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What Does Meeting
Writing Standards Look
Like at Every Age?

Let Them Play Is Only
Half the Story: Part Two

Helping to Save the
World: Choosing a
Service Project

Bouyant Balloons
Activity

Book Pairings that Will
Get Your Teen Talking
about Big Ideas

Worldschooling
Planning and Leading
the Trip of a Lifetime:
Part Two

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What Does Meeting Writing Standards Look Like at Every Age?

Writing anxiety is a real thing. It's a real thing for adults and children alike, and I've found that many people are especially anxious that their children aren't writing like they "should" be for their age or grade.



First, I want to take a moment to say what I think most of us know in our heart of hearts, especially as homeschoolers: there is no "should" when it comes to learning well. What your learner is able to accomplish with the right support in an environment that allows them to put forth their best effort is the right accomplishment.

Still, it can be hard to figure out what "the right support" means when we don't have a standard upon which to make comparisons. For many subjects, that's easy enough to do. We can make a list of the facts learners should be able to recall or the concepts they should be able to explain and then check their performance against it. For writing, though, judging whether or not a learner is on track can be much harder (which is why so many people mistakenly depend on the quantifiable and thus easy-to-judge number of grammar errors, but that's a subject for another day).

In this article, I'm going to explore what "on target" writing might look like at different ages and stages. It's not about holding up writers and judging their work as acceptable so much as it is about deciding what kinds of assignments and feedback are appropriate and productive. Writing instruction, after all, takes place mostly in the feedback and suggestions for revision, and parents need to know what kind of revisions are reasonable if they're going to steer writers to an achievable finish line.

For many of these sections, I will be pulling from Common Core standards. I know that Common Core gets something of a negative reputation (and not just in the homeschooling community), but I am a firm believer that it is the application of Common Core (and its penchant for standardization of assignments and the creation of stilted "course in a box" curricula) that's the problem. Having meaningful, identifiable standards simply gives us a framework for creative, engaging, and purposeful assignments.

In my opinion, standards make us freer to experiment and get radical in how we actually learn the material. After all, if we know the destination, it doesn't matter how we get there. That gives us the chance to meander slowly through the forest stopping to smell every flower or to zipline through the treetops. We get to the same place at the end of the road, but we do it in a way that serves each learner's needs and interests.

Without further ado, here's what you need to know to guide your writer with purpose and confidence.

Kindergarten

At this stage, writing is mostly about recognizing that their ideas are worth sharing. The ability to express opinions and to put them on the page through a “combination of drawing, dictating, and writing” ([CCSA](#)) is crucial. At this stage, writers should also be able to demonstrate the basic narrative organization of a story. In other words, stories should start to have a discernible beginning, middle, and end—although we all know that our young learners are probably going to take some detours! Finally, learners should be able to add details (again, through drawing, dictating, or writing) when prompted with questions about their ideas.



Here are some activities that support these goals:

- Read books together and ask writers to draw a picture of their favorite part.
- Ask a learner to draw/write a story, and then offer to write captions for pictures when they finish.
- Ask questions about stories and drawings to get writers to add more detail.

Grades 1-2

[Grade 1 standards](#) focus heavily on some foundational skills that writers will pull on throughout their lives. Specifically, these standards focus on organization, purpose, and audience. That may sound heavy for a first grader, but if you think about it, humans are storytelling animals. We start constructing narratives before we are even physically able to speak them aloud.

At this stage, writers should get practice in narrowing topics, connecting chronological ideas together using words that indicate time (then, next, later, earlier), recall information from other sources (experiences or books), and provide a sense of closure to writing (an intentional conclusion).

By grade 2, writers should be building on existing structural skills to improve their organization. Linking words (and, because, since, when) should be a heavy focus. Focusing on these conjunctions lets writers see how ideas go together and how they demonstrate those connections to readers.

Work should be getting more detailed than it was before. Details should provide “descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings, [and] use of temporal words to signal event order” ([CCSA](#)).

Writing at this stage should still come with heavy support from adults. In fact, I’m a firm believer in scribing for reluctant writers who may struggle with the fine motor demands or lack the patience to get all of their ideas from their head to the page. The physical act of writing is an important skill, but focusing on the importance of ideas builds confidence and better gives the opportunity to practice strengthening content and narrative organization.

Here are some ways to support these goals:

- When reading, focus on how writers use transition words to make connections between ideas.
- Practice writing the same idea with different descriptions and discuss how it changes the way a reader would understand it.

Grades 3-4

Many people see Grade 3 as a kind of academic shift. Since reading and writing are closely connected, the advance in reading skills that typically happens around this age leads to an advance in [writing expectations](#) as well.

Writers in these grades are expected to be able to state an opinion, support it with reasons, and link those reasons to the statement with appropriate connecting words (because, therefore, for example).



Writers at this level should also be showing the ability to group similar ideas together to form paragraphs. These do not have to be long and complex. The ability to put 2-3 short sentences together for a paragraph is sufficient.

For narrative writing, writers should be able to use dialogue and descriptions of thoughts, feelings, and actions of characters to bring the piece to life in a logically organized way. By the end of this stage, writers should also be considering audience more fully and providing context and explanation to set the stage for their work.

One important skill that should be introduced in this stage if it hasn't been practiced before is the extended time frame for writing. Writers should learn that projects often aren't complete in a single sitting or even a single day. They should learn to draft and then go back and revise, adding details and rearranging sentences.

A paper that's about a page long with 2-3 paragraphs of short sentences is reasonable.

Here are some ways to support these skills:

- When reading, talk about how the writer indicates dialogue and gives descriptions of things that can't be easily seen (like thoughts or actions).
- Assign short writing assignments based off of informational reading on topics interesting to the writer.
- Use writing short summaries as a way to capture thoughts in other subjects and disciplines.

Grades 5-6

To set the best long-term foundation for writing, this stage should heavily focus on revision strategies. Writers should learn that writing takes place in stages and that drafts often start out rough and get more polished through revisions, feedback, and editing.

Research projects become especially important at these stages, and learners are expected

to “use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic” ([CCSA](#)) and “answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate” ([CCSA](#)).



Paragraphs should be getting longer and more complex. They will often include five to seven sentences because there are more details to include on each topic. Sentences, too, should be getting more complex. They will often employ complex combination strategies such as coordinating and subordinating conjunctions.

Papers consisting of 5-6 paragraphs spanning 1-2 pages are reasonable. Reliance on organizational training strategies like the five-paragraph essay can help writers master these skills.

Here are some ways to support these skills:

- Work on combining sentences using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions.
- Practice the five-paragraph essay format (with the understanding that it is only a tool and not a rule).
- Set up multiple writing sessions for a single assignment and guide writers through different steps of the writing process over time.

Grades 7-8

Some of the main features of the standards at this level are that they add a focus on style that hasn't been featured in previous standards. For example, both the [grade 7](#) and [grade 8](#) standards say that writers should “establish and maintain a formal style” and “use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary.”



At this point, support for learners should include a draft specific to the polishing of style. Writers should learn to read their work aloud and listen for clunky sentences while eliminating slang and informal language when writing for an academic audience.

They should also be practicing research skills in both informational and literary texts to learn how to draw specific evidence from their research and reference it in their own writing. Introduction to the basics of formal citation formats (such as including the author's last name in an in-text citation) is a good practice.

Papers of 3-4 pages consisting of 6-8 paragraphs are reasonable. Topics that ask writers to state an opinion and defend it as well as topics that ask them to summarize longer works they've read are meaningful and appropriate.

Here are some ways to support these goals:

- Focus on learning how to pull quotes from sources and put them in the paper.
- Practice explaining quotes.
- Practice reading drafts of work aloud and listening for places to improve style.

Grades 9-10

One big difference in the standards here is that writers are expected to not only defend their own claims in opinionated writing but to also demonstrate consideration of counterclaims. They are also expected to write in a way that “anticipates the audience’s knowledge level and concerns,” which means they will need a sophisticated understanding of who would be reading their work and why ([CCSA](#)).

Writers are also expected to be able to switch their writing style depending on the discipline in which they are writing. For example, writing up a science observation should be more fact-based and straightforward while writing a narrative about their own life would be much more embellished with lots of sensory details.

Organizational training tools like the five-paragraph essay will likely be insufficient to create the papers complex enough to do the kind of work required of questions asked at this level. Instead, writers should be exploring other organizational strategies like compare-contrast, spatial order, and chronological order. Support for this learning can heavily feature outlining and reverse outlining.



Papers of 5-6 pages consisting of 8-10 paragraphs are reasonable. Topics will likely ask writers to draw comparisons between different sources of information and include references to outside sources including direct quotations, summaries, and paraphrases.

Writers should have an established writing process by this stage that consists of drafting, revising, getting feedback, and editing. They should also be starting to see how their writing process can be adapted for assignments of different lengths and difficulties. They should be able to plan out multiple days for the different steps of writing including research, drafting, revision, and editing.

Here are some ways to support these goals:

- Assign different types of essays including informative, narrative, and argumentative prompts.
- Have writers work on multiple drafts of a paper over time.
- Use outlining and reverse outlining for organizational help.

Grades 11-12

The final years of high school basically ask writers to take the skills they have built up this point even further. The standards state that they should be able to conduct “more sustained researched projects” and write to “solve a problem” ([CCSA](#)). This is a great time to include writing in long-term project-based learning opportunities where writers work with the same topics for extended periods of time and in interdisciplinary ways.

As a research skill, writers should be able to get “relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively” and “assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience.” In other words, their research skills should be sophisticated enough to tell what sources are trustworthy and then which of those trustworthy sources are useful.

Papers of 8-10 pages in length consisting of 12-15 paragraphs are reasonable, but not every paper has to be that long to adequately practice many of the skills needed for this kind of advanced thinking and researching. Often, writers will benefit from doing shorter projects that build up to a longer project, perhaps by writing one paper that explores one perspective, another that explores a second perspective, and a final paper that combines the two.

Here are some ways to support these goals:

- Assign some complex, long-term writing projects that require independent research.
- Teach media literacy strategies for determining the quality of a source.
- Provide writing assignments with a real audience (letters to the editor, essays to political representatives, scholarship application essays, etc.).

Some Final Thoughts

Some learners are going to be struggling to meet these goals. Writing is a complex act that requires multiple different skills to come together simultaneously. Most of us don't have equilateral strengths in all of them, and struggling in one can become a barrier to overall writing progress.

It's always a good idea to let writers engage as deeply as possible with a topic—even if that means accepting some superficial flaws in style and grammar at a level where



they “should” be writing in a more advanced way. Helping writers to understand that their ideas matter and are worthwhile is more important than making sure they write it perfectly. The confidence in what we have to say is much harder to learn later.

Likewise, some writers are going to be advanced and fly through these standards early on. I believe it’s important to offer writing challenge. Too often, advanced writers get used to performing formulaic essay responses and stop pushing themselves to learn complex organizational and argumentative strategies. Finding ways to make writing assignments stretch their skills (by adding multimedia components, asking them to take on different perspectives and argue multiple sides, or otherwise making the prompt more complex) is crucial.

