

unit design

Each unit is made up of eight components: Music & Movement, Art, Nature, Cooking, Play, Handwork, Helping, and Stories.

Music & Movement

A large variety of social activities can be used for the Music & Movement component -- including gym classes, music classes, yoga or other exercise classes -- or you can simply dance, exercise, and make music at home. I highly recommend Kindermusik classes; look in your local area for other Music & Movement activities. And don't forget to expose your child to Music & Movement through live performances. Although doing exercise videos with your child at home works well -- and is a wonderful way to make sure exercise is a part of your own day! -- watching performances on TV or video does not come anywhere close to the real experience and should be avoided.

Art

Process -- not product -- is the emphasis of Art time. Use this time to explore thoroughly the techniques and skills used when working with a material. When it comes time to use the art materials in creating handwork, your child will be confident and able. Art should be discarded daily and in front of your child. Be sure that your child understands that art activities are for learning, for exploration, and are not to be kept. Even many adults in our society are afraid to experiment with art materials because "it won't look right"; nip this attitude in the bud!

Visiting art exhibits, once your child is a little older, is also a part of Art. Look in your newspaper for local galleries; often there will even be art exhibits at the local courthouse or coffee house. Show your child that art can be found in all places. Sculpture gardens are also a wonderful outing for Waldorf homeschooling -- a nice blend of Art and Nature.

Nature

Try to explore nature with your child as often as possible. Even walking your dog daily is an opportunity to be outside and to observe the natural world. Change the items on your nature table often as your child becomes aware of what is changing outside. Don't forget that nature can be experienced indoors as well through the growing of plants.

Cooking

Cooking is separate from other kinds of Helping because so many quality things are learned during this time. It is similar to Handwork, as well, in that it should have an authentic context; have your child prepare food for the entire family. When children help provide daily sustenance for their families, it is a very real way for them to express the love they feel for those family members -- just as it is for you!

Play

Keep Play as an empty square – but always have it in your planbook. It is a good reminder that all children need daily time to play, preferably away from adults. Unguided imaginative play is crucial for the development of the young child – play is their WORK and its importance cannot be overstated. Stay out of it as much as you can; also, try not to interfere too much in the play between your child and siblings or friends when conflicts break out. A good deal of socialization takes place as children work among themselves to resolve problems.

Your job as a parent is to provide a safe place for the children to play and to give them the best quality toys you can, such as play silks, blocks, simple dolls, and materials from nature. The more open-ended a material, the more of your child will be brought forth in playing with it. The more structured a material, the less will be required of your child – and the less your child 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 your child.

Handwork

A proper approach to handwork is absolutely essential; otherwise, nothing will be gained from doing it. Handwork must have an authentic context – it must be truly useful around the home and must be completed slowly, deliberately, and with pride. As children grow, they benefit from the lessons learned in doing handwork – that taking your time, following all the steps, and doing your best work will result in a product of which you can be proud. Take the time to do handwork of your own, as well as teaching it to your child. Knitting, crochet, weaving, felting, carpentry, & etc. are wonderfully relaxing for you and will show your child that handwork is truly authentic.

Helping

Helping around the home is an essential part of any Waldorf curriculum. It can be very difficult when transitioning to a Waldorf approach to parenting to remember to have your child share in your chores. Use this space in the planbook as a daily reminder – list specific tasks your child can be a part of each day. Or, if you are already accustomed to sharing your home chores with your child, simply fill this section in after the day is done.

Stories

Each unit consists of 15 recommended stories to be read within the six weeks. You can and should revisit the stories as often as you or your child wish. The stories are of differing lengths and styles and some may appeal more to older or to younger children. Please do read each story at least once, however, to allow your child exposure to the full breadth of the topic. An ideal time for these stories is as part of your bedtime ritual.

Remember that storytime or puppet shows at your local library can be a part of your plans for the day but DO NOT take place of reading one-on-one with your child. This personal connection and quiet nurturing time is a very different experience than the social one of experiencing a story in a group.

Parent Preparation

You don't have to have formal education training to be a homeschooling parent. It does help to be familiar with the philosophy behind whatever program you choose, however. The Waldorf approach to the preschool years is based on what is developmentally appropriate for children at this stage of their life. Each unit contains recommended readings for all parents/caregivers, including those who are not actively teaching. It is best for all the key adults in a child's life to share a philosophical approach to parenting, for consistency in child-rearing. The recommended readings will help strengthen your understanding both of your child's development and of the activities in the unit.

The most vital part of the unit, however, is something which cannot be packaged. It's you, the parent and instructor. Your mental preparedness for school is a key part of each day and it is your main task each morning. Many people do school all year round; don't hesitate to take off whatever time helps you to stay balanced. We do school 5 days a week but we do Tues/Wed/Thurs and Sat/Sun. This is so I can do my errands such as doctor appointments and shopping on weekdays and so we can take advantage of relevant activities which occur on weekends. Spreading out my days off also helps me stay on top of my lesson planning and the housework and helps me feel relaxed and balanced. This is a crucial part of allowing me to teach effectively and it has kept me happy with my decision to homeschool.

Although you are not passing on a large amount of "academic" knowledge to your children in these units, you are at all times passing on large amounts of yourself and your attitudes. Make sure you are at your best! The Waldorf philosophy allows you to integrate your children into your lives without you – as a person – being left out. Taking time to exercise each day, walk outside, prepare nutritious meals, fold laundry, wash dishes, do some handwork, and read – all of these things help make you a balanced and relaxed person. Best of all, you are sharing each of these things with your child. Each of you also gets some personal time each day, time when your child plays and can be alone with his thoughts and you can be alone with yours.

Truthfully, before I discovered the Waldorf method, I felt like my preschool daughter was always in the way. Here I was trying to get important things done and she was constantly underfoot. I knew she needed more attention, but I thought my only option was to put the dishes and laundry on hold so I could take care of my parental obligations. And it came through loud and clear; when I tried to play with her, she knew that my mind was elsewhere. Once I discovered Waldorf and described it to my husband, he said with certainty, "That's what you need to be doing". And I discovered that Waldorf homeschooling is more of an approach to parenting than it is an academic regime – it's flexible, it's fun, and it absolutely changed my life. And I'm so happy to be able to share it with you!

