



# HomeschoolNYC Newsletter

## *Celebrating Child-led Learning*

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*Thank you for the positive feedback. Keep it coming! I welcome ideas for future issues as well as comments which represent differing opinions and views. While many of us may think differently, we all care about our children, and we all want them to thrive. It is rare when men and women follow their hearts and do the kind of work that they feel passionately about. When children are encouraged to grow and learn in this way, by following their hearts and passions, they find their direction much sooner than I used to believe was possible. Quoting Joseph Campbell, we are here to help them "follow their bliss" so they can become truly happy and productive, each in their own way.*



*Laurie Black Spiegel*

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## **Finding Focus in Homeschooling**

How do we crystallize our direction? How do we help our children find their focus? Sometimes it's easy, and the child seems to know. They persistently ask and remind us of what they need. But even then it can be hard to listen. And just when we think we have figured it out, and established a routine that works, our kids grow and change and we have to figure it out all over again. I found it helpful to ask

my children the big "what do you want to learn?" question more than once a year.

Spring is a time of transformation and renewal. It is the perfect time to sit down with your children and ask: How is it going? Are you bored? Are you happy with what you are learning, and how and where? How would you change it if you could? If you could learn anything, anything in the whole wide world, what would it be? (In the chapter in my book, [Education Uncensored](#), called "Child-Inspired Learning and the Three I's", I ask this question in a way that shows the choices are truly endless.) Give your kids time to think about it, and when they offer their answers write them down. Each idea leads to the next. As you consider what your child has said, you will be able to listen more deeply. This kind of respectful consideration will ultimately be returned by the child, and you will find that they listen more closely to you.

If your child says "I don't know," it is only because they have been told in the past that their ideas are not worthy. Curiosity is innate. We are all born with it. Usually a child's interests and enthusiasms are openly displayed. But sometimes those interests have been suppressed or subdued. Perhaps their teachers or parents were simply too busy, or perhaps the child actually heard someone say, "Oh, you can't do *that*." You can't become an actor or learn how to fly a plane or climb a mountain; it's too hard or too costly or it's simply not done. But each temptation creates a new place to start, a motivation that will lead to the next idea. Encourage your children even if you don't know how they will begin. This is an adventure you can take together, and the fun often lies in the discovery of the process.

## April Field Trip Ideas

The closest genuine mining experience to NYC is just over an hour's drive from midtown Manhattan. [The Franklin Museum](#) in Franklin, New Jersey, has a dazzling collection that includes fluorescent minerals seen under black light, Native American stone tools and artifacts, marine and wildlife fossils, a life-size mine replica and thousands of mineral specimens. Guided tours are offered hourly in season. There are three mine "dumps" nearby which provide a mining experience. Afterward you can have your minerals identified. Check out the list of [minerals that have been found here](#). The Franklin Museum also hosts a big gem and mineral fair in late April and late September, and other weekend field trips and events. The [Sterling Hill Mining Museum](#) also has a fantastic fluorescent mineral display, gold, silver and copper displays, and more, including an outdoor collecting site where visitors can collect six specimens. Additional experiences, such as a fossil sandbox and mine tours, are extra. Both museums are open seven days a week from April to November.

About three hours' drive from the city, in upstate New York halfway between Albany and Syracuse, you can visit Herkimer, New York. Mining Herkimer diamonds, which are clear, double-terminated quartz crystals, is hard work, but a worthwhile adventure for the entire family. Several mines exist in Herkimer, such as the [Ace of Diamonds](#) mine. There is even a [Homeschoolers Day at the Herkimer Diamond Mines](#).

For a local field trip a subway ride away, visit the amazing [gem and mineral collection](#) in the [American Museum of Natural History](#). There is a dazzling [new collection of diamonds](#) on display. There are also [teacher/student resources](#) you can check out on-line, such as [how to start a rock collection](#), and an [8th grader reading the rocks at Cold Spring Harbor](#).

Celebrate Passover with a visit to the [Rose Haggadah](#), on view through April 18th at the Stephen A. Schwarzman building in the New York Public Library at 42nd St. and Fifth Avenue. In three volumes, the Rose Haggadah brings together fifty years of Passover-themed artwork, with works by some of the most prominent American artists of the 20th century. Every year a different volume is opened at this time, accompanied by a video with images from all three volumes. Meanwhile, a fourth volume is in

progress.

Honor the decorative traditions of Easter with a visit to [The Ukrainian Museum](#), on E. 6th St. between 2nd and 3rd Avenues, to see the art of [Pysanka: the Ukrainian Easter Egg](#).

The month of April goes from bud to branches heavy with blossoms in the [Cherry Tree Esplanade](#) of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. On-line you can find their [cherry tree guide](#) and examine the stages of blooms. On the weekend of May 1-2, the [Sakura Matsuri](#) is their annual rite of spring, celebrating Japanese culture with over 60 events and performances for all ages.

Don't forget to record your experiences with: photographs, drawings, stories, maps, scrapbooks, memoirs, reviews, articles, or letters. Make keepsakes, send communications, submit informative articles to homeschool publications, and write and illustrate stories to share with your friends. Use field trips as a starting place to encourage further research and creative projects.