Writing is a lifelong skill, and everyone can improve their writing through practice and feedback. It’s never too late to build skills, so no matter where a writer is on the list of “shoulds,” the best time to start working toward a stronger writing foundation is right now.



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A promotional graphic for Dayla Learning. It features a close-up of a hand holding a yellow pencil, writing on a piece of lined paper. The paper has some pencil shavings and a small smudge. The background is dark, and the spiral binding of a notebook is visible on the right side. The text is overlaid on the image.

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BEFORE THEY CAN
LEARN TO CLEAN IT UP.

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"Let Them Play" Is Only Half The Story (Part 2)



**By Samantha Matalone Cook
MAT**

In part one of [“Let Them Play is Only Half the Story,”](#) I discussed how years of research have shown us that the optimal learning environments are ones in which there is a balance between guided and self-directed learning, and also the role adults play in the education and socialization of younger children. Part one of this examination of play showed that when we ask “Is play enough?” the question itself is misleading because it often doesn’t acknowledge that the ideas and actions of play are complex. While the need to play is innate, much play is also guided by community tradition or interest. This combination of mentorship and skill-building is what lays the foundation for cognitive, emotional, and social growth and builds more advanced knowledge and skills.

Just as important as understanding the developmental and educational complexities of play, is knowing how to participate in play without taking away the creativity, autonomy, and unexpected outcomes that play gifts to children. There are many ways to foster learning through play. Creating an environment of academic integrity that is fun and engaging should be the goal of every home and every classroom.

Below, I’m going to dive into some of my favorite ways to playfully and strategically cultivate the acquisition and retention of knowledge and skills. All of them relate to each other and they can all be used alone or in combination. All of them can be initiated and led by the educator or the student. All of them can be used with and modified for multiple ages, special needs, and in congruence with any educational philosophy. Every activity listed below uses play as a catalyst for individualized learning and progress.

Information Treasure Hunts

One of the most essential skills we can give our children is conducting solid research. The ability to find information, determine the credibility of resources, and organize knowledge according to source, intention, and value is a lifelong advantage. Information treasure hunts are perfect for building this skill in young learners.

To start, you or your learner will be choosing a topic, image, object, or fact that they will be researching. The older the learner, the more challenging you can make these, including choosing topics that need specific key words to find or limited places you can find information. You can use libraries, museums, historical societies, science centers, the Internet, or field trips as resources for research, or even as the location for your information treasure hunt. Have your learners keep notes of the resources they find and the key words that were helpful. You can also partner with your learner on information treasure hunts if they are emergent readers and writers.



Some kids love information treasure hunts that have a time limit, finding as much as they can within 30 minutes as an example. Assigning a certain amount of time can also be used as a great strategy to get apprehensive or disinterested kids involved because they tend to focus more on the race-like time limit at first, rather than being overwhelmed by the idea of research. This is also a great activity to do with multiple ages, where they can help each other, or in groups, where students can be split by interest and share diverse research with the whole group.

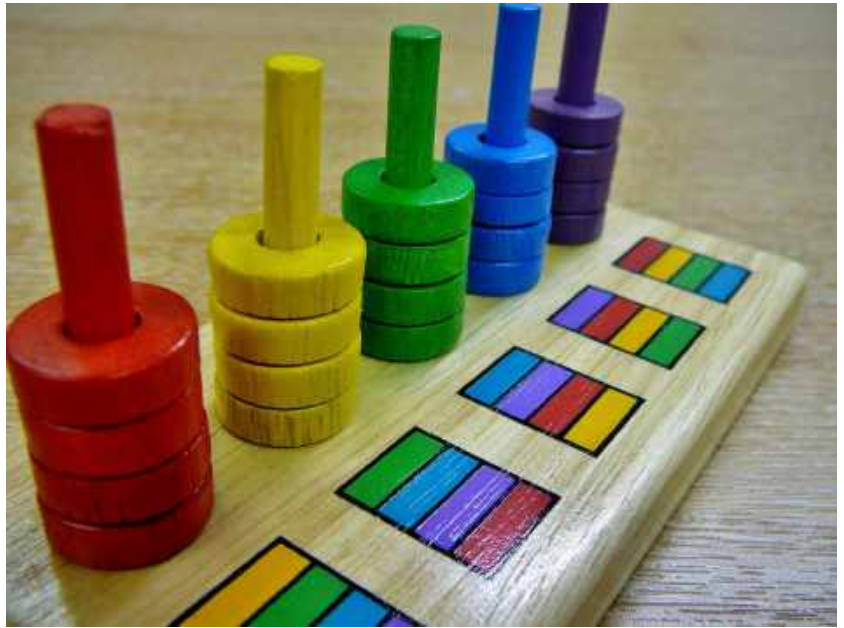
This activity supports knowing how to learn through playing with resources focused on the topics that interest them, and can be expanded in deciding what to do with that information. Learners could, for example, use information treasure hunts to start a collection, create a story, design a game, or schedule bundle field trips. They could also use information treasure hunts to vet a topic they are intrigued by, using this activity to decide if they would like to dive deeper.

The point of information treasure hunts is to build research skills and establish the understanding that there is no knowledge or skill your learner cannot access. They are open-ended and meaningful, often leading to deeper learning through projects or unit studies.

Sequencing and Finding Patterns

Building relationships between and within concepts is another important academic skill, relevant to every subject, and begins in early childhood. Building play around sequencing and finding patterns lays a solid foundation for understanding more advanced concepts in every subject down the line, but their importance in early childhood should not be dismissed. Young children are very interested in organizing and categorizing objects and ideas. Sequencing and finding patterns satisfy this developmental need, and these same activities help older children think both more logically and more abstractly about the patterns and sequences of larger concepts. Physically sorting or patterning objects is also terrific for the refining of small and large motor skills.

Sequence and patterns can be found anywhere, like in nature, stories, video games, art, and math. Activities that encourage the notice, prediction, and demonstration of sequence or patterns are easily set up and facilitated. Some successful ideas include sorting activities, mandalas, nature art (check out Andy Goldsworthy), jewelry making, knitting, observations in city design, examining specific art history movements, composing music, and coding.



There are many ways to document sequences and patterns, including drawing, making lists, creating timelines, and taking photographs. You could also hold events like a nature art day, at which kids make mandalas and other natural art pieces, or hold a yard sale, where children sort and organize the items.

Patterns and sequences can be found everywhere. Because of the importance patterns and sequences have in every subject, early exposure and practice with them can be valuable towards later achievement in addition to being fun and engaging.

Collections

Kids love to build collections and it is never too early to start. Collections can be based on a theme or a specific topic, actual artifacts or information, and can be collected physically or virtually. You can use a platform like Trello or Pinterest to collect virtual objects and information. I suggest that even if you have a substantial virtual collection,

you try to have some sort of physical collection as well if appropriate. Learners benefit from the sensory experience of handling objects.

Collections can be as simple or complex as you or your learner want them to be. You could collect rocks, go to a museum and collect all the paintings with dogs in them, or you could collect ideas for how to solve a problem or challenge. You can document your collection by making a list, sketching, taking pictures, getting postcards from the museum shops, creating a physical collection of objects, or digitally cataloguing your collection. You can bring out the inner curator in your learners by having them write informational labels for each item in their collection, and by creating a portfolio or guide for their complete collection.

Collections are terrific for seeing connections and relationships between ideas or objects, and may also contain some patterns and sequencing the student did not expect. This activity can be used in combination with many other activities and is a terrific way to organize knowledge and interests into a tangible, interest-driven exploration of subjects.

Making

Making is a hot topic these days, fueled by the unending, intense educational focus on STEM and the continued growth of the Maker Movement. Making is inherent to who we are. Humans have always been Makers, driven by the instinctual desire to innovate and create. Making fulfills a kinesthetic need, building both fine and gross motor skills, and fulfills our innate curiosity through experimentation and invention. It also promotes



sustainability by re-using or re-imagining materials. For young children, Making supports the growing control they have over their bodies and the active imagination younger learners have by turning their ideas into tangible objects. As children get older, Making satisfies the need to understand and test what they can concretely do with their knowledge and skills. Making changes the way kids think about innovation and about what they are capable of.

One of the best ways to support Making for your children is to create a space at home that is dedicated to Making. You don't need a large space or expensive tools to do it. It could be as simple as a table and a tub of supplies. How you start matters less than

actually doing it. Collect loose parts and raw materials, a few glue guns and some tape. Find a few simple projects online or in a book about engineering or tinkering with kids. You can consider making larger, more expensive purchases as you observe what your children are drawn to and as they gain more knowledge and skill in this area. Open Making can and usually does lead to more specific projects. For example, experimenting with motors and random recycled parts can inspire kids interested in robotics to [make brush bots](#) or hold a Hebocon (a “best worst robots” competition that started in Japan) which may then result in more complex robotics, including participating in FIRST LEGO League or Open-ROV challenges.

The wonderful thing about Making is that the design thinking process can be done in any subject or with multiple subjects in very personal, self-motivated projects. Think about the topic you want to teach, and how you can create a kinesthetic moment that immerse the learner in the essence of that topic. There is a project for any concept, invention, or passion. Alternatively, start with a project and branch out from there. If your learner wants to make a catapult, you could start with the design and build and then explore all the related subjects, such as history, engineering, architecture, geography, physics, material science, and sociology.

Making is an essential part of playing and learning, especially for children who are more kinesthetic or visual learners, and for those with asynchronistic development. While it may feel overwhelming to those who do not have experience, if you start small and follow the passions of your learners, Making can be a part of any educational journey. As your learners grow in their interests and abilities, you can incorporate outside mentors who are experts in more complex technologies and techniques, adding incredible breadth and experience to your child’s learning.

Bundle Field Trips

Field trips are a terrific way to engage all the senses and experience subjects first-hand, but bundle field trips can take it to the next level. Bundle field trips are an intense collection of experiences based on a specific subject or theme. By taking many field trips within a short time frame, learners deep dive into a subject, becoming experts in a short amount of time based on real, tangible interactions.



Bundle field trips can be physical, virtual, or a combination. Start by making a list of every possible location nearby that connects to your topic of choice. Next, list the

specific knowledge or skills that each location offers and how you will document these experiences. You can use an app like Google Maps to plan out the most efficient route to take to visit all the locations on your list, or visit them according to region over a few days or weeks. If you are willing and able to travel, you could use a road trip or a vacation as the catalyst to a more expansive bundle field trip experience. Finally, make sure to have a plan on how you will use your bundle field trip adventure within the larger scope of your studies.

The advantage of bundle field trips is that it is experiential and hooks learners through their senses. An intense set of encounters with subjects not only satisfies their interests but naturally teaches them how to organize their thoughts, build their collections, and produce work that has meaning and impact.