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

RHYTHMS UNIT

What are the rhythms in your child's life?

This unit focuses on exploring these rhythms. The goal is not necessarily to make your child consciously aware of them... and we are not studying the blood pumping function of the parts of the human heart here, nor how our lungs filter the air we breathe... but for you to take the time to meditate on the rhythms of daily life and how to incorporate a sensitivity to them into your day. Here are some examples:

breathing in and out

A consciousness of our breathing helps us to feel a connection to our life force. Try to spend some time each morning in prayer or meditation to feel revived and more ready for your day. Slow deep breathing will help to calm a troubled child. Use the cards from The Massage Deck to help you learn new ways to soothe your child. Perhaps you can add a massage to your child's bedtime routine – even 5 or 10 minutes will make a big difference in reconnecting with your child – or make it a special part of the weekend. After bathtime is the perfect time to introduce a massage. Use a lightweight unscented oil (many essential oils are too strong for young children and not considered safe) such as grapeseed oil, available at many supermarkets, or you can simply use cornstarch to lubricate your hands. Darken the room (again, bedtime is the perfect time for this) and light a candle. You may choose to have soft music on or have the room be quiet. Your child will naturally begin to relax and breathe more slowly and deeply.

Massage in and of itself is a very rhythmical activity. Your child will be becoming aware of each of his body parts slowly and one at a time, a very different feeling from a rush of sensation from all over while you run and play. Enjoy reading the book Here Are My Hands which ends with the body part "skin", one which we usually don't talk about with children but which we can help them to be aware of with a massage.

heartbeat

The body part "heart" is also one which is rarely introduced to children at this age. I remember the day when my daughter realized she had parts inside of her. It's not obvious, you know, that there's something there that you can't see. Bones were the first discovery and a constant source of amazement. She came to me when she discovered her ankle (at about four years old) and said, Mommy, I have something in my foot. I said, yes, that's a bone. That is your ankle. For several weeks, she felt all over her body and every time she felt one, she would come running to me saying, Mommy, I have a bone! One day she was lying on my chest, cuddling with me, when she started telling me she could hear something. I told her it was my heart. Then I had her put her hand on her chest so she could feel her own heartbeat. We didn't talk about what the heart does, what it looks like, why it beats, anything like that. No

charts, no pictures. I just let her delight in discovering it. That evening she was so excited to tell her father that she had a heart. She still loves to put her hand on her chest and feel her heartbeat. It is very constant and that makes it soothing to a child.

sleeping and awake time

One of the most obvious rhythms to a child is sleeping and waking. You already do this in your day, of course, but that doesn't mean that spending some time thinking about it wouldn't be worthwhile. Is your bedtime routine everything you want it to be? What about the space where your child sleeps? Is it cozy, soothing? Does your child have trouble sleeping? How does your child start her day? Is it with delight, so happy to welcome a new day, or is it a struggle? Would you like to incorporate some new nighttime or morning verses or a prayer? How your child wakes up has a lot to do with how she falls asleep – it is all connected. Think through everything. Reevaluate it constantly to make sure you are meeting all the needs of your child.

Contraction and expansion is something that Waldorf teachers talk a lot about. There should be a rhythm to your daily activities, above and beyond just sleeping and waking. Perhaps breakfast is a quiet time, followed by some noisy playtime. A quiet snack and a nap follows playtime. We run around and play outside before bedtime so that we are ready to rest. However you organize your day, make sure there is a breathing in, followed by a breathing out. Every parent knows this instinctively – you can only sit quietly on a chair at the doctor's office and play with a toy before you have to climb down and run all around being noisy. Children can't be still for too long. They also can't be active for too long because they become tired and cranky. Follow your instincts and look at your child. What does he or she need? Reevaluate your daily schedule to make sure it is a good rhythm for your child.

Sleeping and awake time also applies to parents! Are you getting enough sleep? Perhaps the TV should be turned off a little sooner (or put down your knitting!) and make sure you are getting what you need in your daily rhythm. Taking good care of yourself will teach your children how to take good care of themselves. Remember that the birth-7 stage is all about imitation. Make sure you are the person you want your child to be imitating.

sunrise and sunset

Another obvious rhythm, this one also requires some thought. How can you make your child more aware of the cycle of the sun? In my family, we wake up when the sun wakes up and go to bed when the sun goes to bed. This means long days during the summer, of course, but isn't that what summer is all about? Although my children don't have a sense of time, they know that we start to prepare dinner when the sky looks a certain way, and that helps them to have a sense of what is coming next, even without being able to read a clock. They also know that I have a plan for the day, which is also a great comfort to a child.

Taking your family camping is another way to be aware of the sunrise and sunset, especially if it's not practical for you to set your family's clock around the sun. Many families go camping with their children to get "back to nature" – if you don't, then consider if there is a way you can begin to. It doesn't have to be expensive. Maybe you know a family who has a screen porch. You can visit them and sleep out on the porch with your kids. Maybe you know someone with a deck and you can all camp out on the deck. The idea is to be able to see the night sky as it changes, not so much to be sleeping on the ground. Do the best you can with what you have.

the warmth of the day and the coolness of the night

The changing temperatures of the day and night is another thing that children have become removed from. With our climate controlled buildings, not only is this daytime cycle lost, but often also the seasonal one as well. Try to turn off your air conditioning and open your windows for a while. This is proven to be good for the health of your children, as well. Modern building materials often off-gas harmful chemicals into the air and unless you let your home "breathe", they will begin to build up. (If this isn't possible, try to have a houseplant in every room to clean your air: <http://www.bayweekly.com/year06/issuexiv25/earthtalkxiv25.html>).

