



HomeschoolNYC Newsletter

Celebrating Child-led Learning

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January/February 2011

Winter days are busy ones for New York City homeschoolers. My students are reading and writing plays, and playing with words and history and ideas. It is a time for new explorations, deepening and enriching friendships, and daydreaming of summer.

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[Laurie Block Spiegel](#)

Gung Hay Fat Choy

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Play in the News

It is a sad day when it is headline news that adults are encouraging children to play. On January 5th, the New York Times hailed an [effort to restore children's play](#). Imagine that just the effort, not necessarily the actual reality, of restoring free imaginative play to the lives of young children merits a headline! One week later, on [January 12, another article](#) in the same journal of record, detailed the struggles of parents to persuade a public school in Queens to give more playtime to kindergartners, who were receiving only a half hour of unstructured playtime each week, not counting recess. The principal responded by



giving the children one extra gym period each week. This additional thirty minutes of structured play was considered a major victory.

An article from CNN written by Harvard professors explains that crucial skills are learned through play. [Want to Get Your Kids Into College? Let Them Play](#) just might convince you to do just that, and let your children play more often and more freely. They call it a play-based curriculum which fosters emotional, social and psychological development.

As an educator and a parent, I have learned that children need at least an hour each day of a playful physical activity, and at least an hour each day of free, exploratory, unstructured, imaginative play. This seems to be the minimum needed for physical, mental, emotional and social health and growth. It can take a long time to see a growth spurt in reading or writing or math. But in play I can visibly see a child's growth happening. I recognize that their awareness has increased, their connection to others has deepened, and their confidence has strengthened. What a true joy it is to watch children play!

Click here for recommended [books on play](#).

Activities for Chinese New Year's



This year we enter the Year of the Rabbit on February 3, 2011. The Chinese lunar New Year falls on a different date every year, always in January or February. There are many places to celebrate this annual festival in New York City, with fireworks, the lion dance, delicious dumplings, and noisy crowds.

Use this marvelous celebration as a way to teach social studies (Chinese culture), science (explain the lunar calendar and the solar calendar), mythology and folktales (the animals in the Chinese zodiac), and the arts (dance, music, costumes). Let's not forget all of the phys. ed. you'll be doing chasing those parades!

At [Asia Society](#) families can celebrate the lunar new year with Chinese opera (translated for kids), kung fu demonstrations, a lion dance, Chinese folktale theater, and calligraphy. Sat., Jan. 29, from 1 pm - 4 pm at 725 Park Ave., admission \$12/adults, \$5/students, children and seniors.

At the [Museum of Chinese in America](#) (215 Centre St., nr. Grand), Sunday January 30 is Lunar New Year Festival Family Day. From 10 am to 5 pm enjoy storytelling with Kam Mak, a noodle-making workshop, a lion dance performance and workshop, arts & crafts, and browse the current exhibit, *Chinese Puzzles: Games for the Hands and the Mind*. Admission \$10/person.

Free [festivities in Chinatown](#):

Feb. 3, 11 am - 3 pm, Chinese New Year's Day Firecracker Ceremony and Cultural Festival, in Roosevelt Park bet. Grand and Hester Streets. See singers, dancers, lions, dragons, marching through the streets of Chinatown.

Feb. 6, The 12th Chinatown Lunar New Year Parade and Festival, from 11:30 am - 4 pm, starts in Little Italy and goes through Chinatown, along Mott, Canal, and Bayard Sts., and along East Broadway. Over 5,000 people are expected to participate including martial artists, musicians and dancers.

At the [China Institute](#) on E. 65th St. a traditional lion dance will be performed by martial artists and acrobats, free, on Sunday Feb. 6, 11 am - noon.

In Queens, about 4,000 people march in the parade in Flushing very year, with dragon dancers, steel drummers, and fireworks. On Sat. Feb. 12, from 11 am - 1 pm, viewing stands will be at the Flushing library (Main and Kissena) and parade's end at Main St. and 39th Ave. At the Queens Crossing Mall performances continue.