Storytelling

Humans are born storytellers. Hearing stories, reading stories, and watching stories is how we learn and make sense of our world. Everyone has a story inside them, and examining how others have told theirs gives children the courage and tools to tell their own.

Through exploring the world of storytelling, you can connect kids to any interest and any topic. Take the time to examine the meaning of words and how the rhythm of writing can make a huge difference in how the story is told. Listen to how stories are told through oral storytelling and music. Explore visual storytelling through illustration, art, dance, puppetry, plays, and movies. Look at combinations of mediums in storytelling, where artists and writers use multiple devices to tell their story. Combine storytelling with Making to [make paper](#) and [ink](#), create illuminated manuscripts, [bind books](#), build [musical instruments](#) to compose music for a story, draw graphic novels, choreograph a ballet, write a Dungeons & Dragons campaign, or make puppets and a stage. Find many and diverse ways for your learner to tell stories of their own.

Storytelling will come naturally to most kids and is already incorporated into a significant amount of their play. Building knowledge and skills around storytelling satisfies the developmental need in learners to organize thoughts, apply what they know while gaining new abilities, acknowledge their own experiences, collaborate with others, express their own ideas and emotions, and produce something of value.



Game Design

Games are learning through strategic play, and can be a valuable tool. By looking at the way games are designed, you can extend learning to cover many different subjects. While board games and video games are usually the first to come to mind, don't neglect to examine other types of games your child may be interested in such as sports, playground games, traditional folk games, card games, jump rope or hand-clapping games, LARP (Live Action Role Play), and RPG (Role Playing Games).



Activities can easily be built around game design, from building a custom board game, to designing a Dungeons & Dragons campaign, to learning to code and creating a video game, to making up a whole new sport (Quidditch is a great example!). Learners could build a game around a specific event (look at Oregon Trail!) or based on a book they love. You could also use game design to look at other subjects. I've personally used the video game Assassin's Creed as the hook to study history, architecture, cosplay, Making, parkour, and ethics. In fact, the mapping done for that game may be used to help rebuild the ceiling of Notre Dame, which was a fantastic example of how games can have larger impact. While Assassin's Creed is a game best suited for older learners, there are many other games that would serve this purpose. For example, Minecraft is a wonderfully flexible video game that could be used to explore many different subjects, from resource management to pixels, the board game Wildcraft could be explored for its focus on herbalism and ecology, and Never Alone is a gorgeous video game created in partnership with Native Alaskan storytellers and elders to express the experience of the Inupiat people and share their traditional lore.

Games are one of the best ways to facilitate learning through play because they are so engaging and driven by the interest and enthusiasm of the learner. While games teach many valuable skills, such as logic and reason, strategy, storytelling, teamwork, creativity, and resilience, they can also be used as a catalyst to other subjects. You can combine game design with many of the other activities mentioned in this article to create a fun and personal experience in learning.

Nature Play with Purpose

Many families understand and nurture the importance of developing a relationship with the natural world. The sensory experience of being outside is important to our development as humans and to our emotional well-being. Our connection to nature, however, is not always immediate nor meaningful. As I have said many times, you have to teach kids to love the earth before you can ask them to care about it. For some children, this is easily done. Other children are not as enthusiastic about the outdoors. In either case, the key is to offer experiences in nature that meet the needs and interests of the learner.



Whether or not your child enjoys being in nature, there are purposeful activities you can do to add dimension to how they see the outdoor world. Geocaching and games like Pokémon Go can be a catalyst for the digital-minded learners. For kids who like to build and are interested in engineering, building bridges, dams, shelters, or sandcastles add value to their outdoor experience. Artists may enjoy sketching or plein air painting, or creating nature art (see Andy Goldsworthy) or mandalas. Many kids may enjoy building collections through recording observations or identifying flora and fauna. They may also enjoy collecting specimens for their collections, if it is allowed in the area you are exploring. Children can also dive into cartography, learning the knowledge and skills necessary to make all kinds of maps, from relief to topographical to ecological. Learners could also combine nature play with game design and share their results with others, ensuring more connections between kids and the outdoors.

By playing in nature with intention, children still receive the sensory benefits of being outdoors while focusing on the purpose of their exploration. This can add a new facet to their relationship with nature, or even be the bridge between a learner and the natural world. Just remember to leave the area as close to or better than how you found it.

These are just a few of the ways in which you can use the natural proclivity children have for play as a tool for more expansive, deeper learning. The combination of play with mentorship and skill-building supports children in their emotional, social, and cognitive development, in their relationship with others, in their partnership with you as their teacher, and sets the stage for life-long learning.



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A MESSAGE FROM SEAHOMESCHOOLERS



Helping to Save the World: Choosing a Service Project

Blair Lee, MS

I think I came out of the womb as a save the world type. I was known early on as the family idealist. My mother would tell the story of me at 2 years of age out in the driveway on a rainy day picking worms off the pavement to put back in the grass, something I still do today. At the age of 11, I volunteered for the first time, canvassing door to door for George McGovern's



presidential campaign. I have volunteered for most of my 44 years since then, working on service projects ranging from those focused on helping people, political issues and candidates, education, and helping animals and the environment. Based on my passion for volunteering, it was a given that service projects were going to be a part of our homeschool journey.

You don't have to have been volunteering as long as I have to make service projects a part of homeschooling at your house. All you need is a desire to make a difference, a willingness to help out through volunteering, and time. Based on my experiences, I wrote a set of guidelines to help you get started incorporating service projects in your child's eclectic, academic education.

1. Be true to your family, your child, and you.

- If you do not want to volunteer on a project under certain situations be clear about it before committing. We are secular, academic homeschoolers, and we consider the service projects to be part of our homeschool. Before we volunteer, I contact the organization and ask if they allow proselytizing. We only participate in those that do not. This is not to say that prayer does not take place at some. There will be other volunteers and group leaders who regularly pray. My husband has volunteered for Habitat for Humanity on a project near Pueblo, Mexico. The group leader on the project was a pastor and prayed with the group daily.

- Dietary restrictions or health issues: Do any of you have nut allergies or gluten intolerance? Are you vegetarian or vegan? Does someone in your family have asthma? All of these should be addressed early. Sometimes it is not convenient for you to bring your own food or to get any when there. I am vegan, but will eat vegetarian when on a project. If the organization is responsible for our meals, and they cannot accommodate a vegetarian eater I will not participate in that project.
- How much of the money donated goes to the actual service? This is something we address before deciding on a project. The answer doesn't directly affect what you are doing, but it does tell you something about the dedication of the organization to service. Because we only volunteer for groups who give most of their profits to their cause, when housing and meals are included, they are not deluxe. This is important to us. For example, with the extreme poverty we observed on the Pine Ridge Reservation, I would have been offended if when I volunteered for Remember the accommodations showed much money spent on the volunteers' food and lodging. What they provided was healthy, basic, and exactly right.



- There is no right or wrong cause as long as you and your family find meaning from it. Our volunteering with Sean has focused on people, politics, and animal rescue. These are not the only causes we are each passionate about, but they are the primary spheres where our family passions about saving the world intersect. Just make sure it is a cause all participating family members think is worthy, so that all participate at a high level.

2. Participate with your children. Your volunteering might even start with your children helping you. If this is the case, you will want to volunteer on projects where they can help.

- My child took it for granted he would one day volunteer. Long before I had him and for the first two years after he was born, I volunteered for a San Diego based organization called Project Wildlife that rescues orphaned and injured native wildlife. I was on the opossum team and would take him with me when I rescued opossums.

- When he was three I read at the local library for their pre-school reading program. Sean helped me select books and practice reading stories using different voices.
- These days an essential criterion when choosing projects is how old volunteers can be. For example, we recently volunteered at Re-member on the Pine Ridge Reservation because they would let someone Sean's age participate. Habitat for Humanity has an older age requirement so Sean cannot volunteer with them. Because of that, my husband volunteers for Habitat by himself.

3. Another aspect that affects the choice of project is the reason your family is volunteering.

- It is common for college-bound high school students to participate in one or more service projects. For those students, a service project that ties in with their academics may make more sense. A more long-term commitment might make more sense as well. This gives the student the opportunity to shine on a long-term basis, which can result in a nice letter of recommendation to include with their transcript. For students whose reason for volunteering is to flesh out their college transcript, you will want to be strategic about your choice of project.
- Is your child a save the world type? If so, you should let your student follow their muse. Even if it is not a cause you would choose, you should still support it. Even within a close family, there will be differences in what brings meaning to each person's life. The elements of what brings meaning will change over time too. Save the world types need support, encouragement, and validation. Even though my parents did not support the same presidential candidate as I did, they supported me supporting him. They drove me where I needed to go and listened with interest when I talked about what I had done while volunteering. They were also there for me through the disappointment of his loss.
- Is there something you want your child to learn about the world? When we volunteered with Cross Cultural Solutions in Delhi, India and Re-member at Pine Ridge, South Dakota my husband and I chose those for a purpose. We want our son to understand in a meaningful way that there is poverty in the world and that small acts of kindness matter and can help. We also want Sean to understand there are people in this world who do not have access to the same opportunities he and his peers do because of their life circumstances. We wanted him to begin, in a meaningful way, applying the adage



“Be the change you want in the world.”

4. Time and travel are two important parameters to think about before deciding on a project.

- Local projects offer the benefit of being close to home and therefore easy to get to and schedule for. Long-term, local projects make a lot of sense if your child might use their service as a part of their transcript when they apply to college or on a job application.
- Do not discount short-term projects if the time isn't available to do a long-term one. For example, volunteering on Thanksgiving feeding people at a homeless shelter is rewarding and meaningful. It also helps your child understand they can make a difference in their community.

Volunteering can help your child find meaning in their life and feel connected to others and the world.

- Projects that are not local will usually happen for a condensed period of time. The benefit of these types of projects is that they are usually more immersive programs. The two we participated in had an educational component with guest speakers which really enhanced the experience. Some local projects have an educational component too, but it is not the same as having four or five nights in a row of guest speakers all discussing issues relevant to your volunteer work from different perspectives.
- If you are volunteering out of the country, you will need to make sure you have taken care of visa requirements if they have them. You should also contact a health provider to make sure you have all needed vaccinations.
- In the country where you are a resident you will need to figure out your transportation for getting to the project.
- In or out of the country make sure your tetanus vaccination is up-to-date.



5. Don't let yourself get discouraged.

- When embarking on a service project, you will be filled with the promise of it. The focus is usually on how you can and will make a difference. It feels like you are about to do something big. The reality of the situation is usually smaller, and it can feel like there is nothing you can do to make a difference. This is especially true for children who volunteer. I spent time while at Re-member discussing this with one of the adults, Geordie Campbell, who had brought a large group of teens to volunteer.

I was feeling despair after realizing the huge issues and will, both societally and politically, it would take to make a large-scale difference for this community. Geordie said something that resonated with me, and helped me deal with my sadness and feelings of helplessness.

“Hope versus Despair

How to stay hopeful in the context of despair and charity must be a part of all social change.

It is important to look at charity as a type of social justice.

