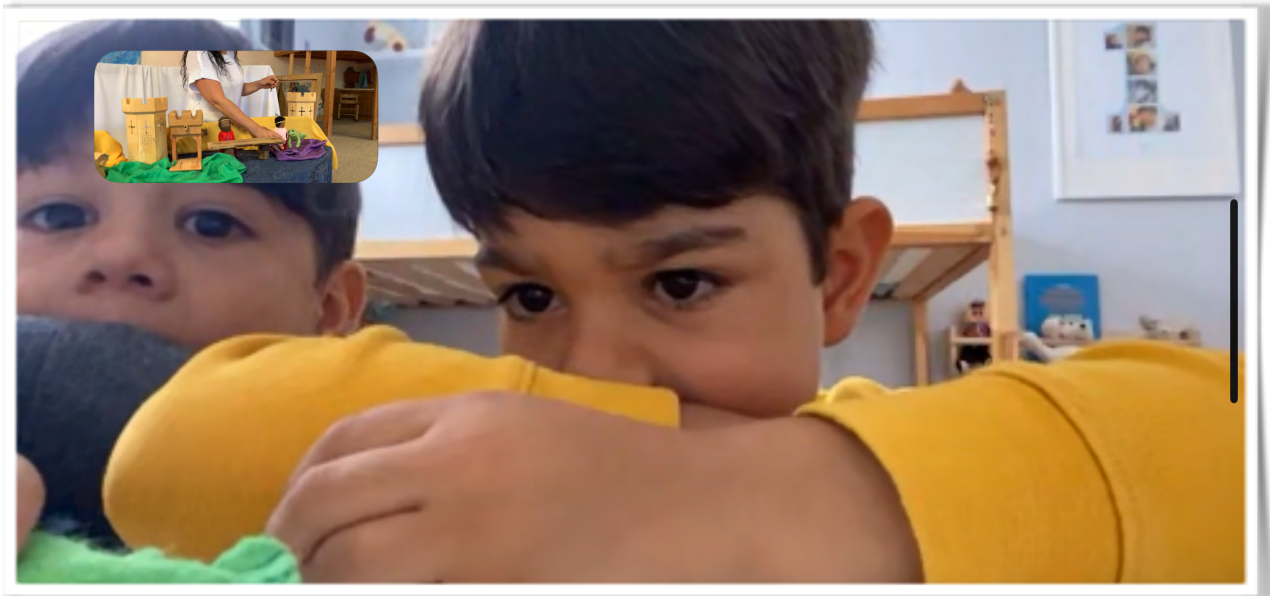


THE STAR

MAKING MEANING



This week, as I was planning my weekly calls to the children in my class, I thought that I might offer a new activity during our call. Why not do a scavenger hunt? It seemed like it would be a wonderful way to connect.

It would be filled with physical activity: (running around gathering things). It would

allow the child to personally

share: (find something that is your favorite color). It is an exercise in thinking: (find something small). It could engage all of the senses: (find something that smells good). Perfect!

Well, my dear friend on the phone with me was a good sport. They ran around with great enthusiasm gathering items from around the house and yard. There was plenty of thinking, and sharing. Their cat is soft. Apples taste delicious. Rose petals from the garden smell good. When all the many disparate items were arrayed on the table the child looked up and with great faith asked me. “Now Ms Barbara, what are we going to

Davi, from Miss Arieta’s kindergarten, and little brother Pietro, engaged in another Beyond the Classroom activity, virtual story time.

“Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them”

*-Antoine de Saint-Exupéry,
The Little Prince*

do with all these things?”

Of course this was her question, and rightly so. As a longtime Waldorf teacher, I know that one of the essentials for young children is that we model and offer real, meaningful, purposeful work. We roll the yarn so that it turns into a nice neat ball. We wash the windows with vinegar water so that the light can stream through. We knead the dough to make delicious bread for snack. We don't offer intellectual concepts, but instead allow children to learn from real life itself. Our activities are deeply satisfying because they conclude with a practical result. They are derived from life itself.

“The activities of children in kindergarten must be derived directly from Life itself rather than being ‘thought out’ by the intellectualized culture of adults.” Rudolf Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness* When something is purely about the process instead of the product, we allow the children to be immersed in the experience, and to create the meaning for themselves. Playing in mud or sand or play dough are examples of this. Children will create their own sense of purpose for the activity. Their play is never purposeless. The flaw that was so brilliantly exposed by my student was that the activity was built on a concept that had no meaning or purpose.