waves and the tide

In order to have your child experience high and low tide, you'll have to spend an entire day at the beach several times. This is not that difficult in the summer, although you'll want to take a sun umbrella to keep your child from being burned. The easiest way to make the advancing of the waves clear is to build a sand sculpture somewhat close to the edge of the water and then watch it be overtaken. The next time, build your sculpture at high tide! Taking boat trips is a wonderful way to observe the motion of waves first-hand. Make sure you have child-size safety vests with you. Try to experience some of the marine life as well. It is good for your child to experience the ocean as its own world, instead of having the idea that it is akin to a giant bathtub.

the element of water

Exploring the four elements is an important part of the Rhythms unit. Explorations in water include building a water feature for your garden, playing in rivers and streams, visiting the ocean, and using water in outside playtime.

the element of air

Experience the element of air by playing with wind (kites, bubbles, and so on), making a windchime, and standing outside and watching a storm come up. It is amazing to a child how strong the wind gets before a thunderstorm and how the trees begin to "dance". In your imaginative play, *be* trees in the wind, bowing and swaying.

the element of fire

Although fire is an important element for children to experience, safety is paramount. Safe explorations of fire include having candles lit at dinnertime, roasting marshmallows over a campfire, and doing art work with charcoal.

the element of earth

Earth play is especially important at this age. Although sandboxes are common, we recommend adding a clay pit to your child's outside play area as well. Using Educating the Will as your guide, set up this important play space for your child. Children at Play speaks eloquently about the need for playing in the four elements. If you have family members which are against it – especially if they use the reasons “it is too messy” and “they should be learning”, share this book. If you do not live in an area with an outside play space, try to have a clay pit added to a neighborhood park. Spring: Nature Activities for Children will help you in this campaign as well; it is quite inspirational.

Clay is also the art focus for this unit, which gives your child plenty of opportunities to explore it, as well as how firing the clay (something which is introduced for the first time here) causes it to change into something quite different.

the changing of the seasons

Although the Rhythms unit is a Spring unit, use it to jumpstart an increased awareness of the seasons all year round by adding a Nature table to your school room (if you don't have one already). If you don't have a school room, or you have child-proofing issues, use a high shelf or a fireplace mantel. The Nature Corner is an invaluable book in this regard.

As a side note, creating figures for the Nature table is important handwork for adults. It gives us that reconnection with the rhythms of the natural world which we are often lacking. Not to mention that making the small figures is often very rhythmical and soothing. If you haven't yet, try dry felting – figures may be made very quickly in this way and the method is quite simple. The motion of felting is a wonderful way to get out tension. Find help with dry felting here: <http://www.allfiberarts.com/cs/felting.htm> or visit the Waldorf Curriculum Group homepage and search for messages 755 and 756 to see the notes I posted from my workshop with Suzanne Down.

Another rhythmical handwork project is knitting. This is also recommended for adults – we have an entire page of our website dedicated to helping you find patterns for farm animals you may want to make for your child: http://www.waldorfcurriculum.com/Articles/knit_animals.html

Setting up the farm scene is an important part of this unit. If you can, try to sew the farmhouse by hand, and let your child help pick the embellishments. The complete

farm scene doesn't have to be ready by the start of the unit – it is fine for your child to see you working on parts of it – but it is best for him to have the entire scene to play with by the end of the unit, as he will want to reenact some of the things he has seen on his farm visits.

birth and life

We recommend a lot of farm visits as part of the Rhythms unit. For one thing, Spring is the best time to see baby animals being born, seeds being sown, and all kinds of activities which really help you to feel that life is beginning again. Having your child experience "birth" in this way is very age appropriate. It's also exciting and fun. If you have a family member or friend with a farm, try to do an extended visit, such as a week-long stay. If not, find a farm near you which allows visits or does school programs and get your kids there as often as possible. Use this link to find a farm near you:

http://www.cookiemag.com/travel/article/2006/03/tra200603_01

death and decay

The flipside of birth, of course, is death. Although we recommend a few books in the Rhythms unit to help your child deal with the loss of a loved one (and have more listed here:

http://www.amazon.com/gp/richpub/listmania/fullview/RC8VQ6BJF23WW/ref=cm_lm_byauthor_title_full/104-9798876-7955127), the best way to have your child experience death and decay is through having a garden. The idea of going back to the soil and resting is well told in And the Good Brown Earth. Use Roots, Shoots, Buckets and Boots to inspire your garden planning – if you don't have a yard, be sure to check out her ideas for container gardens – and plant as wide a variety of plants as possible.

Flowers will decorate your dining room table, your child's bedroom, and have a place of honor on the Nature table. The blossoms you pick will die, even if placed in water. Your child can learn to find and save the seeds so that you can plant new flowers next year.

When you plant vegetables (Roots, Shoots, Buckets and Boots has lots of suggestions in her top 20 plants for children), your child can watch produce appear out of nowhere, from the end of a dying blossom – amazing! – see it ripen, pick and eat it, or compost it. A compost pile is a must-have. It is good for your children to see just how many things come from plants and, therefore, are compostable (like paper napkins). A compost bucket in your kitchen doesn't have to be messy and smelly. We just have a bowl which we put everything into as each meal is prepared and then one of the children runs out and puts it in the compost pile as we get the table ready for dinner. I wash the bowl at the end of the day. As a special project, you can have your child make a special bowl or pot for composting as part of your clay explorations – have it fired and paint it with pictures of plants, fruits, vegetables, worms and soil, and so on.

Trees take a loooong time to grow big and are also a good thing to plant. Your child will be amazed to see how long it is taking the tree to grow, compared to your other plants, and will gain a deeper respect for just how old the mature trees around your house (or in the park) are. You don't have to cut down a tree and count its rings to give your child an idea of its age. I still am amazed to see the dogwood tree my mother planted when we were children – small enough that I could hang Easter eggs or Christmas ornaments on the top branch – which now is taller than our house. Watching something grow never gets old. Nature walks also help with the idea of decay... seeing fallen trees and logs slowly breaking down is fascinating for kids. Try reading [A Log's Life](#).

