



HomeschoolNYC Newsletter

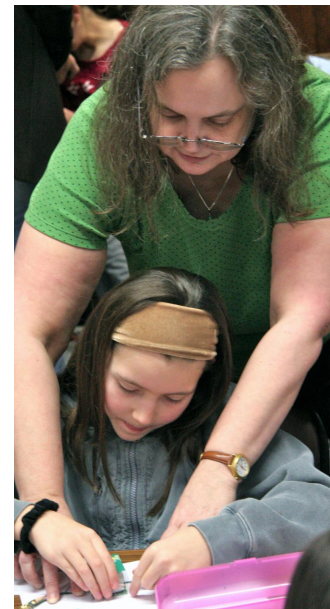
Celebrating Child-led Learning

Vol. 1, issue 2 January 2009

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

I send you all my warmest wishes for a coming year filled with happiness, good health, and the love of learning!

Welcome to the second issue of the HomeschoolNYC Newsletter. Thank you for the wonderful responses to my first issue. Please keep your comments and suggestions coming. It is gratifying to be connected to an ever-expanding community of others who are committed to joyful learning. As always, I hope that you find some useful information here, and perhaps some inspiration too.



[Laurie Block Spigel](#)

In This Issue:

The Path of the Teacher is the Path of the Open Heart

Science in Art

Poetry and Science

January Field Trip Ideas

Make Your Own Invention

Quote by Albert Einstein

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

"The Path of the Teacher is the Path of the Open Heart."

My friend Pam said these words to me one day. We were having a conversation, just sharing bits of our lives. Suddenly these words echoed within me as having a rare truth. Pam works in the healing arts, and it occurred to me that our two vocations, teaching and healing, require an open heart in order to succeed. It is easy for a patient to be misdiagnosed by a doctor who remains judgmental and uncaring, and it is just as easy for a child's education and spirit to be damaged by a judgmental and uncaring teacher. Teaching with an open heart, seeking always to connect with the student -- to the point of deeply caring about the child's spirit -- can produce amazing results.

One beautiful account of an educator with an open heart is [Teacher, by Sylvia Ashton-Warner](#), who taught young Maori children in New Zealand. These children, raised in ancient Maori traditions, were forced to enter the British school system at age five, with disastrous results. Attempts at teaching these children how to read using traditional British texts failed. Yet when Ms. Ashton-Warner created simple books using the children's own words, ideas and experiences, they read and wrote with remarkable success.

Ashton-Warner's outdoor teaching experiences are also inspiring, recounted in her chapter *The Golden Section*. This title refers to the golden mean and fractals, mathematics and science in nature, and to nature itself. We forget that mathematics is one of the sciences, and integral to them all rather than separate. We forget, too, that all sciences, including math, have their roots in nature. It makes perfect sense to teach our children math and science outdoors. Ms. Ashton-Warner had her young charges count the fronds of a fern or the petals of a flower. She understood that science and math are inseparable from the natural world, an environment where all children are curious. Ashton-Warner then advises us to "...put every subject into the creative vent...." Children love to draw ferns and flowers, dance to a bird's movements, sing and play music found in natural rhythms and sounds.

This video will help you to recognize [fractals in nature](#).

[Teacher](#) is an inspirational journey for the reader. We not only discover the truth of child-led learning through the eyes of a true educational pioneer, we also fall in love with Sylvia Ashton-Warner's deep commitment to these children. It is indeed her love and passion, her open heart, which became this teacher's true path.

Science in Art

Much to my delight, Kandinsky made the headlines in the New York Times Science section the day after I posted the last issue of this newsletter. [The Circular Logic of the Universe, by Natalie Angier](#), appeared in the December 8, 2009 issue. I have long been a fan of Ms. Angier's articles, and my art history students enjoyed this one too. Here the author is inspired by a great work of art to consider astronomy, microbiology, and the origins of life. She then goes beyond the artist's amazing use of geometry and his love of the circular form as she finds herself led to revelations in human anatomy, the water cycle, opposing forces in physics, and human and animal psychology. Ultimately, Ms. Angier calls the circle "part of a 'cosmic language' and a link to a grander more

spiritual plane." Bravo! This article is marvelous evidence that subjects are not separated but deeply linked. Art and science have always found inspiration in each other.

It is interesting to note that Paul Klee also loved science. Klee and Kandinsky both kept scientific encyclopedias in their studios. Some of Klee's paintings done at the Bauhaus (where Kandinsky also taught) included amoebic forms inspired by illustrations in journals of microbiology.



Student artwork inspired by Kandinsky and Klee is now in the [HomeschoolNYC photo gallery](#).

The Farm, by Christopher Lodin

Poetry and Science

It is easy to see how science inspires great art and poetry. Profound thinkers often ask the same questions: How did we come to exist? What is the source of life? What is the meaning of nature? What is the nature of humans? We marvel at natural geometric forms found in nature, at the endless variations in animal and plant life, and when we gaze upwards we wax poetically about the stars and the spheres in the heavens. Try reading or writing some science poetry this winter.

