



# HomeschoolNYC Newsletter

***Celebrating Child-led Learning***

**December 2009**

*Welcome to the premiere issue of the HomeschoolNYC Newsletter! Now that my youngest is in his second year of college (and having a wonderful time), I can attempt a timely and newsworthy journal. I will share thoughts, ideas, classroom and parenting tips. I hope that you find some useful information here, and perhaps even a little inspiration.*



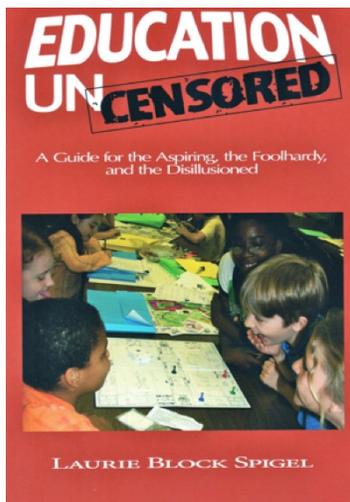
*Laurie Block Spigel*

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## ***Education Uncensored***

As some of you already know, my book, *Education Uncensored*, is now available. I include some of my best teaching advice, with a creative overview of every subject from K-12. The cover shows one of my board game classes, where students make their own games and have more fun learning more stuff that even I can believe.



Here is what folks are saying about this book:

A profoundly creative and down-to-earth account of dreams fulfilled -- dreams and implementation about what educators can do to enhance the often-stifled potential of children, blending home and school education. ~ Paul Jaquith, Educator and Minister

Laurie Spiegel is a gifted teacher and an inspiring writer. Her new book, *Education Uncensored*, is a joyful celebration of what truly creative teaching and learning can be like, for both student and teacher. ~ Jennifer Dees, Parent and Home Educator

[Read a review and sample chapter.](#)

[Purchase the book here.](#)

## ***Art History - Kandinsky and Klee***

In art history class last week we studied the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky, often called the father of abstract art. We then played with watercolors to Vivaldi and jazz (I used the soundtrack to Cowboy Bebop).

This week we explored the multi-hued work of Swiss painter Paul Klee. He was an accomplished violinist who loved Bach, Brahms and Mozart. He was also a stay-at-home dad (let's hear it for the dads!) who took care of his son while his wife Lily gave piano lessons and earned the family income. I played a few Bach Inventions and then some Mozart piano concertos, while we became inspired by Klee's work. Some students made their own magic number paintings. Others painted landscapes, whimsical creatures and birds.



This lesson taught geography as we examined a map to locate Klee's homes in Germany and Switzerland, and his travels from that heart of Europe. We also learned history, since Klee's life was greatly affected by both World Wars. We saw the tragedy of World War I reflected in his paintings, as well as his sadness at having to leave Germany when Hitler ended the Bauhaus. Klee's magic number squares, where each column of varying numbers -- now colors -- has the

same total value, taught mathematical concepts. Each child found his or her own inspiration and created a unique and beautiful work of art.

See some of the art made by Laurie's students at the [Photo Gallery](#) at HomeschoolNYC.com.

If you can't get to the Guggenheim before January 13th to see the current [Kandinsky exhibit](#) (and maybe some Paul Klee too), you can take a peek on their website, where you can also find some great [lessons on Kandinsky](#). Afterward try your hand at painting to music. Paint one picture while listening to classical and then do another, perhaps to rock and roll. Compare them and talk about the differences.

### ***Outdoor Learning in the News***

Remember when kids naturally spent three hours or more outside every day of the year? Now it seems so rare that it merits an article in the NY Times. Check out the Nov. 29, 2009 article on the resurgence of outdoor learning (hurray!) in a Waldorf school kindergarten in Saratoga Springs, NY: [For Forest Kindergartners, Class Is Back to Nature, Rain or Shine](#).

We need school administrators and teachers to understand just how damaging it is for children to stay indoors all day long, especially seated at cramped desks. One chaotic hour of recess does little to rejuvenate the soul that is always hungry for nature and always seeking experiential learning.

Homeschoolers in NYC make excellent use of the [Park Rangers Natural Classroom series](#), and also [Coyote Tracks](#) arranged for kids in Manhattan's Central Park. If only I had these kinds of activities when I was young!

Walking on a beach or down a wooded path is a marvelous adventure in every season. Bring water, trail maps, binoculars, field guides, a book or sketch pad (which can do double duty for leaf and flower pressing), and make the most of the great outdoors.