Finally, I chose the book [As Big As You](#) for this unit to help your child to understand that, like the tree, he too is growing bigger although it happens too slowly to see. [The Growing Story](#) by Ruth Krauss is also a good book for this.

getting dressed and undressed

Your preschool child is growing more and more independent. Getting himself dressed and undressed is part of that. If you find that you walk into your playroom and there's a naked child in there, it may be that your child is more interested in how to put clothes on and take them off than in actually being covered and warm. In the Rhythms unit, we suggest making Montessori-style dressing frames so your child can practice each type of fastener. Make them as varied as you want (and start shopping estate sales for vintage collections of sewing notions – you can often get a LOT for a very cheap price). The classic collection includes buttons (with a button hook!) Try snaps, zippers, buckles, laces, bowties, and hooks and eyes. If you make a lacing frame, fasten the laces securely to the frame, so they can be unlaced and re-laced but the string can't be removed and get wrapped around someone's neck. The four elements of the Montessori Practical Life curriculum are order, concentration, coordination, and independence. All of these are easily compatible with Waldorf in the preschool years.

**"The essence of independence is to be able to do something for one's self."
Maria Montessori - The Absorbent Mind, ch.14, Intelligence and the Hand**

For this unit, we also introduce teaching your child how to tie his shoes (loop it, swoop it, and pull), an essential preschool skill and which has been led up to by the finger knitting taught in the Texture unit. A bowtie frame will help your child to practice this skill over and over.

Weaving, with its over and under motion, is also part of the Rhythms unit. In addition to practical items, such as placemats, which we mention in the curriculum, consider making a weaving frame for your playroom – similar to the dressing frames – where the ribbons are permanently fastened to the frame (such as here: http://www.magiccabin.com/magiccabin/product.do?section_id=0&bc=1004&pgc=1053&cmvalue=MCD|0|Normal%20Search%20Result|P1). In this way, your child can explore the motions of weaving over and over.

ESSENTIAL STORIES

A House for Hermit Crab. Eric Carle.

Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices. Paul Fleischman.

Song of the Swallows. Leo Politi.

I am a Bunny. Ole Risom. illustrated by Richard Scarry.

Where Butterflies Grow. by Joanne Ryder. pictures by Lynne Cherry.

In Every Moon There Is a Face. poem by Charles Mathes. illustrations by Arlene Graston.

Pancakes, Pancakes! Eric Carle.

As Big As You. Elaine Greenstein.

The Summerfolk. written and illustrated by Doris Burn.

And the Good Brown Earth. Kathy Henderson.

When Clay Sings. by Byrd Baylor. illustrated by Tom Bahti.

When the Wind Stops. by Charlotte Zolotow. illustrated by Stefano Vitale.

Child of Faerie, Child of Earth. Jane Yolen. Jane Dyer.

The Lion and the Little Red Bird. story and pictures by Elisa Kleven.

Badger's Parting Gifts. Susan Varley.

Visit waldorfcriculum.com for links to purchase unit materials, additional Waldorf resources & a community forum on Waldorf education.

ESSENTIAL STORIES

For read-alouds at bedtime:

The Tales of Tiptoes Lightly: The Bee Who Lost His Buzz, Pumpkin Crow, Lucy Goose and the Half-Egg.

The Festival of Stones: Autumn and Winter Tales of Tiptoes Lightly.

Big-Stamp Two-Toes, the Barefoot Giant: Spring Tales of Tiptoes Lightly.
all of these books are by Reg Down.

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ALSO RECOMMENDED

MUSIC & MOVEMENT

The Massage Deck: 50 Soothing Massage Techniques. by Katy Dreyfuss.

Here Are My Hands. by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault. illustrated by Ted Rand.

ART

Educating the Will. by Michael Howard. (available from Bob & Nancy's Bookshop: www.waldorfbooks.com)

The Great Clay Adventure: Creative Handbuilding Projects for Young Artists. Ellen Kong.

NATURE

Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots: Gardening Together with Children. Sharon Lovejoy.

HANDWORK

Spring: Nature Activities for Children. Irmgard Kutsch and Brigitte Walden. (also available from Bob & Nancy's)

The Nature Corner: Celebrating the Year's Cycle with a Seasonal Tableau. M v Leeuwen & J Moeskops.

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ALSO RECOMMENDED

PLAY

How Children Play. Ingeborg Haller.

Looking Forward: Games, rhymes and exercises to help children develop their learning abilities. Molly von Heider.
This book also includes a section called "Gardening with Children", by Hugh Peters and Fiona von Heider.

- Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter game from Three Sisters Toys
<http://www.threesisterstoys.com/storedetail.asp?item=10000327&ItemName=Spring,%20Summer,%20Autumn,%20Winter>
- farm scene for pretend play – farmhouse or stable, fences, terrascapes (dyed silks or cotton cloths)
- farm animals – carved wood, knitted or felt
- Kindermusik shaker eggs
<http://www.kindermusik.com/store/trans/productDetailForm.asp?maxItems=26&imgid=320&Seq=7&CatID=1330&fromh=-1&fromw=-1&tow=-1&toh=-1>

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WEEK ONE:

FROM _____ TO _____

notes for next week:

Music & Movement						
Art						
Nature						
Cooking						
Play						
Handwork						
Helping						
Stories						

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WEEK TWO:

FROM _____ TO _____

notes for next week:

Music & Movement						
Art						
Nature						
Cooking						
Play						
Handwork						
Helping						
Stories						

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WEEK THREE:

FROM _____ TO _____

notes for next week:

Music & Movement						
Art						
Nature						
Cooking						
Play						
Handwork						
Helping						
Stories						

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WEEK FOUR:

FROM _____ TO _____

notes for next week:

Music & Movement						
Art						
Nature						
Cooking						
Play						
Handwork						
Helping						
Stories						

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WEEK FIVE:

FROM _____ TO _____

notes for next week:

Music & Movement						
Art						
Nature						
Cooking						
Play						
Handwork						
Helping						
Stories						

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WEEK SIX:

FROM _____ TO _____

notes for next week:

Music & Movement						
Art						
Nature						
Cooking						
Play						
Handwork						
Helping						
Stories						

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JOURNAL: WEEK ONE

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JOURNAL: WEEK TWO

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JOURNAL: WEEK THREE

Visit waldorfcurriculum.com for links to purchase unit materials, additional Waldorf resources & a community forum on Waldorf education.

