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Letter from the Editor: The Mis-Education of Sonya Abrams

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is an editor, photographer, and mom to three little brainiacs who teach her new things about the world every day.

Raising children is a constant reminder that I know nothing, and not just in the parenting department. They plumb the depths of my ignorance daily, lobbing innocent questions from the backseat of the car. “Mom,” my 4-year-old asks, “is electricity made up of chemicals?” I sputter, I stall, I equivocate. “I mean, well, uh sometimes, I guess—doesn’t everything on the planet contain chemicals?” I answer meekly, locking eyes with my 6-year-old as if he must have the answer. I can see pity and disappointment in his eyes. On another occasion, one of them trots out the old standard “Why is the sky blue?” I throw up my hands. “Why isn’t your father here for this kind of thing? This is his department!” Frequently, I rely on a contemporary cop-out and reassure them that Siri must know the answer to their musings, and we huddle around the phone, the pressure off me for a moment.

I don’t know if I’ve just forgotten my early education or if in fact I never knew what I still don’t know now. But one thing I do know is that my huge knowledge gaps make me worry about my own kids’ educational path. How do I know that the schools we choose will foster a love of learning and provide an environment that helps new information be absorbed and stick? How do I

gauge what’s important in a curriculum and what’s useless information my kids will never invoke again? (I’m looking at you, week-long section on ancient Greek architectural styles.)

Our writers in this issue take a clear-headed look at several complex areas of childhood education. Gabriella Judd Cirelli tackles the world of preschool selection on page 20, explaining how to organize your search and what to look for in a school and an educational philosophy. On page 16, Gail Cornwall demystifies San Francisco Unified School District’s lottery process, reassuring us that most parents will end up emotionally intact and happy after undergoing this period of uncertainty.

How do I gauge what’s important in a curriculum and what’s useless information that my kids will never invoke again?

And Anna Gracia, on page 24, tells us what our kids will not—what they’re learning about sexual health and behavior in schools.

I frequently feel like I’m stumbling through this part of parenthood blindly. I hope that the courses we’ve charted for our preschoolers and first grader will lead to a lifelong thirst for knowledge and an eagerness to discover how the world works. Because I’m counting on my kids to one day explain to me exactly why the sky is blue.

Sonya

Housekeeping

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COMING NEXT: December/January: Caring for Others, Caring for Ourselves

Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email editor@ggm.org.

THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY: Vacation at Thomasland, visiting the Museum of Ice Cream, stressing already about kindergarten and already missing preschool though school just started; recovering from an epic ghostbusters-themed 3-year-old birthday party; the new season of “The Great British Baking Show” on Netflix!; revamping my photography business; completing my first marathon swim – 14K/8.7 miles in the River Thames!; crying unexpectedly at *Crazy Rich Asians* *and* *To All The Boys I’ve Loved Before*(!)

Letter from the Board: A Fond Farewell

By Sasha Fahimi

It’s hard to believe we are midway through the fall and heading straight into the holidays. Time certainly flies when you’re focused on the littles, and I hope by now you have all settled into your school and daycare routines (or are mastering the sleep schedule with your infants, as the case may be). Yet another year will soon be drawing to a close, and I want to thank all of our volunteers for a job well done on so many events and activities this year, including the Spring Fling, the Fall Fest, and Preschool Preview Night, which I hope many of you attended. I’m proud to note that the Diversity and Inclusion Committee has continued to evolve and has gained a firm foothold in the organization as one of our more active teams; similarly, our online forums have shown strong participation. I encourage you all to spend time on the ggmg.org forums getting tips on everything from sleep training to the SFUSD lottery and/or private school process, and everything in between. Personally, some of my best non-kid-related tips have come from GGMG’s forums!

On a final note, I will be rolling off as board chair within the next month, and our amazing co-chair Karen Brein will be stepping in to fill my (very small) shoes. Karen is truly amazing and devoted to this organization, and I know she will not miss a

beat. GGMG will continue to grow and improve with her at the helm. I am so glad that I have been able to give back to this community,

I am so glad that I have been able to give back to this community, which has given me so much over the past four years.

which has given me so much over the past four years between cheering me on through sleepless nights and supporting me when I would send frantic anonymous posts about various postpartum miseries. I look forward to many more years of being involved with the wonderful women who make up this amazing organization. So long for now.

Sasha Fahimi



Sasha is a senior associate at the family law firm of Sucherman Insalaco, LLP, in San Francisco. She is mom to one rambunctious little girl, Mila, and to her rescue pup, Norman Joe Biden Fahimi. In her free time, she is constantly reading and enjoys nights in with bad TV and falling asleep to YouTube makeup tutorials that she can never hope to replicate. She has been volunteering for GGMG since May 2015.

Cover Outtakes



Only one shot can make it to the cover. Here are some of our other favorites.

Cover Photo by Anna Psalmond Photography
Cover models: Daphne (3), Oliver (7), Meelaud (9)

Free Halloween Activities

By Christine Chen

Clancy's Pumpkin Patch
1620 7th Ave.
October 1 to October 31
from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day
Crawl through the hay maze or take a hayride (small fee) amidst the best assortment of pumpkins in San Francisco. Kids love walking through the pumpkin patch while parents love the photo ops.



11th Annual Children's Halloween Hootenanny
Waller Street Cul de Sac, near Stanyan Street
October 22 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
This year's theme is "Classic Monsters" so come in your best vampire, Frankenstein, werewolf, or witch outfit because there will be a costume contest! Games, activities, big jumper, art, costume contest, a raffle, music, and performances make this a fun activity for many ages.

