

Giving Thanks

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

November 23, 2005

ACTIVITIES

As you well know, spending time with children is always rewarding. It can help you to see the world around you in a whole new way and to value things that you may take for granted or consider perfectly ordinary. On the other hand, when you are entirely responsible for their care, even small children can be intimidating. Just what do you do with them all day? This newsletter is here to help – whether you're a parent, grandparent, babysitter, caregiver, neighbor, or anyone acting as a substitute teacher and spending the day with a preschool-aged child.

The following sections will give some suggested activities for this week's theme as well as methodology and ideas for preparation.

Opening Verse

The Waldorf method places a strong emphasis on establishing rhythms throughout the day which give a comfortable sense of order and security to a child's life. One of these is to start your day (or your time together) with a short meditation called an opening verse. Choose a place which is clean and orderly; children are deeply sensitive to their environments and are unable to feel calm in the midst of chaos. Lighting a candle while you say the verse is customary, as this helps to establish a reflective atmosphere. Even if you choose not to do light a candle, the opening verse will be a transition for the child into your care. After you declare yourselves to be "ready now for work and learning", you can blow out the candle and begin your day!

Opening Verse:
In the morning at the sunrise
When the light of day doth break,
Children's souls, by angels guided,
Sleep from rested body shake,
Ready now for work and learning,
Happy, steady, and awake.

Finding a Story Time Program

Our local library has a story time program which we have participated in somewhat; a holiday like Thanksgiving (and Christmas, coming up) often spawns story time programs held in bookstores. Even some museums and parks are now offering such programs. Are they appropriate for the Waldorf child?

In [You Are Your Child's First Teacher](#), Rahima Baldwin Dancy suggests that reading more than one book at a time can be harmful to a young child as each book has its own energy and the resulting conflicting energies are a confusing and painful experience.

I can agree with this to some extent, as I have witnessed book after book being trotted out – presumably to fill some sort of expected quota – so much so that my own head begins to spin.

There is also the question of the quality of literature chosen. I actually wrote a letter of complaint to the director of our library and used the word “tawdry” for the first time in my life – the books were that bad! But this is not necessarily the case for every program and librarians are often very open to book suggestions from parents. In my experience, although an involved parent can be a mixed blessing, most libraries prefer your feedback.

Story time programs also have songs, finger plays and rhymes, and craft projects. They are a good way for you and your child to meet other parents who have children of similar ages and who share your parenting style. The list of topics is often provided in advance on a flyer and you can skip programs (such as “ABC and 123”) which you think will be inappropriate. You can leave early if the craft project doesn’t work for you or, again, you can get involved and suggest some alternatives.

Participating in a story time program is also a good way to get to know your librarians and build a relationship with them. From here you can recommend books which the library should purchase or request that more puppet shows be put on. I think it is better to work to make an unsatisfactory situation better than to just give up on it.

Check also to see if you can volunteer to hold your own story time programs at your library. Conference rooms are often available for public use. You may discover – or create – a new Waldorf community!

Stories

Choose from among the recommended stories for this week

Harvest

by Kris Waldherr

Giving Thanks

by Jake Swamp

A Journey Through Time in Verse and Rhyme

ed. by Heather Thomas

Can I Pray With My Eyes Open?

by Susan Taylor Brown

The Three Questions

by Jon J. Muth

We Share One World

by Jane E. Hoffelt

Handwork Projects:

Silhouette Garland

Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday, one which focuses on coming together as a family. There are many wonderful projects you can do to celebrate your family. Try a silhouette garland:

http://familyfun.go.com/decorating-ideas/decorating/feature/famf1203_proj_silogar/

You can do the project as shown or adapt it by asking each person coming to your Thanksgiving dinner to bring their own silhouette. Then try to figure out which one is who!

Adding Rings

For the rings, use strips of paper in Autumn colors. Have each person write (or dictate) what they are thankful for, link the papers together as a chain, and attach them between the silhouettes. Or you can skip the silhouettes and make a chain of thanks and fasten it to a stair railing, across a mantel, or form into the shape of a circle and hang as a wreath.