JOURNAL: WEEK FOUR

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JOURNAL: WEEK FIVE

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JOURNAL: WEEK SIX

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK ONE

ART

These projects are taken from The Great Clay Adventure. Before beginning, read Chapter 1: Fundamentals.

This book also includes interdisciplinary and multicultural links which you can use if doing these projects with your older children as well.

Day One:

Knee and Elbow Pots page 8

Day Two:

Pinch Pots page 12

Day Three:

Coil Beads page 16

Read When Clay Sings. Take your children to a museum to see collections of ancient pottery. Visit Native American cultural sites and learn more about the tribes from your area.

NATURE

Day One:

Take a Nature walk and choose new items for your Nature table to reflect the current season. What silks best represent the colors outside? What natural items did you find on your walk to add to the table?

Day Two:

Using The Nature Corner as your guide, add a figure or two to your table. The tableau for Early Spring contains Mother Earth and her root children (which may be sewn or crocheted – see pictures of my attempt at a crochet root child and the pattern directions at http://www.waldorfcriculum.com/Articles/learn_to_crochet.html#root_child); when Spring comes, the Spring fairy is added and the root

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK ONE CONTINUED

children blossom into flower children. These tableaux are most effective if they are prepared at night when your child is asleep, so do take the time. It is such a magical experience when he wakes up to the newness of it all.

Day Three:

With your child, choose the garden(s) from Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots that you would like to plant together. Even if you live in an area with very little space, be sure to check out her list of 20 must-have plants for children (perhaps you can grow just one) or her container garden suggestions on page 39.

HANDWORK

Day One:

Building on the finger knitting taught to your child in the Texture unit (<http://www.waldorfcriculum.com/Texture/texturehome.html>), give your child a "knitting Nancy". You can purchase these or make your own: <http://www.allfreecrafts.com/kids/corker.shtml>. This craft is also called "spool knitting", or "corking".

The long coil of yarn can be used in many projects; here are some ideas:

<http://www.needlepointers.com/displaypage.aspx?ArticleID=26639&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.hasbro.com%2fcommon%2finstruct%2fKnittingSpool.PDF>.

Even without direction, your child will come up with many uses for her yarn. Let her be creative. Older children love to use the cords in their imaginative play and a basket of them in various colors is a nice addition to the playroom.

* If you have a child under the age of 3 in your playroom, don't leave a basket of these out for imaginative play time, as they present a choking hazard.

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK ONE CONTINUED

Day Two:

In this unit, we will be focusing on projects which allow your child to experience all of the four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. This is done partly through art and handwork projects, and partly by reinventing the outdoor play space your children currently have.

For your own background, begin by reading Educating the Will. Now, take a walk around your backyard (or see if you can persuade a group of people to make changes to your neighborhood park, or another kid-friendly community space) with Spring: Nature Activities for Children in hand. Although this book is full of wonderful ideas, focus on the April chapter right now: "Creating garden spaces". Read through pages 36-39 and then complete the activities for "What to Consider When Landscaping a Garden." The Action Guidelines are especially important. Your child can help with this too, when it comes to identifying what plants and animals currently use the space. Spend some time sitting quietly and observing what you see. Then it is your job as the adult to ponder how to redefine the space.

If your family has done the entirety of our preschool program, you probably already have a dye garden and a sanctuary garden (maybe even a soap garden!), and are planning to add some fruits and vegetables from the plans in Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots. Some of those plans also incorporate outdoor play spaces, such as the Sunflower House (page 27) and the Moon Garden (page 69) – the two my family is choosing to do. But also think about the needs of your children to play and explore in your yard, and what you can add to help them develop large motor skills and balance (such as the climbing wall and tree stump spiral for climbing and sitting, both pictured on page 43 of Spring: Nature Activities for Children) and, especially, to promote rich experiences with the four elements.

The picture on page 42 of Spring: Nature Activities for Children of the redeveloped park in Wiehl, Germany is inspirational!

Day Three:

In this unit, you will be doing a lot of digging and carrying things in your outdoor space. Provide your child with a child-size wheelbarrow, so that he can actively participate as much as possible. Buy one, or build one together: http://eartheasy.com/child's_wheelbarrow.htm.

Day Four:

Build the "Tree stump spiral for climbing and sitting" from Spring: Nature Activities for Children, page 43.

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK TWO

ART

These projects are taken from The Great Clay Adventure. As your child continues to develop his skills with clay, each new experience builds upon the last. This week, your child will begin to fire his sculptures – a completely new experience! All of the clay projects in our preschool program up until this point have been done with self-hardening clay. Exposing the clay (earth) to the heat of the kiln (fire) is fascinating to children. So, too, is changing the qualities of the clay by exposing it to water. Earth, fire, water, and air... they all can be explored through pottery. In fact, working with clay is absolutely vital to the development of young children. Enjoy these activities!

Day One:

Turtles page 22

Day Two:

Coil Animals page 25

Day Three:

Owls page 36

NATURE

These projects are taken from Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots: Gardening Together with Children. This week you will be covering the basics of preparing for a new garden. Although your child will be eager to plant, it is important for you to teach him to how prepare. My motto: haste makes waste. Remember that birth-7 is the age of imitation, so HOW you do school is more important than WHAT you do. Take your time and you will be teaching valuable life skills.

Day One:

Choosing a Site page 137

Explorer's Kit page 137

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK TWO CONTINUED

Day Two:

Get to Know Your Soil page 138

The Underground Connection page 138

Also, if you have older children, you can have them test the soil's pH (page 140) and choose the amendments for tomorrow's project. Otherwise, this is a job for you to do.

