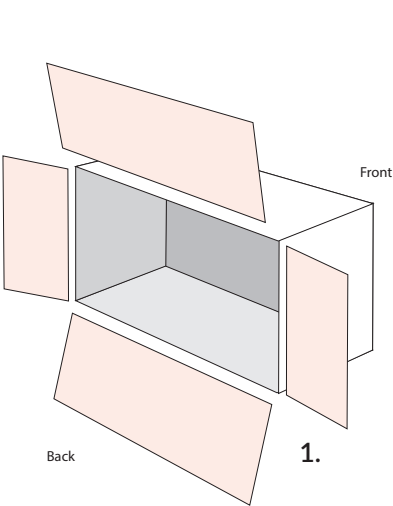
Instructions

Before you begin, you might want to do an internet search for images related to “how to build a crankie.” This will give you a good idea of what you’re aiming for!

1. Cut the flaps off the cardboard box. Stand the box on its long edge, which is the way you want your “theatre” to stand. The open side is now the back of your crankie box, and the large panel is the front stage or screen.

2. Cut a square or rectangular hole in the front panel. Make this hole just a little smaller than your paper – you don’t want spaces showing around the edges. Consider shaping the top or sides of the opening like fancy stage drapes.

3. Use a screwdriver to make a hole near each outer end of the top and bottom of your box. You want matching sets of holes on the right and left so that you can insert the dowels vertically. (You will attach your scroll to these dowels.) Make sure your dowels fit into the holes. The dowels should stick out of the top far enough to grip them easily.



4. At this point, your crankie box is complete! Paint it or cover it with colored paper.

Here’s a photo that shows what the box looks like from the back. (This one already has the crankie scroll attached.)



Photo credit: Paris family

5. One of your dowels will need a crank on top. Use duct tape to attach a clothespin or other sturdy object to the top of one dowel so that it forms a T.

6. Now it’s time to make your crankie. Lay out the paper on the floor and draw your story. Leave some blank space at the beginning, so you can roll a bit onto the dowel before the “title screen.” You can have a flowing picture that is all connected, or you can draw your story frame by frame. (Each frame is the size of the opening in your crankie box.) You might want to draw a basic outline of the pictures in pencil first, and then color in the story pictures.

7. Once the story scroll is complete, tape the end of it (the part that is “The End”) onto the dowel without the crank handle. Carefully roll it up so the entire movie scroll is on one dowel.

8. Before you tape the beginning of the scroll onto the second dowel (the one with the handle), you have to thread the dowel through the holes in the box. If you are facing your crankie “stage,” you want this empty dowel on the left side. Once it is in place, tape the beginning of the scroll onto the dowel.

9. Gently fit the other dowel (the one with the full movie scroll rolled up on it) into the top and bottom holes on the other side of the box. Now your crankie is ready to roll! You might need two people to hold onto the sides of the crankie box and help it turn smoothly.

10. If you are giving a nighttime show, try this: Dim the lights, and shine a flashlight behind the crankie to illuminate it like a movie in a theatre.



Oak Meadow student Finn Ward (currently in 8th grade) uses the flexibility of homeschooling to follow his passion. Visit oakmeadow.com to find out how you can use Oak Meadow to blend learning with life.

You can view the complete *Living Education* issue online. Our online version comes in an easy flipbook format and includes more articles, resources, and interactive links. View this issue and explore the *Living Education* archives at oakmeadow.com/LE.



oak meadow
INDEPENDENT LEARNING SINCE 1975