Science-inspired verse for kids:

[Science Verse, by John Scieszka and Lane Smith](#)

[Spectacular Science, by Lee Bennett Hopkins \(ed.\) and Virginia Halstead](#)

[Earthshake: Poems From the Ground Up, by Lisa Westberg Peters and Cathy Felstead](#)

[Footprints On the Roof: Poems About the Earth, by Marilyn Singer and Meilo So](#)

[River of Words: Young Poets and Artists on the Nature of Things, by Pamela Michael \(ed.\)](#)

January Field Trip Ideas

You'll find a bit of old world winter wonderland in midtown Manhattan tucked behind the former main branch of the New York Public Library, in Bryant Park, between 40th and 42nd Streets on Sixth Avenue. Ice skating on [Bryant Park Pond](#) is a delight, and admission is free (skate rental is \$12.00), open 8 am - 10 pm. The [Bryant Park Carousel](#) is \$2/ride, and plans to stay open through January, weather permitting, 11 am - 9 pm (10 pm on Fridays and Saturdays). That evening you can read aloud from the children's classic [Hans Brinker or The Silver Skates](#), by Mary Mapes Dodge.



Just behind Bryant Park, on 5th Avenue and 42nd St., you can tour [rare toy, map and book exhibits](#) in the New York Public Library's [Steven A. Schwarzman building](#). The real original Winnie-the-Pooh is on display through April 15th in the Children's Center, along with four of his friends: Eeyore, Piglet, Kanga and Tigger. These are the actual toys that Christopher Robin Milne (son of A. A. Milne, author of *Winnie the Pooh*) played with in his childhood, and which became the characters in so many stories. In the Gottesman exhibit hall you can trace the 400 year history of mapping New York City's shoreline, from the early efforts of Verazzano right up to modern computer-generated maps., on display through June. Teens and adults will enjoy the exhibit on Voltaire's satirical bestseller *Candide*. You won't just see rare editions of this famous book, but also materials from the Broadway musical and other art forms. "Candide at 250: Scandal and Success" continues through April 25th. Also on display in this amazing library is an actual Gutenberg Bible, marking the first use of the printing press in Europe in the mid-1400s. There is something here for everyone. Open Mon. and Thurs-Sat 11-6, Tues. and Wed. 11-7:30, admission is free.

In bad weather you can visit [Sony Wonder Technology Lab](#) at Madison Ave. and 56th St. Occupying several floors, this is an indoor wonderland of interactive electronic and digital devices, including virtual tools, animation and gaming. Learn science together here, with hands-on lessons in physics, robotics, and communication, including the history of media and technology. Admission is free (Tues. - Sat. 10-5, Sun 12-5) but you can still make a reservation by calling 212-833-8100, which is a good bet if you're planning to attend a special workshop or screening. During the week you can run into large classes of kids on school field trips, so be prepared to move ahead and then backtrack later.

After a busy day (full of phys. ed.) your child can mark the route you took on a subway or bus map (geography), measure the distance you traveled and determine the cost of the trip (math), and chronicle the events of the day in a scrapbook or drawing (writing and art).

Make Your Own Invention

Winter is the perfect time for an indoor science project. In my chapter on science in [Education Uncensored](#) I wrote about how to make your own invention. Here is a short summary.

First, your child can learn about the six [simple machines](#) and identify examples of them around the house. Then the student might spend a week or more making a list of problems and inconveniences they feel need solving. Necessity is the mother of invention, and you must know what you need before you can plan an invention.

My 11-year-old son's list included keeping his little brother out of his stuff, and getting an extra roll of toilet paper when he discovered too late that he had run out. In the end he rejected those needs for a moveable desktop, which would allow him to clear his desk and keep a semi-finished project intact. Whenever he wanted to write or do homework, he always had an art project or a Lego construction in the way. He designed a tray to fit his desk surface and a pulley system to raise it. This way he wouldn't have to dismantle or put away his half-finished projects. He sketched, measured, researched, constructed and experimented. After a few initial failed attempts, he added extra pulley lines so that his moveable desktop would rise evenly. He also added edges to the desktop, creating a portable tray that could be raised or lowered.

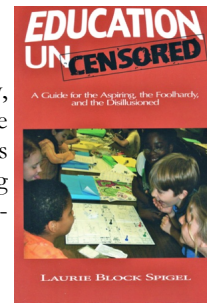
Every science project incorporates other subjects. Math is used in measuring, weighing, counting, and in purchasing materials. History is learned when you read about any discovery or about the life of a great scientist. Art is used in drawing plans, and in sketching or photographing the stages and final results of an experiment. Writing is used to log the experience and to create poems or fiction inspired by a newly discovered concept. Always remember that the most important part of this curriculum, or any other, is to have fun!

Quote by Albert Einstein

"It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge."

~ Albert Einstein, 1879-1955, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921

Laurie Spigel is a leading educator in the New York City homeschooling community, teaching popular group classes. 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

[Read an excerpt and buy the book here.](#)

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

Quick Links

[Newsletter Archives](#)

[More About Me](#)

[Ten Steps To Successful Homeschooling](#)

[What's ... in NYC](#)

[Education Uncensored](#)

Email Marketing by