Day Three:

Preparing the Soil page 140

HANDWORK

Day One:

Building upon your child's experiences with the knitting Nancy (although your child can, of course, continue to use it throughout the unit), today you will teach your child how to tie his own shoes! This is a lot of fun and very exciting, provided your child is successful fairly quickly and doesn't become discouraged. I recommend that you sit behind your child and put your arms around him to show him. My husband learned by watching other people tie their shoes so he does it completely backwards (a mirror image of the way I do it). Although there are lots of little phrases and songs and verses for this, my favorite is "loop it, swoop it, and pull". Believe it or not, there is an entire website devoted to the various ways of tying your shoes – complete with illustrations of SEVENTEEN shoelace knots! (<http://www.fieggen.com/shoelace/knots.htm>) Simply practice until you find a method that you think will be easiest for your child to learn, then teach it to him. If it doesn't work, wait a few weeks and then give him an alternative. The key is to not make it stressful. Also, if you are teaching yourself how to tie several new knots, you can work alongside one another. It is good for children to see grown-ups learning new things and – who knows – he may catch on before you do!

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK TWO

CONTINUED

Day Two:

Even if your child doesn't have shoes with laces, you can still give him plenty of experience to try tying knots. Make a Montessori-style dressing frame by making a 20 inch x 20 inch frame out of slender wood. Stretch a piece of fabric (whatever piece of cotton you have in your scrap pile) over the frame by stapling in the center of each side first and then, pulling tightly, working your way out from the center and stapling around all the edges. Then sew various pairs of ribbon, yarn, or seam binding tape onto the cloth to make a series of bow-tying practice areas. See a picture: <http://www.montessorimaterials.com/Practical%20Life.htm>

Day Three:

Make a series of dressing frames, one for each type of fastener your child encounters in his clothing. Some examples are:

- zippers
- hooks & eyes
- buckles
- buttons (large and small)
- Velcro
- snaps

A collection of sewing odds & ends should be sufficient for your purposes and the entire project is both very cheap and very practical. If you don't have a collection of fasteners, consider buying a lot of vintage sewing items on eBay. They are usually inexpensive. You can also check estate sales and yard sales.

You might also want to build a wooden box or crate to store your frames in. Give your child access to the dressing frames by placing them in the playroom. When you see that they are no longer needed, donate them to a local preschool or child care center.

Day Four:

Another outdoors project – a play pit. Using the directions from Spring: Nature Activities for Children, on page 57, build a clay pit such as is described in Educating the Will (page 71). Fill it with a hundred pounds of clay. To find clay, visit your local pottery shop and ask them for their supplier. Buying it locally will save you a lot of money and it's nearly impossible to search online for "clay" successfully.

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK THREE

CONTINUED

baby chicks, otherwise your hens will lay unfertilized eggs). Chickens are not expensive to keep. Do some research and find out if this is feasible in your area. It can't hurt to check it out!

Day Two:

Fruit & Vegetable Experiences

Find a farm near you which is raising fruits or vegetables. These will vary based on your region. Look for signs which say You Pick, or watch the farmers sowing seeds or planting seedlings. Your child will be all the more excited to plant your flower and vegetable gardens from Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots after seeing this. Take home some farm fresh produce to eat.

Try if you can to join a CSA program (community supported agriculture) in your area. Visit <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/> to search by city, state, or zip code to find a CSA program for your family or to get more information about farm subscriptions, farmer's markets, food co-ops and other local harvest programs. There are often low cost options or you can split the cost of a share with another family. Our CSA even has a workshare program where you work for just 4 hours and can take home a full share of that week's produce.

Day Three:

Grain Experiences

Visit a mill to see grain being ground into flour. Let your child compare wheat berries, cracked wheat, and wheat flour and to see the millstone. Read more about the history of mills here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gristmill>. Some old mills are no longer in operation but you can tour them. Then give your child the experience of grinding wheat berries into flour – a classic Waldorf activity – with a grain mill.

You can also ask to keep some of the grains you see and take them home to sprout (see page 25 of Spring: Nature Activities for Children).

Another rhythm you can explore, connected with grains, is the grain a day system advocated in The Waldorf Kindergarten Snack Book. By eating a different grain each day of the week, your child is gaining experience with trying new foods, plus getting a variety of health benefits from each one. The seven grains are (find more detailed information in the book):

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK THREE CONTINUED

Sunday - Sun - Wheat
Monday - Moon - Rice
Tuesday - Mars - Barley
Wednesday - Mercury - Millet
Thursday - Jupiter - Rye
Friday - Venus - Oats
Saturday - Saturn - Corn

HANDWORK

Day One:

The focus of the handwork activities for this week is weaving. Although there are many weaving patterns, a simple over one, under one is usually easiest for children just starting out.

The easiest first weaving project is a Woven Heart: <http://www.ruthannzaroff.com/mirkwooddesigns/woven.htm>

Day Two:

Now that your child has an understanding of how to prepare paper for weaving (the warp), let your child exploring designing his own weaving projects. Practice cutting large pieces of paper into strips (old maps are a good use for this) and weaving different colors of paper or ribbon through them (the weft). If you have a hard time remembering which is which, remember that "weft" rhymes with "left" and is the left to right part of your weaving project. Remember to keep the warp paper intact at the top so it's easier to weave through.

Day Three:

Today, begin on a set of placemats for your dining room table. Instead of paper, you'll be using yarn. Take a flat piece of cardboard or an old cardboard box to be your loom (find directions here: <http://www.allfiberarts.com/library/aa01/aa040201.htm>).

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK THREE

CONTINUED

Instead of yarn you can also use small strips of fabric, ribbon, or any other material your child wants to try. Be creative! I find that yarn is the simplest way to start out, since using a yarn needle is an easy way for small hands to keep track of their fibers as they weave. The most important thing is to teach your child the technique of weaving with an arc. By working the weft in an arc, you achieve the proper amount of tension. After each row, use a fork or comb as a beater to smoothly pull the yarn down so that it lays flat.