What you are feeling, Blair, is called compassion fatigue, and it is a common problem for volunteers.

That is because the complexity of the dysfunction leads to despair.”

Geordie Campbell

- Don't let despair keep you from trying to be a part of social change. We like to tell Sean to make it matter that he walked on this Earth. We try to let him define what that means for him, but if everyone who was able did something they felt would make a difference, no matter how small it seemed, it would be a very different world.
- If you are going to an impoverished community prepare your children. You will have some idea what you are going into. Your children have not had the same breadth of experiences. And even with plenty of explanation before you go, compassion fatigue can be an issue you should be prepared to deal with both personally and with your children. One of the guest speakers at Re-member, Will Peters, said “Just because someone will be hungry tomorrow does not mean you shouldn't feed them today.” Help your children understand that “feeding” someone today might seem so small you are not making a difference, but it does make a difference for the hungry person.
- Don't make value judgments based on where you are at in your life. When you are volunteering make sure you keep your own expectations and presumptions out of the equation. If you find yourself thinking you would behave differently, or do something differently, realize that is you thinking from the perspective of where you are now. The truth is much more complicated. None of us has any idea what we would do in a situation unless we have been in it.



6. Be prepared to pay for your food, lodging, transportation, and often materials.

The three service projects that were away from home that my family has participated in all had fees we paid in order to participate. Many participants use raising the money for the project as a part of the journey.

7. Be prepared to “shovel poop”!

Poop used to “ick” me out so much, and then I volunteered for the Humane Society and Project Wildlife. I am using shoveling poop as a metaphor for doing things outside of your comfort level, whether it is ticks on dogs, spiders under houses, pooping in a hole in the ground in a space with only three walls, covering your hair, or anything else along those lines. You need to let these things go and not fixate on them. You are going to have to help your children do the same. You are there to serve. It is not about you. If your child has something they absolutely cannot deal with, spiders for example, discuss this with the organization before signing up for the project. These projects need volunteers to come and work. When you get there they do not have the time to fuss with volunteers’ idiosyncrasies and pet peeves. They are too busy coordinating the work on the project.



8. Homeschoolers have much more control over the courses and coursework used as a part of their child’s academics.

- Homeschoolers should take advantage of this and use the service project as a part of their academics. Learning more about the project and intended benefits of it helps your child understand their service in a larger context and helps them make connections from their volunteering to the world at large. It also gives them knowledge they can use to educate others about these issues. My child has learned about Native Americans, opossums, educational issues in India, and politics. This year he will work on two service projects. Sean spent six days volunteering for Re-member, and he will spend 12-months, all of 2016 volunteering on a Presidential campaign.
- Before going take the time to learn about the project, area, and organization. Before we went to Re-member for example, my family:
 - *Watched movies about the Lakota both documentaries and historical fiction
 - *My husband and I read books and articles that we discussed and shared parts of with Sean.

- In preparation for volunteering on a Presidential campaign, Sean is taking two American Government courses before volunteering on a Presidential campaign. He has already been watching speeches as candidates declare that they are running. He has chosen the political issue that is the most important to him without us telling him what the issue most important to us is. After researching the issues being discussed by the candidates, he decided the most important political issue is income inequality. He is learning what each party's platform is and where the various candidates stand on them. He reads articles about the candidates, watches the debates, listens to town hall meetings, and is in the process of choosing the candidate he wants to support. All of this is ongoing. Some of these will be completed before he starts volunteering and some will not.
- After volunteering discuss the big issues and take home messages. What you see and learn can take time to process. Continue to discuss these issues with your child and help them give voice to what they saw, did, and felt for months after the experience. This helps your child to be an advocate for change in this area.

9. Keep good records.

Adults usually volunteer without keeping records. You should keep good records for your child. They can use their service when applying for jobs and to college. You can use photos and written accounts. If you are not volunteering with your child, you should help them with record keeping. It makes sense to have kids write their own journal about their service. If you do this though, you should read over what they wrote for completeness. Make sure, if incorporating the project into a high school student's transcript, to use key words when writing about it that tie in with other coursework. His service at the Lakota Reservation and on the Presidential Campaign will emphasize the historical context of both, since I am considering them to be a major component of 10th grade history.



Adults usually volunteer without keeping records. You should keep good records for your child. They can use their service when applying for jobs and to college. You can use photos and written accounts. If you are not volunteering with your child, you should help them with record keeping. It makes sense to have kids write their own journal about their service. If you do this though, you should read over what they wrote for completeness. Make sure, if incorporating the project into a high school student's transcript, to use key words when writing about it that tie in with other coursework. His service at the Lakota Reservation and on the Presidential Campaign will emphasize the historical context of both, since I am considering them to be a major component of 10th grade history.

The records should include:

- What was done
- The hours spent doing it
- Name and contact information for person in charge of the project they worked on
- Information about the organization

Our children are growing up in a big complicated world. Listening to the news and online there is a lot of discussion about the problems in it, without much constructive discussion about how to solve them. Many of the kids I meet feel frustrated with these problems, and they don't see how they can help fix them. Volunteering on projects that are meaningful to kids does two important things; it helps the world and gives kids a positive outlet to help fix it. With hard work, thoughtful service, and small acts of kindness, we can save the world empowering our children to be good stewards of it at the same time!

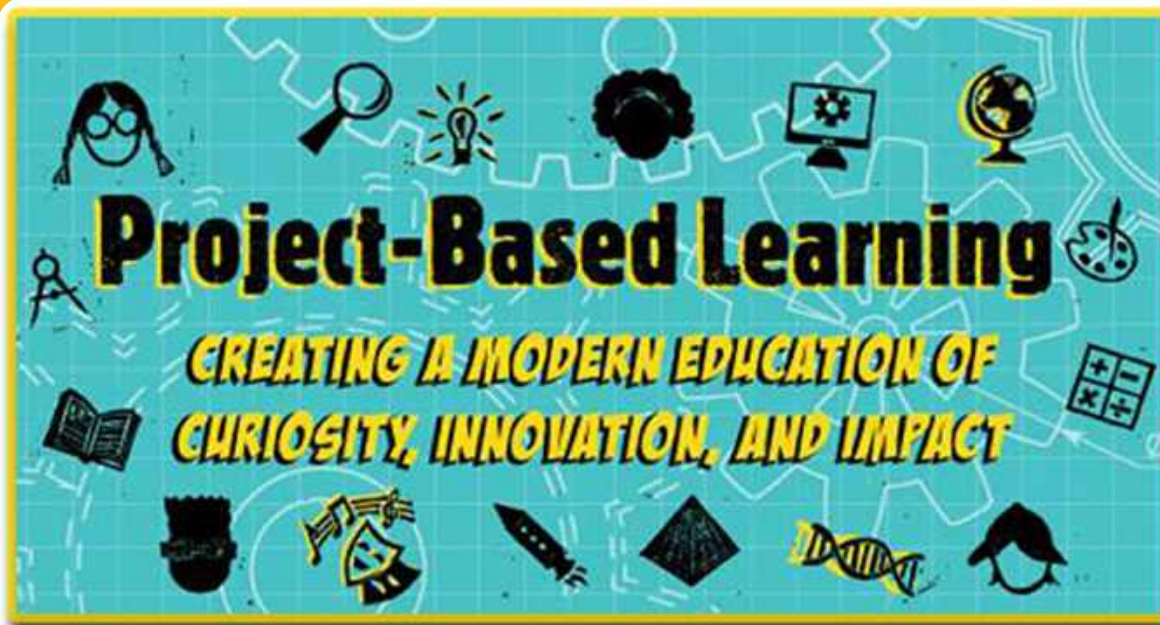
Here are links to the four service projects mentioned above:

Re-member: <http://www.re-member.org/trips.aspx>

Cross Cultural Solutions: <https://www.crossculturalsolutions.org/>

Project Wildlife: <https://www.sdhumane.org/support-us/volunteer/>

The Humane Society: <https://www.humanesociety.org/volunteer>



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Unit Studies

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SEAHomeschoolers.com/membership-group/

Buoyant Balloons



Tools Needed: Helium balloon, paper, scissors

Does a helium balloon weigh anything? The answer is yes! Anything that has mass will be pulled downward by gravity. This includes rocks, humans, helium, and even the sky. Why then do helium balloons float upward? Answer: There's more than just gravity acting on a helium balloon.

First, you need to understand that our atmosphere is held to Earth because of gravity. If it weren't for this gravity, the atmosphere would simply drift into space. Air has weight, and that weight holds it downward. Second, you need to understand that the atmosphere's weight applies a pressure. At sea level this is about 14.7 pounds for every square inch. At higher elevations, there's less atmosphere above you. So at higher elevations, the air pressure is less. On top of Mount Everest, the air pressure is only about 4.4 pound per square inch.



So here's the key question: Where is the atmospheric pressure greater: On the bottom or top side of a balloon? Answer: The bottom side. Why? Because the bottom side is "deeper" in the atmosphere.

Think about that. The atmospheric "push" on the balloon is greater from beneath than it is from the top. This results in a net push upward. This net push upward is called the buoyant force.

Amazingly, there's such a buoyant force on everything within the atmosphere. That includes rocks, humans, and even helium balloons. It isn't very much because the difference in atmospheric pressure between the bottom and top of an object is quite small. In most cases the weight of the object is much greater than this atmospheric buoyant force. That's why most objects fall to the ground.

The weight of a helium balloon, however, is also quite small. In fact, it's smaller than the upward buoyant force. Aha! So that's why a helium balloon rises, even with its downward pulling weight. Simply enough, the strength of the upward pushing buoyant force is greater. And so up it rises.



To see how this concept applies within water, watch this video.

Sink or Swim

Activity: Crumple a piece of paper and tie it to the string of a helium balloon. With enough paper, the weight will be greater than the buoyant force and so the balloon will sink. Use scissors to slowly cut away at the paper. This decreases the weight. Keep cutting until you get to the point where the weight downward is perfectly balanced against the buoyant force upward. At this point, you'll find the balloon neither rises nor falls. It hovers still. It's a tenuous situation. Air currents may interfere. But you'll get the idea. And it's fun. Exploring how things work is always fun.

So if you understand what we've discussed, if you really do, you'll be able to answer this question:

On the Moon, where there is no atmosphere, would a helium balloon rise, hover still, or fall to the surface? Assume the balloon doesn't pop, which regular balloon quickly would!

Till next time, good science to you!



$$\uparrow B_F = W + \downarrow$$

A Hands-on Science Series From Conceptual Academy

Conceptual Academy is a video-centric learning platform used by colleges and high schools for introductory science, now available for homeschools, grades 7 – 12. Thank you for visiting our dedicated homeschool support site at www.LearnScienceAcademy.com.