Thanksgiving Decorations

Make decorations with your child to adorn the holiday table. Martha Stewart Living magazine, November 2004 (#132) has my absolute favorite natural table decorations, including making a cornucopia and inspired uses for gourds and mini grapevine wreaths.

Place Cards

FamilyFun November 2005 suggests a fun place card game where the children secretly make the cards using a phrase to describe each person in lieu of their name. When the adults come out of the kitchen it is a lot of fun for them to try to figure out where they are supposed to be sitting, as well as to hear how the children have described them! Try descriptions like what the person looks like, their hobbies or favorite things to do, phrases or actions which are always associated with them, etc.

What I'm Thankful For

Instead of having an adult say grace at Thanksgiving dinner, try having the children say what they are thankful for. If your child will be too shy, have him write (or dictate) it in advance.



One Room Schoolhouse:

An older child can write out what he is thankful for on a scroll, perhaps in calligraphy, and tie it with a ribbon. After the Thanksgiving dinner, these scrolls can be saved in a special box. A collection of these will be treasured in future years, as your child looks back to see how he has changed over time – as well as what has remained important.

Making Butter

Although making the Thanksgiving dinner can be a monumental and sometimes hectic undertaking, have your child help with at least one food. One easy food (and one which nearly everyone at the table will partake of) is butter. Your child will be thrilled to help you out in an authentic way and to contribute to the delicious meal.

Making butter with a small child is amazingly easy. All you need is heavy cream, a marble, and a clean jar:

<http://webexhibits.org/butter/doityourself.html>

Welcoming the Day

Morning Verse

Being thankful for family, friends, food and shelter, and the beauty of the natural world is important throughout the year, not just on Thanksgiving Day. A morning verse is a wonderful way for you and your child to share a few quiet moments together expressing your joy at waking up and starting a beautiful new day. Find morning verse suggestions at <http://www.waldorfhomeschoolers.com/blessings.htm>.

The good morning message in Giving Thanks is traditionally said at the beginning of each day and would also make a wonderful daily verse.

Song – “Morning Has Broken”

The beautiful song “Morning Has Broken” was recorded by Cat Williams as a hymn but first written as a poem by Eleanor Farjeon.

Lyrics: <http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=289>

Singing this song together would be a wonderful way to start each day!

Blessing

What is the importance of saying a blessing before each meal? Quoted from <http://www.waldorfhomeschoolers.com/blessings.htm>:

**Cultivate Mindfulness.
See gratitude as a daily practice.
In pictures, words and songs,
let children express a grateful heart.**

Gratitude & Reverence

Rudolf Steiner stated "If he sees that everyone who stands in some kind of relationship to him in the outer world shows gratitude for what he receives from this world; if, in confronting the outer world and wanting to imitate it, the child sees the kind of gestures that express gratitude, then a great deal is done towards establishing in him the right moral human attitude. ***Gratitude is what belongs to the first seven years of life.***"

Steiner also wrote "If one observes children, who by a right upbringing, have developed a natural reverence for the grownups and their surroundings, and if one follows them through their various stages of life, one can discover that their feelings of reverence and devotion in childhood are gradually being transformed during the years leading to old age. A adults such persons may have a healing effect upon their fellow man so that by their mere presence, or through the tone of their voice, or perhaps by a single glance they can spread inner peace to others. Their presence can be a blessing because as children they have learned to venerate and to pray the right way. No hands can bless in old age, unless in childhood they have been folded in prayer."

Of course, these qualities cannot be taught. They must be modeled by the adult and imitated by the young child. They must "live" within the parents.

(source: Steiner Human Values & Education and The Renewal of Education)

Waldorf Teachers consider the Moral education of children to be one of their primary tasks. Children should say grace before each meal to express their reverence for the earth and her gifts.... Gratitude is the basis for love. When children deepen their appreciation for the natural world, they deepen their love for all of creation.

In my own experience, children benefit tremendously from the rhythm of saying a daily morning verse and reciting a blessing before each meal. In my notes for the babysitter I write down our blessing because my daughter feels so strongly about it and will not allow it to be skipped. Even my two year old lisps "Earth give" at the beginning of each meal. I can tell by the way they do it religiously at the beginning of each meal that the routine gives them comfort. It feels right.