Day Four:

Now, lay your weaving down for a while and get outside into the fresh air! Having added your clay pit to the outside play area, it's time to introduce a new element: a water feature. There are a wide variety of water features you can build or buy – consider a fountain, a pond, or anything else which will add water to your outdoor space. Keep in mind the age of the children in your home and choose one which will be safe. Children can drown in as little as one inch of water. For this reason, you can now even purchase a pondless waterfall!

If nothing else, invest in a copper rain chain instead of a regular downspout on your gutter. This allows the children to see and experience the beauty of the rainfall instead of hiding the water away.

If you aren't able to add a water feature to your yard, focus on alternative ways of giving your children plenty of outdoor play experiences with water. Read [How Children Play](#), especially the section where they document all the different ways the children played with their local stream throughout the year. Make a weekly playdate to a stream, pond, river, or other waterway. Keep the playdate – every single week. Your children will greatly benefit from this repeated chance to explore the water and to experience its seasonal changes.

LESSON PLANS: WEEK FOUR CONTINUED

Add a roof (make a peaked shape – again, support all of your pieces with an inner layer of cardboard) which can be sewn to the top of one wall. When the four walls are fastened in their upright position, the barn roof swings down to rest on top of them. In the Ikea model, the fabrics for each part of the barn are different. You can have a lot of fun with this! Windows and doors, embroidered flowers, etc.

Day Two:

Next, you'll need some fencing. Simple fencing can be made by gathering sticks; using the thicker pieces of stick for the posts and the thinner pieces for the fencing, whittle notches into the posts where the stick ends will fit and glue them securely together.

Day Three:

Fields and ponds come next. You can purchase or dye your own silks in a variety of greens, browns, and blues to be your landscapes. The most extensive online list I've found of plants for natural dyes is this one: <http://www.pioneerthinking.com/naturaldyes.html>

Day Four:

Finally, your child will be itching to add some animals to this farm scene. Visit our website where we have compiled a large list of patterns for knitted animals: http://www.waldorffcurriculum.com/Articles/knit_animals.html.

You can also choose to make your animals out of wool felt (in which case, I recommend the patterns from [Feltcraft](#) or Suzanne Down's book [Around the World with Finger Puppet Animals](#) which would be good for a barn on a small scale). Depending on what animals you are making, you can also check [The Nature Corner](#) for patterns.

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK FIVE

ART

Day One:

Read The Lion and the Little Red Bird. If you dyed your own playsilks for the farm scene last week, your child will have some experience with natural dyeing. If not, this is a wonderful time to explore it. The difference between Art and Handwork is, essentially, that Art is process driven and Handwork is product driven. Use these days to have fun with the colors and not worry so much about the result.

There is a section on plant-based dyes and paints in Spring: Nature Activities with Children, beginning on page 72. Follow the directions for making dyes and experiment with gathering plants in your area (take a field guide with you to make sure that you gather nothing that is poisonous) and seeing what happens. There are many helpful suggestions on page 74. What colors can you come up with?

Day Two:

Continue to experiment with natural dyes and their results. It takes three days each time – the first day to gather, chop, and soak the plant matter; the second day to boil it and then add the cloth to the solution, rinse and wring it out; the third day to see the final color of the dry cloth. Colors will usually dry lighter than they look when they are wet

Day Three:

In addition to natural dyes, experiment with natural pigments from the earth. Try making a thin paint out of your clay by adding quite a bit of water and then painting with it. What happens when it dries? This is a wonderful body paint – encourage your child to paint himself or a friend all over. If you live in an area where there are ochre deposits, gather ochre with your child (once the water is warm enough to wade in, or see if you can find some outcroppings), dry it, grind it to a powder and then reconstitute with a little water to make a paint consistency.

Page 74 of Spring: Nature Activities with Children emphasizes the value of repeating activities with children. Even if you have done natural dyeing with your child over and over throughout our preschool program, don't skip it.

“The first year they will watch; the second year they will participate; and the third year they will be able to do the dyeing largely on their own. Rhythm and repetition are important educational elements.” page 74

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK FIVE CONTINUED

NATURE

Day One:

There are additional activities suggested for each themed garden in Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots. Depending on which garden(s) you chose, pick an activity for today.

Day Two:

Another thing which you can do with this week, to add some interest to your garden, is to read Where Butterflies Grow and purchase some butterfly larvae (caterpillars) to hatch. You can also find a caterpillar outdoors and try to raise it to its adult stage. A good rule of thumb is usually to feed the caterpillar the leaves of whatever plant you find it walking on.

Again, this activity may be repeated from the Insects unit – the extra year will make a big difference in what your child gets out of the experience. And it never ceases to be magical.

Day Three:

Finally, refer to Spring: Nature Activities for Children to find additional activity ideas for your new garden space. “March” includes directions for building a nest box for birds – “April” includes a section on nesting help for wild bees and wasps – “May” has a long discussion of beekeeping.

HANDWORK

Day One:

Having spent the first four weeks of the unit on clay projects in Art time, your child has the skills and confidence necessary to move clay work over into Handwork time. We are now going to focus on product.

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK FIVE

CONTINUED

You'll be making a series of tile signs for the different parts of your garden. Before you begin, walk around the outdoor space and identify the areas. You have the tree stump spiral, a water feature, perhaps a pet area, an herb garden, your new vegetable and flower gardens, etc. Decide how many tiles you'll need to make and gather all of your materials. Bear in mind that you may need to make extra tiles later on, as the parts of your garden evolve.