On the phone with my friend, with all of the many odd items spread out on the table, I was stumped. What could we do with these things? But my young student wasn't. She got busy trying to construct something of meaning from it all. “Maybe it could be a house for the cat! Or...”

-Miss Barbara



Jones, from Teacher Jenell's playgroup making meaning with sand.

HANDWORK IN THE KINDERGARTEN

This weeks craft is about spreading a little joy in our neighborhoods. Have you heard of kindness rocks? Several years ago there was a woman named Megan Murphy who decided to write some inspiring words on rocks and leave them at the beach for others to find. Her mission: One message at just the right moment can change someone's entire day, outlook, life.

Well, that turned into a whole movement called the The Kindness Rocks Project. I would like you to do this with your child but in a simple way. Just painted rocks. Once you have made several, take them with you on your next nature walk and let your child choose where they want to leave one. You can suggest places like at the bottom of a tree, in between a garden, on the side of a sidewalk, someones front door....

You will need:

- ★ Rocks, smooth ones are best. Look for them on your next nature walk
- ★ Any craft paint such as acrylic
- ★ Small paint brushes



Make sure the rocks are washed and dried. This in itself can be a wonderful activity for a child. Give them an old toothbrush and some dish soap and let them scrub the rocks clean. Once dry, have your child paint a solid base color all over their rock. White works best for this. Once this base is dry they can paint anything they want. The younger child will need more assistance with this part and a simply painted rock is just fine. The older child can paint hearts, a rainbow, a smile, an animal.

I remember doing this with my own children when they were little every time we went camping. We would paint a bunch of rocks before our trip. Once at

the campsite, we would spread them everywhere: on our hikes, around trees, even in the bathrooms. It brought so much joy to them as givers of this little gift imagining the look of surprise when one was found. I hope you find as much joy in this simple project as I did with my children.

Love,

Miss Arieta

THE GATHERING TABLE

We are so fortunate, being part of a Waldorf school, to learn what it really means and feels like to be part of a community. Gatherings are a big part of what we do. Many of our gatherings center around a holiday or festival. These times of celebration almost always include food. Lots of wonderful food! This is probably true for many of your special family events at home as well. The family table is a place where we gather. We share a meal and we make memories. It can also be a place to hash out differences, to share secrets, and even share big news. Many engagements or news of a new baby coming, are announced at the dinner table. So, get that unfolded laundry off the table. Put a vase of flowers in the center. Share a meal and make some memories together!

Warmly,

Miss Terri



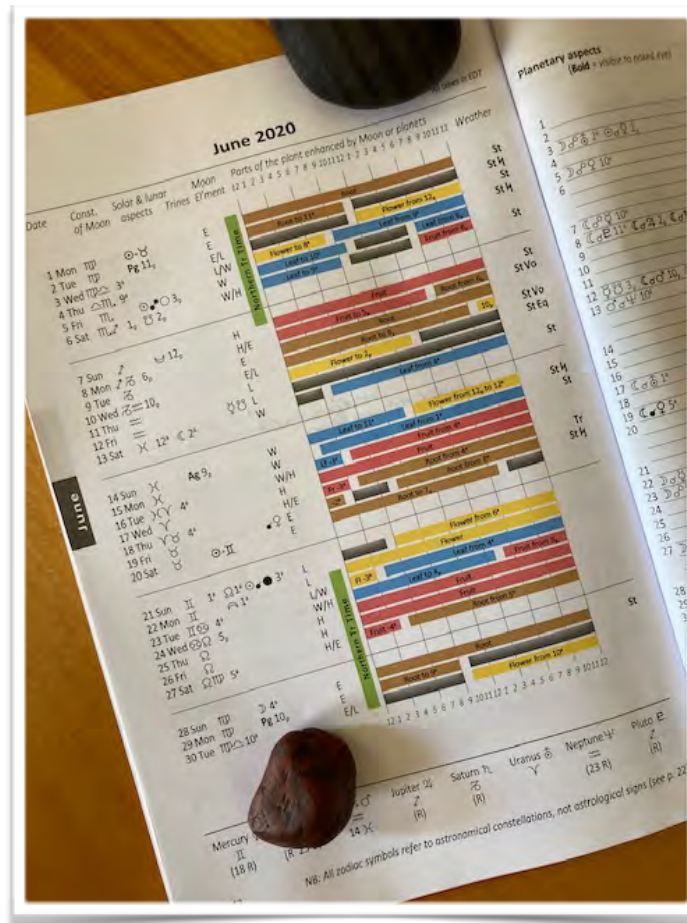
Kindergarten families gathering for a lantern walk meal.