### ***Not Wanting to Learn***

## *What do you do when your child no longer wants to learn?*

One family that recently sought my advice asked me this question. Their teenager had suddenly left a school for gifted overachievers. The loss of this school saddened the parents, but they were more alarmed when their son decided he didn't want to do anything anymore. He just stayed in his room. I spoke with this family about child-led learning, and the need for decompression after living in a highly pressurized school environment. I suggested to the parents that they back off and wait. Sooner or later their child will want to go somewhere, do something, and will seek to learn. Times like these can try a parent's patience, and waiting can be excruciating. Waiting for what? For an intelligent child to stop wanting to not-learn. Not-learning is a phrase coined by Herbert Kohl in his essay, "[I Won't Learn From You](#)". Kohl cites several examples of people who spend a great deal of energy and intelligence fighting off learning. It is easy to understand Kohl's example of a person of color choosing to not-learn from a racist teacher. But it is harder to understand when a gifted child who has been placed in an environment for the gifted reacts in this same way. Education requires the student's trust. In my opinion, this teenager felt betrayed, and was not ready to trust his learning to anyone anymore. When education becomes all about test scores, competition and class rank, forcing young students to succumb to pressure, then perhaps a not-learning approach is justified. It takes great energy, will, and focus to not-learn, and we are all capable of this when faced with the right circumstances. Kohl shares his personal experiences as an innovative and open-minded educator, and I always find him well worth reading. I send this troubled teen and his family my best wishes and hopes. Recently I heard that he had started reading his favorite genre again, science fiction. Surely this is a promise of more to come. I believe that one day this boy's passions will awaken and he will find his true place, learning -- and perhaps even teaching -- in this great, wonderful world.

## ***December Field Trip Ideas***

Department store windows come alive this month, turning Fifth Avenue into a fine December walking tour. Start at FAO Schwartz, at 5th Ave. and 58th St. and wander through the most crowded, biggest toy store in the world. Then cross the street to Bergdorf Goodman, between 58th and 57th St. Their windows are often spectacular. This year one is a fantasy world built entirely from books and paper, origami taken to a whole new level. Further down 5th Ave., across from St. Patrick's Cathedral, is Rockefeller Center (between 50th and 51st Sts.) where you can gaze at the great tree rising behind the Prometheus statue above the skating rink. Continue south past the NY Public Library with the big stone lions (42nd St.) to Lord and Taylor's at 5th Ave. and 38th St., where animated windows display scenes of old New York. When you're done, hop on the 5th Ave. bus and continue downtown to [Books of Wonder](#) and the Cupcake Café at W. 18th St. for a well-earned treat. Afterward your child can mark the route you took, using a marker on a Manhattan bus map, and then fold it into a scrapbook or story of the outing.

For more holiday wonder, visit the eighteenth century Neapolitan angels that adorn the [Christmas tree](#) at the [Metropolitan Museum](#). After gazing at the incredibly rich display, browse

through the arms & armor right next door. Ask for the [kids' guide](#) first at the information desk in the front hall.

The [Jewish Museum](#) at 92nd St. And Fifth Ave. has Sunday drop-in art activities and ticketed workshops, like [make your own sculptural menorah](#) on Dec. 13th, as well as workshops for kids with special needs. There is also [free menorah-making](#) at Belvedere Castle in Central Park on Dec. 13th, where all ages are invited to make an edible menorah. Return the following Sunday evening, Dec. 20th, for free solstice [stargazing](#).

Don't miss the origami tree on display through January 3rd at the [American Museum of Natural History](#), at Central Park West and 79th St. This year's theme is an animal alphabet! Animals are an easy starting point for science, literature, and art. And you're in the one of the most exciting museums in the world for kids! Afterward read an animal alphabet book such as [An A to Z Walk In the Park](#), by R. M. Smith or, better yet, make an animal alphabet book or some animal origami of your own!

[Animal Alphabet Origami Tree Lighting](#)

## Make Your Own Accordion Alphabet Book



Fredi, age 6, shows off the homemade alphabet book she made for her new baby cousin. I cut the pages from foam board and used tape for the hinges to make a large accordion book. Fredi made the shapes of letters from pieces of recyclable cardboard boxes and glued them onto each page. The tactile experience of creating each letter's shape helps to impress that letter on a child's memory. Making the pages and putting them together with the letters in their correct order teaches

sequencing. Using recyclables teaches us good habits for saving the planet. And it's a whole lot of fun! This project was inspired by [Susan Kapuscinski Gaylord's recycled alphabet book](#).

### Quote by George Bernard Shaw

I am not a teacher; only a fellow traveler of whom you asked the way. I pointed ahead-ahead of myself as well as of you.

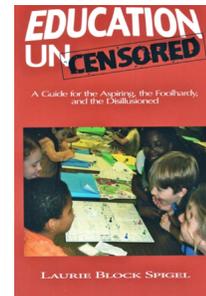
~George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) British dramatist, critic, writer.

### *Education Uncensored*

Available now only at [HomeschoolNYC.com](http://HomeschoolNYC.com)

**Price:** \$12.95 plus shipping & handling

[Buy the book here.](#)



*E-mail comments and suggestions to [Laurie@HomeschoolNYC.com](mailto:Laurie@HomeschoolNYC.com).*

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