Day Two:

Using the techniques described in The Great Clay Adventure, make some of your tiles using
Coil Stamp Prints page 88

Day Three:

Today, try some
Rubber Stamps on Tiles page 92

Day Four:

Again, we are exploring adding the next of the four elements to the outdoor play space: fire. This does not mean free play with fire! Rather you can choose to add a copper firepit to your yard, or build an earth oven for baking bread outdoors. Or build a patio and set up a grilling space. Or pitch a tent and have a campfire. Any way that you can designate a section of the yard for fire experiences, and try to spend some of your time introducing your children safely to fire, is fine. We especially recommend building an earth oven. There are specialty books on this, such as Build Your Own Earth Oven or you can find directions online: <http://www.geocities.com/mosesrocket/>

Building with cob is a wonderful experience for the entire family (and a great tie-in with the third grade curriculum). With the simple elements of sand, clay, straw, and water you can build anything – even a house! It is very hands on, very safe, and a lot of fun! If you get into cob, I recommend the book The Hand-Sculpted House which is very detailed about the entire process including how to test your soil, where to find low cost materials, different mixing processes (mixing with your feet is especially good for children), how to test your mixture for stability and strength, and how to go about building an entire home this way. Spring is the perfect time to start a long term project like building a wall (which would go great in your garden, by the way) so this is the time of year to start experimenting.

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK SIX

ART

Day One: Charcoal Drawing

As a final exploration into the element of fire, this week your child will be experimenting with charcoal drawing. Charcoal has been made throughout the world for thousands of years.

For the first day, build a bonfire and let it burn down completely. Then, when the wood has cooled, take a piece of burned wood and show your child how you can make a mark with it. This is also a natural tie-in with the earth paints done last week. In ancient times, earth paints and charcoal were the art materials available to humans. A final rhythm for your child to sense: our connection with human experiences throughout time.

Give your child a large piece of paper to draw on using the charcoal sticks.

Day Two: Blending and Smearing

To learn how to make charcoal properly (less of a hit-or-miss proposition), try making another batch following these instructions. How to Make Drawing Charcoal: <http://www.ct.astate.edu/elind/charcoalhome.htm>

Spend some more time today exploring the properties of charcoal. After making a series of drawings, introduce the blending and smearing characteristics of charcoal with bare hands, fingers, or other tools like tissues and cotton balls.

Tip: charcoal is very messy so protect the surface around your art area and have plenty of wet paper towels on hand to wipe fingers.

Day Three: Charcoal Rubbings

Place the paper on a textured wall or sidewalk to pick up the bumps under the paper with the charcoal. Once your child realizes how easily textures transfer onto the paper, he will be excited to see what else around the house will make interesting designs. Perhaps you can have him create a series of texture rubbings, display them on the wall, and the entire family has to guess what household item made that texture. Or set up a matching area where the items in question are available, and you have to place the correct object under its corresponding art piece. For older children, you can take them to a graveyard to do charcoal rubbings of gravestones. (This is an especially good tie-in if you have a 4th grade child and are studying local history.)

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK SIX CONTINUED

NATURE

These projects are taken from Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots: Gardening Together with Children. This week we are finishing up the basics.

Day One:

Compost: Garden Health Food page 145

A Healthy Heap page 146

To help keep your gardens in tip-top shape, teach your child how to maintain them over time. In addition to weeding and deadheading, your other responsibility is feeding your garden. If you don't already have one, begin a compost bucket in your kitchen. (If you are worried that a bucket might become smelly, just set a special dish aside for compostable items gathered throughout the day, and then dump it each evening before dinner. After dinner, wash your dish with the other mealtime dishes so that it is clean for tomorrow.)

Compost is wonderful for children to learn about because, in learning what is compostable, they are learning what foods come from plants. It is a wonderful way to maintain our connection with the natural world, even if you aren't able to have much of a garden.

Day Two:

Building a Compost Bin page 146

Day Three:

Worm Magic page 147

Building a Worm Box page 148

There is more about raising earthworms on pages 63 and 64 of Spring: Nature Activities with Children.

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LESSON PLANS: WEEK SIX CONTINUED

HANDWORK

Day One:

Having read The Tales of Tiptoes Lightly books with your child at bedtime, now is the time to finish off the unit by making the most beloved characters from these books: Pine Cone and Pepper Pot, Jeremy Mouse and, of course, Tiptoes herself. Giving your child these characters to play with allows her to make up her own stories and continue the adventures of the characters. To make the two gnomes, follow the directions in

The Nature Corner: Tailored felt gnome page 63

Day Two:

For Jeremy Mouse try

The Nature Corner: A mouse page 65

Or make a little mouse yourself using wet felting techniques.

Day Three:

For Tiptoes herself, dry or needle felting is best (for directions, visit <http://www.allfiberarts.com/cs/felting.htm>). Your child is too young to use the needle but can help you position the wool and add on the details. For a picture of a sample Tiptoes Lightly fairy, see here: http://www.atoygarden.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=product.display&Product_ID=1332

Day Four:

Finally, to add an awareness of the element of air in your outside space, add a windchime to your garden. There are lots of windchime kits available – we are using one from Hearthsong which, unfortunately, they no longer carry – or you can simply do the following project from The Great Clay Adventure: Wind Chimes and Bells page 100

This project makes a great culminating activity for your clay experiences and is the perfect finishing touch to your garden.

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CONCLUSION

Rhythms is the cumulative unit in our nine unit preschool curriculum series. Starting with Families, which assumes absolutely NO familiarity with the Waldorf philosophy, you can travel along the path we took to take the plunge, try it out, and learn as much as we could.

The next series of units is more like a traditional Waldorf kindergarten, in that it assumes that you are familiar with Waldorf and have a library of the essential books (which you will, if you've followed along with our nine preschool units). These units will be an Around the World series, with each focusing on a different continent. You may also choose to repeat the first two years of our preschool program (which is what my family is doing) if your preschooler has a younger sibling who is now ready to go through the program. It will not hurt your child in any way to go back to Families and do it all over again. We also want to encourage you to take all the suggestions we have given – and, in particular, to utilize the wonderful library of books we have recommended to you – and branch out on your own, exploring the assets of your community, taking trips, following your child's interests, and using the books from your library to spark new projects. Life is full of wonderful experiences which will inspire you.

If you ever need support, feel free to visit our Yahoo group (sign up at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/waldorfcriculum/join>) where you can chat with other families also using this curriculum. Post your own curriculum suggestions and let us know what works for you!

All the best,
Rhoda McGrane

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