THE EARTH'S GIFTS

While grocery or wine shopping you might have come across the terms Biodynamic or Demeter certified and wondered what they mean. Biodynamics is credited with being the first form of organic farming in modern times. In 1924 in response to questions by farmers who noticed

degraded soil conditions and a deterioration in the health and quality of crops and livestock resulting from the use of chemical fertilizers, Rudolf Steiner offered 8 lectures. These lectures formed the foundation on which Biodynamics has grown into a worldwide practice with the goal to restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony. It has been described as a form of agriculture focused on healing the planet that is holistic, ecological and ethical, integrating scientific understanding with a recognition of spirit in nature. Demeter is the largest certification organization for biodynamic agriculture. The standards for Demeter certification are extensive encompassing those for organic qualification plus additional rigorous requirements.

One aspect of Biodynamics is the utilization of a lunar and planetary calendar. Stella Natura and the Maria Thun Biodynamic Almanac are two highly regarded calendars. Following such a calendar for farming is a very old, perhaps ancient practice. The wisdom in these calendars have long fascinated me as they support the belief that everything in the universe is one ecosystem interrelated and interdependent. Incidentally, early childhood teachers have long noticed the correlation between the full moon and the often increased high energy and strong impulses of young children. We don't use the calendar to predict behavior just to bring an awareness. There are of course so many other influences and lenses to consider.



Biodynamic is the gold standard of farming that heals the planet through conscious agriculture.

*Apricot Lane Farm
Moorpark, CA*

A fun way to learn more about Biodynamic farming is to visit Apricot Lane Farm in Moorpark or by exploring their website (where you can sign up for tours). Alan York, a famous Biodynamic practitioner and international mentor, was instrumental in the foundational work to create this farm. The inspirational story of this farm and its owners are highlighted in the beautiful award winning documentary, The Biggest Little Farm. I highly recommend it.

June calendar from the North American Edition of the Maria Thun Biodynamic Almanac 2020.

As always please let me know if you have any questions.

~Ms Catherine

PURPOSEFUL WORK

As the days grow longer, I invite you to put together an outdoor or indoor working space. In issue five, I spoke about woodworking in the classroom and this time I would like to invite you to dig a little deeper and together we can create a space where woodworking can be a living place for “Will” work in the home for your child. I was reading a lovely article by Laura Donkel “Purposeful Work for the Young Child: Suzhou’s Shining Example”

in this article Laura describes a beautiful outdoor area, with a work bench and a wooden tool box filled with child sized tools: hammers, saws, rasps, and a basket of sand paper with different coarse; medium to fine. Nearby were baskets of collected branches, tree limbs, and logs. This got me to thinking, if you could create a space either outside or somewhere in your home that could be a working area.



Adam, Lux, Theo, and Ethan working purposefully together.

Together you and your child can go and collect thin and thick branches and small fallen logs that you could then take home to work on this new space. Here you will want to find an old desk or tabletop that can be used for putting together projects. Even a tree stump could work. It is helpful if we take the lead and then allow our child to observe and then follow. One helpful tool I would like to suggest is a miter box, it is a little box that you would attach to the table top with either a clamp or screw into place, then place the wood into the miter box and then line up your saw in the grooves, and then begin to saw back and forth. This is a safe way for the young child to practice sawing, as the saw is guided in the grooves. It also gives them the ability to do this work on their own, with just some supervision. Together you could first do some sawing and then be creative. Materials to gather, a basket of wooden pieces, branches, fallen logs or extra wood scrapes that may be lying around the house. You will want to make a small tool basket to keep by this area, a hammer, saw, rasp and sand paper. Maybe together you work on sawing a thick branch, taking turns until your child takes the lead and saws through. Allowing the young child to investigate the natural world around them helps expand their imaginative capacities.

As you know, young children learn through doing. By engaging their will in purposeful activity, children become increasing capable and confident in their ability to meet the challenges of the world.

Enjoy! - Miss Michaela

GAMES & MOVEMENT

If you haven't tired of the tales of Lazy J Ranch, please continue reading :) After lunch in the dining hall we would return to our cabins for "rest." Of course we never napped but instead sat on our bunks and ate the cookies our moms had sent in our care packages, listened to cassette tapes on the one Sony Walkman with speakers that someone smuggled from home and we also played string games. Cats Cradle was one of our favorites. I have included a link on below.



I have also included a great article on the therapeutic benefits of string figures written by A. Johnson Abrams, a surgeon, who not only discusses the therapeutic benefits of string games but provides an enlightening examination of their historical roots. Who would have known that there is a world wide authority on string games, maybe I should have become an anthropologist, how fascinating! Anyway, enjoy the read, and practice Cats Cradle with your children. If your's happens to be an upcoming first grader we will be taking up string games this fall.