Signs of Autumn

A Printable Coloring Page by Judith Claudi-Magnussen



Book Pairings to Get Your Teen Talking about Big Ideas

The [SEA Teen Book Club](#) is back...with a new host, a new book list, and new members from around the world! This year's live online meet-ups are sure to be filled with fun and thought provoking discussions as our teens delve into a diverse array of thoughtfully selected book pairings. Parents can join the [SEA Teen Book Club group](#) on Facebook for more information, club meeting scheduling, and access to the discussion questions for each book. Teens can join the SEA Teen Book Club live online meet-ups every month or just for the books they are interested in discussing. The 2019/2020 session kicks off this month with a discussion of Radium Girls on September 24th at 10 AM Central and you can check out the complete session book list on the next page.

**SEA TEEN
BOOK
CLUB**

**JOIN
ANYTIME
THROUGHOUT
THE
YEAR**

**2019/2020
SESSIONS
STARTS IN
SEPTEMBER**

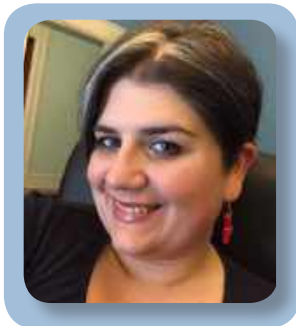
**BOOK
PAIRINGS
TO GET
YOUR TEEN
TALKING
ABOUT
BIG IDEAS**

**DOWNLOADABLE
DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

**MONTHLY
ONLINE
MEET-UPS**

Secular, Eclectic, Academic Teen Book Club 2019/2020

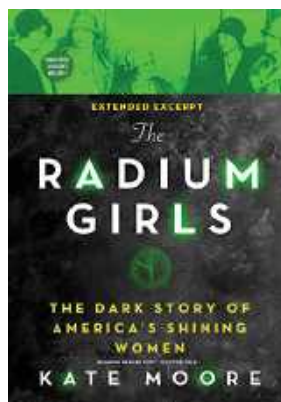
I am so excited to be hosting the [SEA Teen Book Club](#) for the 2019-2020 year. I wanted to pick pairs (and one trio) of books so that we could dig deeper into themes and draw connections across genres and time periods. In particular, I really want to pair classics with more modern books that tackle similar issues or take on a different perspective. Often, classic texts can come with the baggage of past generations (including inaccurate scientific views and views limited by prejudice that went largely unquestioned in the era they were written). Rather than avoid these books, I believe pairing them allows us for open, meaningful conversations that give teen learners a more empathetic and complete picture of humanity while providing exposure to an influential canon of works that still informs our cultural experiences. Finally, pairing nonfiction works with fiction can help make literature more accessible (and, quite frankly, enjoyable) to learners who have perhaps felt less interested in fictional works in the past. For those pairings, I tend to put the nonfiction work first, giving readers a chance to develop a large background knowledge they can draw from when exploring the fictional world.



I can't wait for our discussions! Happy reading!

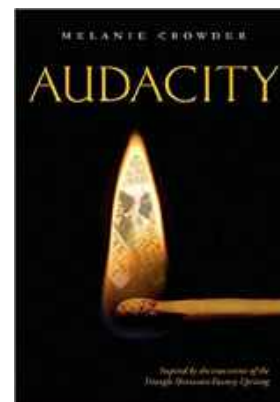
- Michelle Parrinello-Cason

Set 1



September

[Radium Girls](#) by Kate Moore

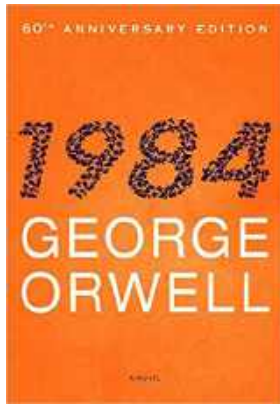


October

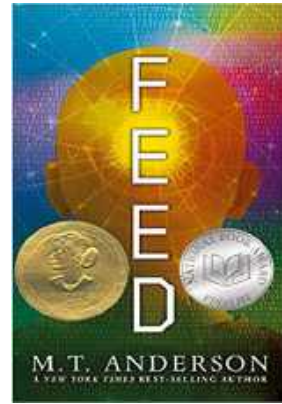
[Audacity](#) by Melanie Crowder

Radium Girls is a nonfiction look at the women and girls who got radium poisoning working in American factories and sparked a fight for workers' rights. Audacity is a fictional novel in verse about an immigrant who organizes a women's union.

Set 2



November
[1984](#) by George Orwell



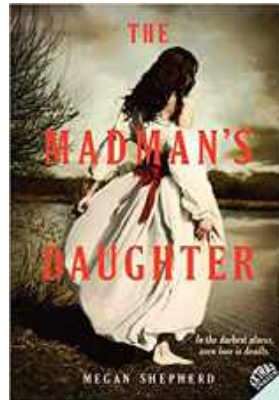
December
[Feed](#) by M.T. Anderson

Feed pairs well with 1984 as both are dystopias looking at technology, but Feed is more in-line with contemporary technologies and social media influence.

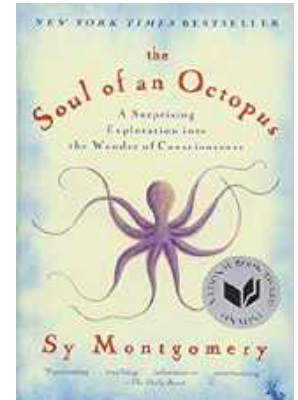
Set 3



January
[The Island of Dr. Moreau](#)
by H.G. Wells



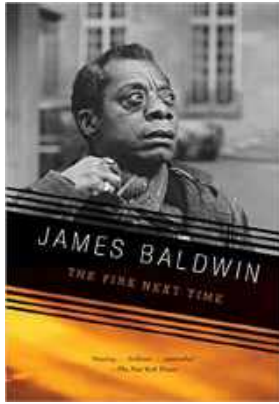
February
[The Madman's Daughter](#)
by Megan Shepherd



March
[The Soul of an Octopus](#)
by Sy Montgomery

The Soul of an Octopus is a nonfiction look at the consciousness of animals through a scientist's work with octopi. The Madman's Daughter is The Island of Dr. Moreau through his daughter's eyes.

Set 4



April
[The Fire Next Time](#)
by James Baldwin



May
[The Hate U Give](#)
by Angie Thomas

James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* is an impassioned call about black civil rights written in 1963, which pairs well with *The Hate U Give*, a modern-day look at police brutality and the ongoing struggle for black civil rights.



Homeschooling TNT's 11th Annual Halloween Dance

Friday, October 25th 7-11pm

Brookhurst Community Center - 2271 W. Crescent Ave - Anaheim

- Live DJ & Dancing
- Games & Activities
- Snacks & Drinks
- Chocolate Fountain
- Costume Contest
- Cash Prizes
- Photo Booth
- Quiet Outdoor Patio

Allergen Statement: All food will be nut free. Dairy, soy & gluten free options will be available.

Tickets can be pre-purchased via Paypal

Sept 1 - 10	\$15
Sept 11 - Oct 17	\$20
Cash at the Door	\$25

To Purchase a Ticket:

Send the correct amount and add a note with the first & last name of each teen to Homeschooling TnT at the link below.



Costume Contest Categories

- Best Overall
- Best Couple
- Best Group
- Best Special Effects
- Funniest
- Scariest
- Most Original
- Teen Choice

FINE PRINT: Each costume category winner receives a \$25 cash prize. Winners will be selected by an independent team of judges. (Be sure to visit the Judges Table if you want to enter the contest.)

Open to homeschooled teens & their guests, ages 12 - 19. Dates are not required. You are welcome to bring non homeschooled guests. Theme attire is encouraged, but not mandatory. This is a lock-down, fully chaperoned event. Teens must be signed in and picked up by a responsible adult. Please ensure your teen knows this is a lock-down event and that they are not permitted to leave the facility. Please also advise your teen to be aware of the wide range of ages and maturity levels of the teens in attendance. Modesty and consideration -- in dress, dancing, language and behavior -- are required. Attendees who disregard guidelines and warnings may be asked to leave and/or denied tickets to future dances. We do not have a strict dress code, but do ask attendees ensure their costumes are not extremely sexual or offensive.

Worldschooling: Southern Africa As Our Classroom

By Steve Askin &
Catherine Hanna

Readers who want to learn more about travel in Africa are invited to connect with tour leaders Steve Askin and Catherine Hanna through their [Small World Travel Africa!](#) Facebook group. Please say that you read about the trip in SEA Homeschoolers Magazine.



After a month in Egypt, it was time to journey south and continue our exploration of African civilizations both ancient and modern. But first we had to escape Egypt, which proved no easy task.

Still smiling after traveling 4000 miles together.
Photo by Steve Askin

Prepare for border crossing challenges.

On arriving at Cairo International Airport, Catherine and I discovered that our son Isaac had forgotten his passport in Luxor, 400 miles to the south, so he couldn't leave as scheduled. Retrieving that crucial document turned into a three-day adventure for him and mom. Lesson learned: for the rest of the trip I held everyone's travel documents in one big pouch!

Then came one of the classic border snafus that friends had warned we might experience journeying from one poor country to another. On a routine search of outbound luggage, an airport security officer discovered – to his seemingly horrified astonishment – that one of our teens had packed a necklace fashioned from spent bullet casings. “That’s illegal!” he shouted, prompting a crowd of his compatriots, some in business suits, others armed and uniformed, to surround our now-frightened teen. “Very serious” opined one. “We’ll sort this out,” promised another repeatedly as the minutes ticked away. “But wait a bit. We need guidance from the Interior Ministry.” Waiting, of course, was the one thing we couldn't do, as the time for our departure to Cape Town neared.

Was this a classic bid by badly underpaid airport staff for “baksheesh,” the local term for a bribe? Probably, but dare we risk making matters worse by offering money to cure what some fool might actually view as a serious offense? We decided the safest response was to turn to an expert. Fortunately, Egyptian guide, [Ash Shaer](#), immediately answered when I called and put him on the phone with the plainclothes official who seemed to be in charge. They soon released our traveler to continue the journey, sans necklace. As we later confirmed, bribery is too often part of the routine at [Cairo International Airport](#).

When Catherine and Isaac rejoined us, I learned that baksheesh, delicately proffered on our behalf by another local friend, had also been a necessary lubricant in the struggle to retrieve a lost passport. These were just two of the many occasions when having a local friend on our side made life run smoothly.

South Africa as a classroom: Learning from a young democracy

Cape Town. No such irregularities greeted us in Cape Town, the bustling metropolis on South Africa’s Western Cape. But visitors traveling to South Africa with minors must prepare in advance for the entirely appropriate demands of that country’s ongoing campaign [to stop human trafficking](#). South Africa strictly enforces rules requiring special documentation for any child not accompanied by both parents. For a complete explanation of the rules, [click here](#).

The welcoming signage at Cape Town International airport taught us that the world has much to learn from South Africa’s “Mother City.” Faced last year with the threat of a “Day Zero” on which faucets would run dry, Cape Town brilliantly planned and implemented [the world’s most successful water conservation drive](#).



Water conservation posters greet visitors arriving at Cape Town International Airport.