Bedtime Prayers

Regardless of your religion, bedtime is a good time to say a little thank you for the gift of each day. Talk with your child about the good things that have happened or use it as a time to discuss anything which is bothering her. Bedtime is a cherished chance for one-on-one time between parent and child. [A Journey Through Time in Verse and Rhyme](#) is a treasury of verses, blessings, and prayers and can be used to enrich your time together throughout the day. If you want to begin praying with your child, use [Can I Pray With My Eyes Open?](#) as a way of introducing the topic.

Verses, blessing and prayers provide wonderful steady rhythms for your child throughout the day and are the foundation of a happy secure childhood. Please don't hesitate to contact me or the Group for more sources and suggestions.

Community Giving

If you volunteer together as a family at a soup kitchen, give to a canned food drive, or do any other type of charity work or community giving, use the books The Three Questions or We Share One World to talk with your child about the importance of helping others.

Closing Verse

Use this verse to end your time together on a high note, striving to go forth and made the rest of the day a good one. Like the opening verse, lighting a candle is customary and provides a sense of closure. When the candle is blown out, you will go forward feeling positive about the next thing to come your way.

The golden sun so great and bright
Warms the world with all its might.
It makes the dark earth green and fair,
Attends each thing with ceaseless care.
It shines on blossom, stone, and tree,
On bird and beast, on you and me.
So may each deed throughout the day,
May everything we do and say
Be bright and strong and true,
Oh, golden sun, like you!

OTHER IDEAS

Cooking

In general, we do not recommend specific cooking activities because many children and families have restricted diets such as vegan or vegetarian, gluten-free, kosher, etc. However, cooking is always a wonderful activity for a child to participate in. Bearing in mind any food allergies, and common-sense kitchen safety, consider preparing a simple recipe with the child. Children love to wash vegetables, measure and mix ingredients, and set the table for a meal. Preparing and eating a snack is always popular!

Play

Don't forget the many benefits of unguided imaginative play. You need to stay nearby for safety's sake, if the child is in an unfamiliar environment or you aren't certain what should or should not be childproofed. All children need daily time to play. In the preschool years, play is the WORK of the young child. Prepare an appropriate play space and then stay out of it as much as you can; give the child the simplest and highest quality toys you can find such as large pieces of cloth, blocks, dolls, and materials from nature (such as pinecones, feathers, or shells). Avoid plastic toys. Consider a basin of water and some measuring cups or add some dish detergent and give the child a whisk. The more open-ended a material, the more of the child will be brought forth in playing with it. The more structured a material, the less will be required of the child – and the less he will grow and develop when playing with it. As a simple test, try playing with the toys yourself. If you find you tire of a thing quickly, so will a child!

Helping

Helping around the home is an essential part of any Waldorf curriculum. It is not necessary to put a child in front of the television while you do the dishes or sort the laundry into lights and darks; let the child help you. Even if you have an automatic dishwasher, a child can help by rinsing the dishes before they are loaded. Children love to do work that they know is truly helpful and all young children thrive in situations where they are allowed to imitate an adult. Washing the dog, washing the car, sweeping or dusting, repotting houseplants, feeding the cats, setting and clearing the table... all of these are wonderful activities to do with a preschool-aged child.

PLANNER

Activities: highlight the activities you would like to do

Opening Verse

Finding a Story Time Program

Stories

- Harvest by Kris Waldherr
- Giving Thanks:
A Native American Good Morning Message by Jake Swamp
- A Journey Through Time in Verse and Rhyme ed. by Heather Thomas
- Can I Pray With My Eyes Open? by Susan Taylor Brown
- The Three Questions by Jon J. Muth
- We Share One World by Jane E. Hoffelt

Handwork Projects:

Silhouette Garland
Adding Rings
Thanksgiving Decorations
Place Cards
What I'm Thankful For
Making Butter

Welcoming the Day

Morning Verse
Song – "Morning Has Broken"

Blessing

Bedtime Prayers

Community Giving

Cooking

Play

Helping

Closing Verse

PLANNER

Book List:

list the books you will be reading
feel free to substitute other books you may have on hand
which relate to this theme

Materials:

list all materials required for your chosen activities

Please feel free to contact me at any time at waldorf_curric@yahoo.com.