<https://youtu.be/HTSxcN9lh5M>

-Warmly,

Teacher Jenell

TREATMENT NOTE

String Figures: Therapeutic Benefits

A JOHNSTON ABRAHAM FRCS

Key words: String figures, muscle memory, manual dexterity.

Biography: Mr Abraham trained in England and practised as a plastic surgeon in Canada for 28 years before his retirement. He is planning a further book with his daughter who has trained as a nurse, a physiotherapist and an occupational therapist, and works in a rehabilitation centre in Vancouver.

HOW does the sequence of movements in the game of cat's cradle become fixed in the memory? Cat's cradle is usually performed by two people. It is a circular type of game which ends when one of the performers fails to remember a movement. However, there are a large number of variations on the original theme; namely, a group of cat's cradles almost as easy to remember, which are performed by one person only, but sometimes need help from the teeth or toes.

These cat's cradles, given the name of *string figures** by anthropologists, have been recorded from peoples all over the world. The Eskimos (Inuit), for example, have some of the best string figures in the world. String figures have been recorded from the North and South American Indians, the islanders of the entire Pacific, many African tribes, the Australian Aborigines, and the Maori of New Zealand. They include tricks and disappearing loops. Examples of string figures include 'a net torn by polar bears', 'an Eskimo house collapsing and being repaired', 'a man climbing a palm tree', 'a looper caterpillar', 'men going to make a garden', 'a well which empties and fills again', 'a sea serpent', and an Eskimo figure which predicts the weather, or the sex of an unborn child.

All these figures require a degree of manual dexterity not called for by the game of cat's cradle, and they need practice to fix them in the memory. Many string figures have a number of different stages which were originally used to illustrate tribal legends or myths, and which were often accompanied by chants. Other string figures represent symmetrical patterns such as fishing nets and woven tent flaps.

The motions required are probably stored in rather primitive parts of the brain. An Eskimo performer, blind for as long as 20 years, was able to remember and set up string figures that he had learned as a child. The present author can successfully perform string figures in complete darkness or with his eyes shut, which suggests that a 'muscle memory' is involved. If adults are asked whether or not they have played cat's cradle as a child they will remember at least a few figures, and will take a delight in showing them, which suggests that they are probably stored rather deep in the unconscious.

String figures appeal to the kinaesthetic sense, the sense of movement, and to the love of symmetry, and once practised, are easy to remember and satisfying to recall. The

feeling of tension generated by the weaving of a loop of string is pleasurable, just as the tension in a kite string or fishing line is pleasurable. The same sort of pleasure is felt when playing with a rubber band or idly folding foil wrapping paper.

About three thousand string figures have been recorded around the world, and anthropologists guess that they might have originated as far back as the Late Stone Age. They were learned from the Chinese and Japanese and brought back to England by sailors engaged in the 18th- and 19th-century tea trade, and given by the sailors the name of 'cat's cradle' on a nautical analogy. The anchor was 'catted' when hauled up to the cat beam, a beam carved with the heads of cats (originally lions). The rope sling in which the anchor was suspended was the 'cat cradle', or 'cat's cradle'. A handsome cat beam can be seen on the beautifully restored Cutty Sark now docked at Greenwich.

Mrs Honor Maude, who with her anthropologist husband, Professor H C Maude, is a world-wide authority on string figures, has collected large numbers of string figures from the Pacific islanders. She is now retired and lives in Australia with other retired people. She has discovered that old people take a great delight in learning and performing new string figures, since routine exercises tend to be boring. They find string figures mentally stimulating and very valuable in retaining and improving finger dexterity. They find reassuring the ease with which string figures can be remembered, if they are at all concerned about failing memory. The figures are entertaining to watch (many of them are of humans and animals in motion), and the stories associated with them can be fascinating.

Not only old people and people with finger joints stiffened by arthritis can benefit from learning and performing string figures, but patients being rehabilitated after hand injuries and hand operations can benefit enormously.

A knowledge of string figures can add considerably to the armamentarium of physiotherapists and occupational therapists.



Mr Abraham demonstrates a string figure — the calabash net

*Mr Abraham's book *String Figures* has just been published. It contains a historical account, and instructions for making 40 figures. Published by Reference Publications, Inc, 218 Clair River Drive, Box 344, Algonac, Michigan 48001, its UK distributors are Proost and Brandt. Paperback version £4.95; ISBN 0 917256 23 9.