Amon Tsabola , a tour guide who led us through southern Africa. Photo Credit Ancel Camacho

We were met at the airport by a warm and wise tour guide, [Amon Tsabola](#). Over the next two months we would cover four thousand miles, visiting four countries, in his well-equipped 12 passenger van.



Ocean view from our hilltop home in Cape Town.

Cape Town's unique position near the meeting point of a warm Indian Ocean current and the Atlantic's cool Benguela current contribute to the region's amazing biodiversity. "I could have happily spent a week hiking in the foggy mystical rain forest of the [Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden](#)," said 19 year old Dante Camacho.

This beauty cannot conceal the fact that South Africa remains a divided nation. For Americans, an honest encounter with South Africa is a look in the mirror. As visitors from a country still grappling with the wounds caused by slavery more than 150 years after the end of the civil war, we had no reason to be surprised that a so recently free South Africa remains a divided nation. It is a vibrant, multiracial, multiparty democracy, but one which still suffers from [the world's widest wealth gap](#).

A visit to southern Africa, therefore, involves more than just touring game parks (exciting though encounters with alpha predators and dramatic scenery will be), basking on beautiful beaches or visiting some of the world's earliest known human settlements.

Our own advance preparation included putting two founding documents side by side, [South Africa's Bill of Rights and our own](#). While neither country has fully achieved its human rights aspirations, we learned that South Africa, unlike the United States, recognizes universal education, food, health care and affordable housing as fundamental rights of every person. The South African Constitution starts, as ours obviously does not, by declaring the nation's core commitment to human rights and equality under a democratically elected government committed to "[non-racialism and non-sexism](#)." Because of the South African constitution's expansive view of human rights, its courts were also a decade ahead of the U.S. in recognizing gay peoples' right to marry.



Table Mountain and the Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden Photo credit Skyler McKinney

To understand this new South Africa, one essential stopping point is the [Robben Island Prison](#) turned museum, where Nelson Mandela and hundreds of other freedom fighters were confined for decades by the old apartheid regime. From the guides, some of them ex-prisoners, visitors learn why some call it "[Robben Island University](#)," the place where jailed anti-apartheid fighters debated and refined their ideas for building a just society. Some in our group prepared for the visit by viewing the Mandela biopic [Long Walk to Freedom](#) or reading the Robben Island chapters in Mandela's autobiography by the same title.

Vital though the visit to Robben Island was, for most teens, the most memorable moments around Cape Town came as an adrenaline rush. At the mountainous [Hottentots Holland Nature Reserve](#), clad in protective gear, travelers got a unique view of the region's majestic mountains and deep gorges on a zipline tour.



The Zipline tour at Hottentots Holland.

The road back from Hottentots Holland winds through the Western Cape's wine country. It is dotted with [chic hotels and world-renowned vineyards](#) that, incongruously, looked to our group of Californians like a more upscale version of Marin County.

In Cape Town, sadly, we also experienced one of the jarring realities of an economically divided society. While tending his trusty Nissan van in the middle of the night, Amon was set upon by three knife-wielding thieves. He bravely fought them off, but not before suffering a deep wound in his leg. This was the first of several reminders that violent street crime is widespread in South Africa's urban centers. We made it our policy to get local advice on places to avoid, especially at night, and to never have any group member venture out alone.

We rushed Amon to the nearest emergency room, at a government hospital. After waiting 30 minutes with nothing happening, I approached the staff – not as a complaining patient but as a comrade from the hospital workers union I worked for in the U.S. After commiserating about the understaffing that plagues public health workers in the U.S. and South Africa alike, I asked if there was a facility nearby with fewer delays. They immediately referred us to a nearby private hospital. \$135 was the full cost of speedy and efficient private sector health care (including ER fee, doctor bill and medication). This was a pittance by American standards, yet far beyond the means of the average South African. Despite a constitution which deems health care a fundamental human right, South Africa is as far as the U.S. from making that goal a reality.

From Cape Town, Amon pointed our van toward Africa's southern tip, Cape Agulhas. A climb to the top of one of South Africa's oldest lighthouses offers the best view of the rocky coastline and turbulent waters.



Dante & Skyler explore The rocky coast where two oceans meet. Photo credit Ancel Camacho



Our group looks out over two oceans from Cape Agulhas Lighthouse at the continent's southern tip. Photo credit Steve Askin

Though [South Africa's excellent national park system offers accommodations nearby](#), their cottages are often pricy. Here, as elsewhere in southern Africa, we found that a [comfortable, beautifully equipped Airbnb](#) which was much closer to the coast and less expensive than park lodgings.

Traveling east from Cape Agulhas, we were definitely not the only travelers on the road!



An elephant family near Port Elizabeth. Photo credit Skyler McKinney

March 27, 1987
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U.S. missionary 'focused anger' against Transkei prison life

Paulsen remembered 'victims, victimizers'

By STEVE ASKIN
Africa Correspondent
Lusaka, Zimbabwe

KEENLY FOCUSED ANGER helped American Marianhill Father Casimir Paulsen survive foul physical conditions, demoralizing tedium and fear-provoking violence in a Transkei police station where he was held without trial or charge from mid-December until March 11 (NCR, Jan. 30, March 20).

Transkei is one of South Africa's ethnic "homelands" created, in Paulsen's words, as "the ultimate tool of divide and conquer." Transkei's 2.5 million people live on three noncontiguous tracts of overcrowded land set aside by South Africa. Three-fourths of the labor force are migrant laborers in South African industry, farms or mines. Paulsen noted, while Transkei is "independent" government — recognized only by Pretoria — is "used by South Africans to implement their apartheid policies."

A U.S. State Department spokesman told NCR several Americans are detained in South Africa on criminal charges, but no case is comparable to Paulsen's detention as a security matter.

In detention, Paulsen disciplined himself to remember the victims — and the victimizers he hopes will one day be punished. He recently scribbled names in his Xhosa language Bible, next to the words of the prophet Zecchariah. No other books were permitted in the bare 10-foot square cell he shared with up to three other prisoners for most of his 85 days of detention



Father Casimir Paulsen arrived in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, March 12, the day after his release from a Transkei, South Africa, jail.

at Kei Bridge police station.

Christians are taught to love, Paulsen reflected after his ordeal, but "the other side of the coin is: If you love good, you must hate evil."

Paulsen methodically described his experience in six hours of interviews during two days — unhelpful and recorded for clarity here — starting after mass his first Sunday of freedom. He speaks to NCR at the Uganda Martyrs Catholic Church near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. By coincidence, the church is the namesake of the one he involuntarily left behind in

(See Paulsen, page 21)

1987 interview with Fr. Cas.

Durban. Continuing along the coast, our travels took us to the port city of Durban. There an old friend from the anti-apartheid struggle, Catholic Fr. Casimir Paulson, welcomed us to [Tre Fontaine](#), a Catholic guest house built in 1965 as a multiracial retreat center which quietly ignored apartheid's segregation laws. Fr. Cas, age 83, is a Detroit native who has spent most of his life serving communities in South Africa. He shared the story of his arrest and torture in 1987 by South African authorities and his eventual return to a free South Africa.

At Tre Fontaine, we found a welcoming hub of community involvement, open to everyone concerned about building a caring community across lines of race, religion and class. Over tasty meals in the Tre Fontaine dining room, (our vegans even found a chef eager to learn about their special dietary requirements) we mingled with participants in a “healing of memories” workshop. They came to find mutual support needed to move their lives forward by communicating about painful past experience, under apartheid and more recent.

Here, too, we had our first encounter with African teens at St. Francis College, a Catholic high school. The students, neatly lined up in crisply pressed school uniforms, looked very different. Yet they immediately found common ground with our Americans with their informal and varied dress styles, as they laughed together and exchanged stories. “I learned that, whatever our daily lives may be, as teenagers we all are very much alike,” said Isaac’s older sister, Sophia.

Durban also broadened our understanding of the cultural and ethnic diversity of South Africa. This great port city has long been a center of Indian migration to South Africa, since even before a young lawyer named Mohandas Gandhi came here in 1891 to serve as counsel to an Indian-owned business. (We learned more about his time in South Africa later in our journey.)

A modern-day Indian businessman, introduced to us by the Catholic Sisters at Tre Fontaine, took our group on a tour through some of the richest and poorest communities in South Africa. “It’s crazy how wide the gap is,” said Isaac Hanna. “The poor areas are all black, and families live in tiny shacks like this,” gesturing in our own home to identify an area one-third of the size of our kitchen. “On the oceanfront, mostly white, they live in mansions.”

Spending time with a successful, socially conscious Indian family also helped us reflect on the complexities of life under apartheid. As Ancel Camacho astutely observed, “we learned how whites under apartheid, even while oppressing Indians, gave them more rights in a way that moved blacks to see Indians as their immediate oppressors. This deflected anger from the whites who actually controlled everything.”

Johannesburg and Soweto. We continued to learn about South Africa’s contrasts in a great city of many names: eGoli in Zulu (“city of gold”), Jozi in local slang, Johannesburg and its sister city Soweto on our maps. These two cities form the core of South Africa’s most populous province, Gauteng (meaning “place of gold” in Sotho, one of South Africa’s 11 official languages.)

High School students at St. Francis College.



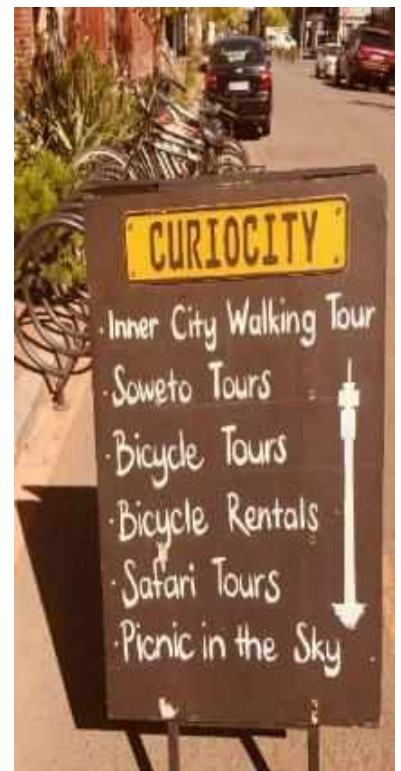
In Johannesburg, an arts and culture district known as Maboneng is the perfect base for exploring a lively and unruly metro area, home to about nine million of this country's 58 million people. There are multiple opportunities to see the city with other young people from South Africa and around the world by joining the tours organized by the [Curiosity youth hostel](#).

Within a few blocks of each other, you will find an experimental theater, an art house cinema, avant garde art galleries and wonderful restaurants: my personal favorite is the [Little Addis Cafe](#) which offers vegetarian and vegan options. In this delightfully diverse city we also found great [Japanese](#) and Thai cuisine and, of course, Soweto street food.

For solo travelers and small groups, the ideal place to stay is Maboneng's [Twelve Decades Arts Hotel](#), which offers 12 floors of uniquely decorated studio size rooms. For our group of 11, we opted instead for a nearby [suburban Airbnb](#) complete with swimming pool and game room.