## Suggested Reading

[If You Find a Rock, by Peggy Christian](#), for ages 4-8.

A good introduction to the subject, this book introduces a unique way of classifying rocks. Perhaps readers will develop their own classifications.

[Julie the Rockhound, by Gail Langer Karwoski](#), for ages 4-8.

This book will inspire the young rockhound, with suggested activities included.

[Crystal Kids, by Marcia Singer](#), a coloring book.

Metaphysics, meditations, healing arts, and crystal fun for beginners of all ages.

[The Secret Life of a Snowflake: An Up-Close Look at the Art and Science of Snowflakes.](#)

by Kenneth Libbrecht. Stunning photos of snowflakes makes this is a picture book for the whole family, with an introduction to the science of snow appropriate for youngsters.

[The Worry Stone, by Marianna Dengler](#), for grade 3 and up.

A folktale in the spirit of the California Chumash Indians.

There are many wonderfully illustrated rock and mineral identification books which are good references and fun to take along when you go rock hunting.

This guide, while not comprehensive, is a good introduction for beginners:

[Peterson's First Guide to Rocks and Minerals](#), by Frederick H. Pough, edited by Roger Tory Peterson.

## Crystal Wand Workshop

At the request of my students, I created a crystal wand workshop last fall. We began with a focus on science. We looked at diagrams that explained how crystals work as energy conductors and are used in radios and wrist watches. Each student selected a clear quartz crystal and a branch for a wand. We also identified other materials available for this project, including tumbled stones (rose quartz, amethyst, agate), feathers, seashells, beads, ribbon, and small pyrite crystals, azurite nodules and other assorted minerals. We discussed where these items came from and looked at maps (geography). We also talked about the crystal wand in literature, folklore and fairy tales, viewing illustrations from different versions

of Cinderella (comparative literature). This was also an art activity and students each drew designs for their own personalized wands. While we worked, we listened to fairy music: Tchaikovsky's "Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy" (from *The Nutcracker Suite*), Mendelssohn's "March of the Fairies" (from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and *The Harp of Brandiswhiere*, by Sylvia Woods (a Celtic fairy tale in music). I had gathered sumac branches especially for this workshop, chosen because they have a soft core that is easily hollowed. Each student glued a clear quartz crystal inside the tip of their branch. Most students used copper wire (an excellent conductor of energy) to wrap their wands. One student chose natural hemp twine since she wanted no metal in her wand. Adornments were chosen thoughtfully, using colors and materials to represent the four elements or the four seasons or for personal reasons. Some students added writing to this experience by creating their own book of magic spells to use at home with their crystal wands, or by listening to the stories of their crystals and writing them down. There is magic hidden inside of every stone, no matter how small.



[Crystal wands made by students.](#)

## Make Your Own Crystals

Crystals always form in geometric shapes. We see them and use them every day, often without any awareness of their precision and beauty. Although winter is over, and marvelous snowflakes no longer drift down from the skies, you can still make crystal formations at home in your own kitchen. From the Exploratorium, a favorite science museum for kids in San Francisco, is a [recipe for making rock candy](#). At another site, learn how to make a [garden of salt crystals](#), or grow Epsom salt crystals, or even make a washing soda snowflake (scroll down the page for resources for crystal growing kits). Perhaps the prettiest crystal site is [SnowCrystals.com](#), where you can explore the science of snow.

Become a collector of crystals, rocks and minerals, and start searching the very ground you walk on. This is not just a foray into science, geology, geography, history, and art. All stones, from diamonds to clear quartz crystals to common pebbles, can feel ancient and magical. If we imagine they can speak, and we listen very carefully, the spirit of the stone might tell us its stories and we can write them down.

## Quote by Orison Swett Marden

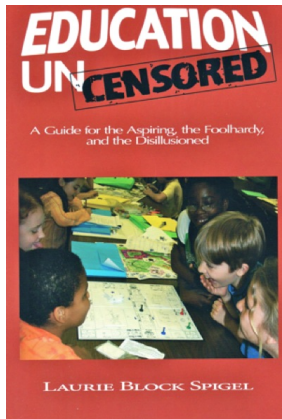
"The universe is one great kindergarten for man. Everything that exists here brought with it its own peculiar lesson. The mountain teaches stability and grandeur; the ocean immensity and change. Forests, lakes, and rivers, clouds and winds, stars and flowers, stupendous glaciers and crystal snowflakes, every form of animate or inanimate existence, leaves its impress upon the soul of man."

~ Orison Swett Marden, American author and philosopher, 1850-1924

## [AERO CONFERENCE](#)

Don't miss the [7th annual AERO Conference on Learner-Centered Alternatives](#), June 24-27, 2010, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Albany, NY. Keynote speakers include John Taylor Gatto and Herbert Kohl. Workshop presenters include Don "Four Arrows" Jacobs, Kirsten Olson, Chris Mercogliano, Laurie Spigel, and many others.

### ***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](http://HomeschoolNYC.com)

Price: \$12.95 plus shipping & handling

[Read an excerpt.](#)

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

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