At Flushing Town Hall, enjoy the free [family lantern-making workshop](#) on Jan. 29 at 2 pm, Korean music on Jan. 30, and a lunar new year dance sampler on Feb. 12.

At the Queens Library in Flushing Feb. 12, noon - 2 pm, arts & crafts followed by classic Chinese songs. Feb. 19, 10 am - 3 pm, Lunar New Year Festival includes demonstrations in Korean food preparation and Chinese floral arranging, and performances in Korean music and dance, and traditional Chinese music.

Books on Chinese New Year's



Lao Lao of Dragon Mountain, Margaret Bateson-Hill, illustrated by Francesca Pelizzoli. This beautifully designed and illustrated folktale includes instructions on how to make a snowflake, a butterfly, a flower, and a dragon from cut paper.

Cat and Rat: The Legend of the Chinese Zodiac, Ed Young.

A charming story telling the ancient legend of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac.

Moonbeams, Dumplings and Dragon Boats: A Treasury of Chinese Holiday Tales, Activities and Recipes, by Nina Simonds and Leslie Schwartz, and the Boston Children's Museum.

Delightfully illustrated and informative, with recipes & activities.

Sam and the Lucky Money, by Karen Chinn, Cornelius Van Wright, and Yong-Hwa Hu. A story about Chinese New Year in New York's Chinatown, seen through the eyes of a young boy.

The Spirit of the Chinese Character: Gifts from the Heart, by Barbara Aria and Russell Eng Gon. A beautiful, simple introduction to Chinese calligraphy with just forty characters. Also excellent is the companion book *The Nature of the Chinese Character*. For ages 10-adult.

Make a Book to Celebrate the Year of the Rabbit



On the left is a simple stick and elastic book, made with red construction paper and a wooden chopstick. Red is the symbol of good luck in China. To celebrate the new year, gifts of money are given in red envelopes, and wishes of good luck are written in red and gold. *Gung Hay Fat Choy* means best wishes for a prosperous and healthy new year. On the cover of my book I have written the symbol for good luck in Chinese, using a black marker. I used a small rubber stamp of a rabbit to celebrate the year of the rabbit. Legend says that the rabbit lives in the moon. Your book could have poems about each animal in the Chinese zodiac, or your favorite Chinese food recipes, or your story of how you celebrated the Chinese New Year. Here you will find [detailed instructions and more handmade stick and elastic books](#).

Planning for Summer



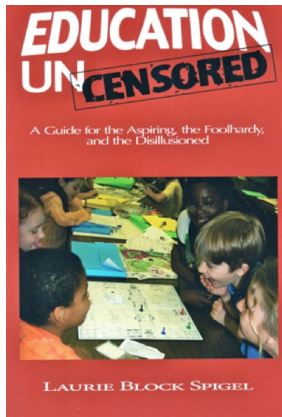
Now is the time to look into summer camps or plan a vacation that will allow the entire family a chance to learn and play together. Here is a list of [summer camps](#), as well as [camps preferred by homeschoolers](#), some with parent and student reviews. Laurie's travel articles recommend local [road trips and day trips](#).

Quote by Benjamin Franklin

"Games lubricate the body and the mind."

~Benjamin Franklin, 1706 - 1790, founding father of the US, author, diplomat and inventor

Education Uncensored



Laurie Spigel is a leading educator in the New York City homeschooling community, teaching popular group classes and inspiring parents to create their own curriculum. Her approach is informal, creative, and child-led. Here she shares her innovative ideas and original techniques for every subject. She explains why our current educational system has it all backwards and shows how exciting learning can truly be. A real source of inspiration as well as a practical guide, this is an eye-opening book for every parent and teacher.

Available now at HomeschoolNYC.com

Price: \$12.95 plus shipping & handling

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E-mail comments and suggestions to Laurie@HomeschoolNYC.com.

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