South Africa's modern economy was born in an 1880s gold rush. Ancient and modern can both be found just outside Johannesburg at the [Cradle of Humankind](#), where in a single day you can tour both a depleted gold mine and the world's largest find of early human bones

Our own group's deepest dive into South African wealth was an underground tour of the [Cullinan diamond mine](#), still active in its second century producing precious gems. There we suited up for an underground tour. It was a muddy, hot and humid excursion deep beneath the ground. A great experience once, but something none of us would repeat a second time ... let alone as our life's work.



Knowledgeable local guides offer youth-focused tours of greater Jozi every day, disembarking from Maboneng's Curiosity hostel.



Our group dons protective gear to explore the Cullinan Diamond mine. Photo credit Ancel Camacho



Our travelers explore the Cullinan Diamond mine
Photo credit Skyler McKinney

In the early 20th century, this still-active mine produced the largest gem quality diamond ever found. As will surprise no one familiar with colonial history, the Star of Africa and other gems cut from that chunk of rough stone became the most valuable trinkets in the British crown jewels. Some estimates place their value at [\\$2 billion](#). Wealth continues to flow to the surface here: the month before our arrival, miners dug up a gem quality stone valued in the [tens of millions of dollars](#).

Johannesburg also was the site of our deepest encounters with South Africa's freedom struggle. Any tour of Soweto – the “black township” created to house black South African workers far from the whites who ruled them under apartheid - must include the [Hector Pieterse Museum](#). The museum honors those killed, wounded and arrested in the 1976 uprising of high school and elementary students which became a crucial turning point in the struggle to overthrow apartheid. For a lively account of life in post-apartheid Soweto, several of our group read Trevor Noah's [Born a Crime](#).

Ancel Camacho behind bars at Old Fort prison. Photo credit Steve Askin

We continued our education at the [Apartheid Museum](#), organized chronologically to lead visitors from the pre-colonization era, through the rise of apartheid, the decades of resistance and finally into the modern era.

We gained a still deeper understanding of apartheid oppression at the Old Fort Prison on Johannesburg's Constitution Hill, a blood-stained institution where freedom fighters from two continents were held more than a half century apart. At Constitution Hill, we opted for a [time travel tour](#), in which visitors change into prison uniforms and tour the facility with guides dressed as guards.



Here's an excerpt from [Nelson's Mandela's essay](#) drawing the direct connection between Mahatma's Gandhi's South African experience as imprisoned activist and his own more than a half century later:

Gandhi threatened the South African Government during the first and second decades of our century as no other man did. He established the first anti-colonial political organization in the country, if not in the world, founding the Natal Indian Congress in 1894...

During his 21 years in South Africa, Gandhi was sentenced for four terms of imprisonment... [As prisoners] there was practically no difference in the issue of clothing given to us in 1962 and that given to Gandhi in 1908. He records, that 'After being stripped, we were given prison uniforms. We were supplied, each with a pair of short breeches, a shirt of coarse cloth, a jumper, a cap, a towel and a pair of socks and sandals.' Our issue was almost identical. Neither was there any difference in the diet, basically porridge, save that we were given a teaspoon of sugar; Gandhi's porridge had no sugar. At lunch, we were served mealies, sometimes mixed with beans. He spent one and a half months on a one-meal-a-day diet of beans.

To help South Africans remember their past, the Constitutional Court was built alongside this old prison. The court's art and architecture evoke the diversity of the "rainbow nation" and the dedication of its courts to, in the words of retired Justice and Albie Sachs, "expanding the scope of human freedom."



Art and imagery at the constitutional court.

From Johannesburg, we travelled north to our final South African stop, visiting the remains of an ancient African kingdom at [Mapungubwe National Park](#). The stone structures here are the relics of a community that might once have been home to 25,000 people. The national park also offered some amazing opportunities for viewing African wildlife.



Wildlife at Mapungubwe National Park. Photo credit Skyler McKinney.

Peace amidst poverty in eSwatini

Crossing South Africa's border to the tiny Kingdom of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) some of the contrasts between democracy and dictatorship were immediately evident.

The first, but most superficial indicator, was the quality of the roads – among the worst I've seen in my 35 years of African travel. But poor roads matter less than the impoverishment of the people. Measured by per capita gross national product, Eswatini is one of the more prosperous nations of sub-Saharan Africa, but you would never guess that upon viewing the conditions in which the average person lives.

King Mswati III, the man who last year changed his country's name by royal fiat, is Africa's last absolute monarch reigning under a State of Emergency imposed by his father in 1973.

Paradoxically, this oppressed nation was one of the most restful stops on our journey. We stayed in comfortably outfitted thatched rondavels (traditional circular dwellings) at the beautiful [Mabuda Farm](#). The 1000-acre farm is operated by Helen Pons whose family has farmed this region since the 1930s. Her ophthalmologist husband has devoted his career to curing blindness in a country that, according to recent reports, [suffers from the worst eye care in Africa](#).

For us foreign visitors, a high point of our visit was a lesson in harvesting honey. Dr. Pons showed our group how to decap honeycombs with surgical precision ... and without getting stung. The farm is part of a nature conservancy. Had we stayed longer, this would have been the perfect place to view indigenous wildlife on horseback. We enjoyed our peaceful stay in this beautiful mountain kingdom but, sad to say, learned the full extent of its suffering only through further reading.

Business analysts estimate King Mswati's personal wealth at around [\\$200 million](#), while the average person survives on less than \$2 per day. Forbes Magazine captured the essence of his reign: "He lives lavishly, using his kingdom's treasury to fund his expensive tastes in German automobiles, first-class leisure trips around the world and women. But his gross mismanagement of his country's finances is now having dire economic consequences." [The nation suffers](#) from the world's highest HIV infection rate and one of the lowest life expectancies, 58 years at birth.

Forging lasting friendships amidst the chaos that is Zimbabwe.

No illusions blurred our vision of the final nation on our itinerary, Zimbabwe. After nearly four decades of one-party rule, Zimbabwe's people appear virtually united in their opposition to their thieving rulers following a transparently stolen election in 2018. In eSwatini and before that in Egypt, citizens would criticize their government only in whispers, if at all. In Zimbabwe, even strangers would unhesitatingly turn conversations toward their anger against the ruling ZANU-PF party.

Yet, as I told parents before we traveled here with their teens, Zimbabwe's autocratic government is a daily threat only to its own people. Here foreigners actually seem to face fewer dangers than those awaiting them in some South African cities. Indeed, one of the ironies of travel in developing countries (as we also saw in eSwatini) is just how wide is the gap between a foreign visitor's experience and that of local people.

Even amidst chaos, Zimbabwe remains a remarkable destination. Here you will find the best-preserved ancient ruins south of the Sahara, surprisingly well-maintained national parks with excellent opportunities for game viewing and the world's most dramatic waterfall. All these sights plus, most important, deep engagement with a group of Zimbabwean teens, made this final stop the high point of our journey for many participants.

SIDEBAR A Zimbabwe travel how to.

Given the complications of travel in Zimbabwe, we need to offer some country-specific advice and also a link to local service providers who will make your visit a success.

Check current conditions before venturing into Zimbabwe. The country's economy is in freefall, daily electric power outages are the norm, petrol shortages are frequent. We've found that the [British Foreign Office travel](#) advisories are far more precise guide to current conditions than those offered by the U.S. State Department. As the advisories warn, foreign visitors should stay away from political demonstrations, as demonstrators always face the risk of violence by security forces.

If you choose to visit, you will also quickly learn that hardship has made Zimbabweans wonderfully resourceful. The nation's major cell phone company, which also functions as its principal bank via its phone-based money transfer service, has become one of the world's largest purchasers of Tesla solar energy storage batteries, which it uses to keep the money flowing. Since local currency is nearly worthless, we entered the country carrying about \$100 per person in US \$1 and \$5 bills, but we soon found that credit cards backed by U.S. dollars are also welcomed widely.

Visitors can rely on two microbusinesses that made our travel safe and successful. In this narrative, you've already met [Amon Tsabola](#) who wisely stockpiled enough fuel near his home to cover our entire stay in Zimbabwe, and always steered our group away from danger. Other Zimbabwean friends offer [a spacious full service guest house](#) plus the most amazing cultural immersion program.

Visiting an ancient kingdom: Our first stop in the country was Great Zimbabwe.

The modern nation takes its name from this kingdom which thrived near the center of this country for 400 years before the arrival of the first European colonialists. Amon helped us understand why this mystical place has an important place in the hearts of his fellow Zimbabweans.

At its peak, Great Zimbabwe was an urban center of 10,000-20,000 people. Its stone structures remain the most impressive surviving ancient



Exploring Great Zimbabwe. Photo credit Skyler McKinney.

architectural achievements in Africa south of the Sahara. This city was the center of an inland African kingdom whose global trade links are evidenced by discoveries of Ming Dynasty China, Arabian glass and other imported goods. The kingdom's success as a medieval trading nation rested on its gold mines.

The site has been imperfectly preserved. During a century of white rule starting in the late 19th century, settlers and colonizers looted Great Zimbabwe, walking off with its iconic soapstone sculptures of native eagles and other treasures. The most famous colonist-businessman, Cecil Rhodes, even hired an archeologist to falsely "prove" Great Zimbabwe was built by Phoenicians or other foreign visitors. No wonder, then, that Zimbabwe has embraced this ancient city's heritage and made those soapstone sculptures its national symbol.

The [BBC's Guide to Africa's looted treasures](#) and a Guardian report on "[racism, ruins and plundering](#)" provide a great introduction to this amazing site and its place in history.

Victoria Falls: No mere picture can do justice to the roaring waters of Victoria Falls, which engulfed us in misty spray on a beautiful April day. Don't imagine that you can merely stop for a few minutes and then head on. Each of more than two dozen vantage points offers a different perspective on the roaring waters. While Zimbabwe offers the most dramatic view, some of our travelers walked across the Zambezi River footbridge to also see the falls from neighboring Zambia.



Victoria Falls. Photo credit Malia Day.



Together at Victoria Falls. Photo credit Malia Day.

Victoria Falls is a top international tourism destination on both sides of the national border. Walking down the main street of the tourist town that has grown up near the falls, you'll be bombarded with at least a dozen different options for add-on activities, including bungee jumping, white water rafting, sky diving, helicopter flyovers and sunset boat cruises.

Plan prudently or you can easily blow your budget. Here, unlike most places we traveled in Africa, activities are priced for the well-heeled foreign tourist. You'll also find some great restaurants here, but their offerings are priced with the affluent traveler in mind. If you stay for more than a day, we strongly recommend finding lodgings with a full kitchen. We found excellent, reasonably priced accommodations through [Zimbabwe National Parks](#) but understand that prices have increased since our visit.

To avoid cost overruns, we asked our teens to pick just one of the many offerings, and they chose wisely. We enjoyed an elephant encounter, which fully lived up to its promise of an intimate experience with these gentle giants at a wildlife rescue center and orphanage. These pictures tell the story far better than words.



Elephant Encounter

Forming Lifelong Friendships.



Photo credit Ancel Camacho.

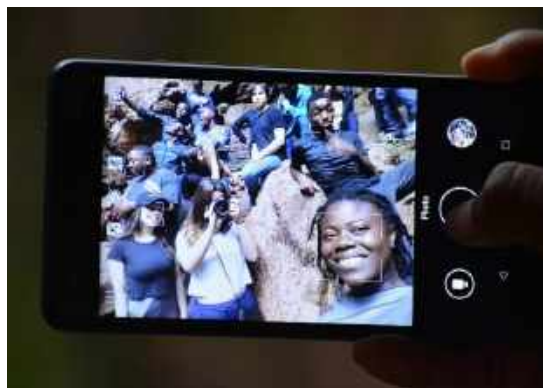


Photo credit Malia Day.



Photo credit Skyler McKinney.

Ask our teens where they had their most meaningful African experience of Africa. Not, they will say amidst the surging waters of Victoria Falls, not among apex predators or giant herbivores in beautiful national parks, not climbing through ancient ruins, not even when learning about the horrors of the old apartheid South Africa and the most hopeful features of its new Democracy.

Instead they will point to a spacious suburban home on an acre of land at the outskirts of Zimbabwe's capital, Harare. Our hosts, Mary and Jonah Gokova, operate [a well-catered Bed & Breakfast \(& lunch & dinner!\)](#) which doubles as a retreat center for cultural immersion programs. Here our eight teens shared 10 days of their lives with about the same number of Zimbabwean youths.



Our group with the support team at Mary & Jonah's Bed & Breakfast

The Gokovas call their program "Total Sensitivity." They, and facilitator Elaine Chiedza Manyere, brought a global perspective to a thoughtfully designed experiential learning program. Jonah is founder of a men's anti-sexist movement in historically patriarchal Zimbabwe. Mary works on long-term community development programs for an international aid agency. Elaine, only a few years older than the teens, is a grad student who has worked on women's rights issues in Zimbabwe.

The encounter across continents started awkwardly, with the participants sitting down in a circle to try to explain to each other what it's like to grow up in their respective countries.

Then Elaine found the perfect way to bring them together. She took the teens to [Pakare Paye Arts Centre](#), a performance and education center created by one of Zimbabwe's most admired musicians. There they picked up some guitars and started singing and playing music together. They returned from this experience full of laughter and animated chatter.



Pakare Paye. Photo credit Skyler McKinney.

This mix of exploration and conversation continued throughout, building lasting bonds among the teens. They could get close to nature at the nearby [Lion Park & Snake World](#) in the morning, and discuss youth culture in the afternoon. Repeated visits to Pakare Paye brought the group closer together and culminated with the teens sharing a song they wrote together.



Lion Park & Snake World. Photo credit Malia Day.



Lion Park & Snake World.
Photo credit Skyler McKinney.

“We bonded around humor and music,” Ancel Camacho explained, “but also around the conversations we had about culture, gender rights and other issues.” They found much in common but also enormous differences. “Their school culture is strict, harsh and sometimes even includes beatings,” Ancel said. Most striking for Ancel and others was the impact of living amidst poverty and scarcity far beyond their American experience. “We can think about our future. For their families, life is about scrounging for what you need to survive another day.”

Despite the differences, “they’re also just like us” every teen told me in her or his own words. “We’re the same age and we all like to do the same things,” explained Sophia Hanna-Askin. “To reach this level of friendship with foreigners is beautiful,” said Dante Camacho.

If you missed Part 1 of this article, click the title below to be taken to SEA Homeschooler's August edition. The article begins on page 3.

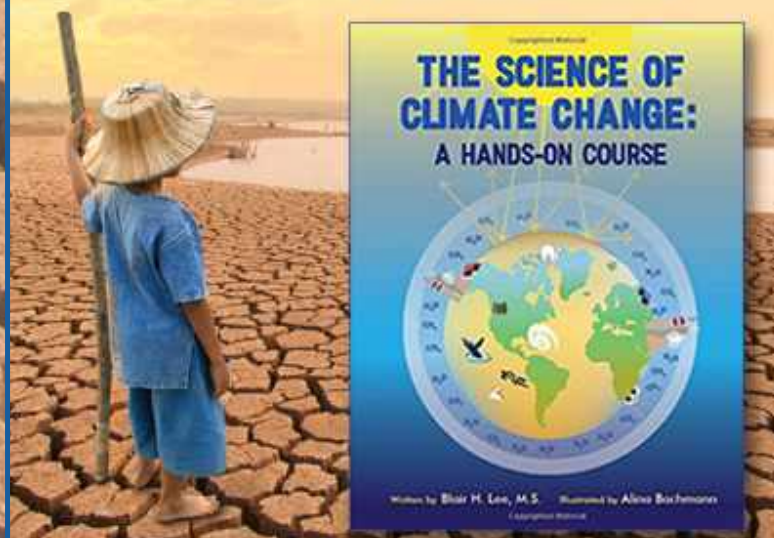
Planning and Leading the Trip of a Lifetime

Climate Literacy

It's an Education Issue

"An incredible resource for students and their teachers to learn about what causes climate change and what we can do in our everyday lives to solve this problem."

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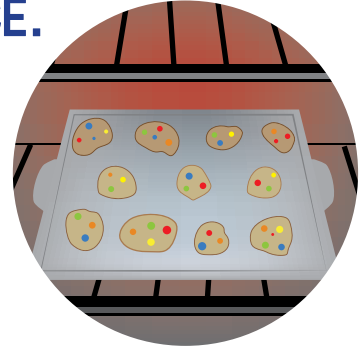
**IF EVERYONE COMES TOGETHER
TO SOLVE CLIMATE CHANGE,
IT WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**



COMPOST



EAT LOCAL, AND
EAT LESS MEAT



HOMEMADE FOOD



TURN OFF THE
LIGHTS



REUSABLE
WATER BOTTLES



RECYCLE



REUSE



WALK, RIDE, OR
SKATEBOARD INSTEAD
OF DRIVING



GARDEN



USE ALTERNATIVE
SOURCES OF ENERGY
INSTEAD OF COAL, OIL,
AND GASOLINE

**This September 20th,
millions of people around the
world will march to demand
an end to the age
of fossil fuels.**

Join the March.

Join the Movement!

**If all of us come together
on this issue
we can make a difference!**

Vegan Apple Harvest Cake

It's apple season! Let the children help prepare this special treat the whole family can enjoy.

Ingredients

- 2 C All-Purpose Flour
- 3 tsp Baking Powder
- 1/2 tsp Salt
- 1/4 C Sugar
- 4 Tbl Vegetable Shortening
- 1/4 C Applesauce
- 2/3 C Almond Milk

FOR THE FILLING:

- 4 small or 3 medium baking apples peeled, cored & sliced

FOR THE TOPPING:

- 2 Tbl Sugar
- 1 tsp Cinnamon



Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Prepare an 8x8 square or 8in round baking pan with cooking spray.
3. Mix together the flour, baking powder, salt and sugar.
4. Add the shortening, applesauce and milk and mix until just combined. Do not overmix.
5. Spread into the prepared pan.
6. Prepare the apples by peeling, coring and slicing as you would for apple pie.
7. Place them round side up deep into the dough. The dough will puff up substantially during baking, so get them down into the dough at this point.
8. Sprinkle with the cinnamon sugar mixture.
9. Bake for 35 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes clean. Cool slightly before serving.

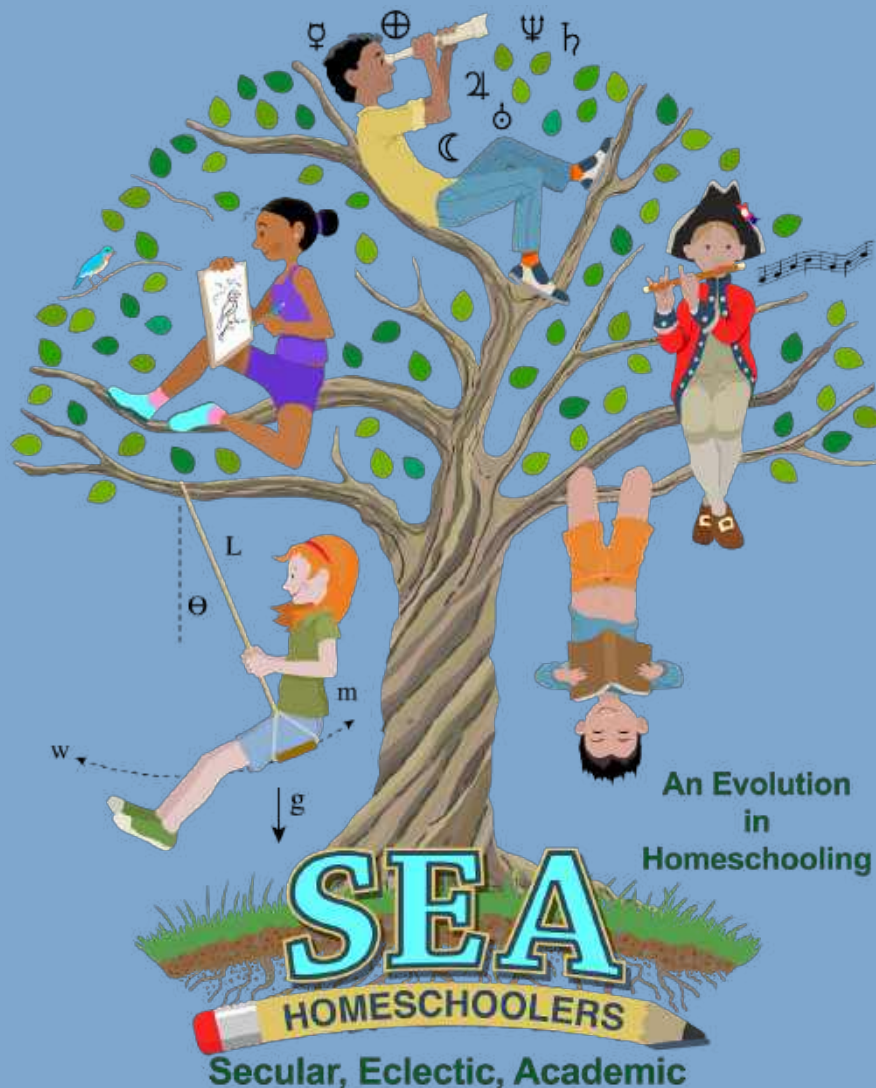
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I want to personally thank you for being an important part of the SEA Homeschoolers community.

Blair Lee, founder of [Secular, Eclectic, Academic Homeschoolers](#)

If you have any submissions, ideas, questions, or comments, please email us at editor@seahomeschoolers.com or visit us on Facebook at [Editor at SEA](#).



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