Sugar Skulls Craft for Kids
Golden Gate Valley Meeting Rm.,
1801 Green St.
October 24 from 3:30 to 5 p.m.
Make your own sugar skull mask in preparation for Halloween. All materials will be provided.

Night Lantern Ghost Walk and Concert
Main Post in the Presidio
October 25 to October 27
from 7 to 9 p.m. each night
Enjoy a walk at night in the Presidio and learn an interesting historical spin on the park. Musical storyteller Jill Tracy leads the lantern-lit stroll to some of the most fascinating and supposedly haunted locations in the Presidio.



Spookville: Halloween Theme Park at Westfield San Francisco Centre
865 Market St., 4th floor under the dome
October 26 to October 31: Mall Hours
Westfield is hosting a family-friendly attraction great for all ages. Spookville offers visitors a non-scary Halloween with interactive installations, perfect for your Instagram. Take selfies with a cast of kooky characters.

Halloween Hoopla
Yerba Buena Gardens,
221 Fourth St.
October 28 from noon to 2 p.m.
Enjoy music, crafts, and a costume parade in the Children's Garden.



Stonestown Spooktacular
Stonestown Family YMCA,
333 Eucalyptus Dr.
October 27 from 1 to 3:30 p.m.
Full of family-friendly activities such as creepy crafts, spider crawl, little spooks corner, witch's brew, and much more. Open to the community and appropriate for children ages 2.5 to 10



Noe Valley Spooktacular
Noe Valley Town Square, 24th St. between Sanchez St. & Vicksburg St.
October 29 from 2 to 8 p.m.
Fun activities for the kids include hayrides, art projects, face painting, and live music. Last year there was a beer garden for parents that opened at 5:30 p.m.



Boo!

Halloween Toddler Tales and Playtime
Excelsior Public Library Meeting Room, 4400 Mission St.
October 30 from 11 to 11:30 a.m.
Come in costume or borrow one at the library and enjoy a Halloween-themed story time. Listen to stories, sing songs, and do fingerplays. All toddlers are welcome.

Halloween Story Time
Visitacion Valley Public Library Meeting Room, 201 Leland Ave.
October 30 from 11 to 11:30 a.m.
Dress up at the library and trick-or-treat at the Halloween Storytime for toddlers ages 3 to 5. Stories, songs, fingerplays, and more.



Sacramento Street Shop Trick-or-Treat
3067 to 3696 Sacramento St.
October 31 from 3 to 6 p.m.
Sacramento Street's shops will provide treats for kids dressed up in costumes.



Trick or Treat!

Christine LOVES Halloween as it allows her to embrace her inner child. Sadly, this is probably the last year she will get to pick costumes for her 4-year-old and 2-year-old as they are getting more opinionated.



Li'l Kid, Big City: Hidden Gems of the Embarcadero

By Christine Chen

Beyond the Embarcadero's well-known sites are some hidden gems worth a visit. For the train-obsessed, the San Francisco **Railway Museum** celebrates the city's rich rail transit history, with a focus on the streetcars and cable cars unique to SF. There is a full-sized, exact replica of the motorman's platform of a 1911 streetcar where kids can experience what it was like to be at the controls. Art lovers should visit **Gap headquarters** (2 Folsom St.) during the weekdays to see the 60-foot high **Richard Serra sculpture**—four pieces of thick steel that spiral up, offering excellent echoes as you walk inside. For denim lovers, **Levi's Plaza Park** is usually a sunny outdoor space to have lunch after learning the history of the original blue jeans—patented in 1873—before or after you mosey through the visitor center, company store, and brand headquarters. Magowan's Infinite **Mirror Maze** (Pier 39) is free for kids ages 5 and under. With 77 mirrors in a 2,000-square-foot maze lit with black lights that make the columns and archways glow, Mirror Maze is a fun, psychedelic experience of perplexing hallways, twists, and dead ends. **The SF Giants Childrens' Play Area** (or **Coca-Cola Fan Lot**) has no entrance fee on non-game days and is much less crowded! ♦

Christine is mother to a 4.5-year-old son and 2.5-year-daughter who are most disappointed that Tcho's Chocolate tasting tour is on hiatus as they expand their facility on the Embarcadero.

What to Do With Leftover Halloween Candy

By Catherine Symon

Whether your kids are allowed to eat a little Halloween candy or a lot, sometimes there is just too much corn syrup and red dye #40 for anyone to handle. Here are a few ideas for turning your surplus of Snickers and truckload of Twizzlers into useful teaching moments:

Bring in the Switch Witch

Even preschoolers can learn to understand the value of things as they decide how much candy to "spend" on books, art supplies, or other parent-picked alternatives to their Halloween loot. Set the prices or let your kids practice their negotiation skills by making you an offer. Not sure if your child will trade any candy away? Occasionally the Switch Witch swaps everything in the middle of the night without asking...



Send a military care package

Boost a soldier's morale while teaching your kids about service and sacrifice. Enlist friends and schoolmates to donate their candy, too. The Department of Defense maintains a list of care package nonprofits that coordinate deliveries, though do your own due diligence in choosing a legitimate provider (scammers want candy, too). tinyurl.com/DoD-care-packages

Do science experiments

Why would you eat that Laffy Taffy when you can learn about its physical properties instead? Have your kids hypothesize what candy will do under different conditions and then try it out. Will it float? How long does it take to melt? Can it dissolve in water? Will it break if you drop it from high up?

Make art

Get out the glue and make a Mike and Ike mosaic, a Twix tower, or a cardboard-box house fit for Hansel and Gretel (crochet the figures in your spare time for a complete project). Once the glue goes on, give plenty of reminders: this art is not edible. ♦

Catherine is a medical writer. Last Halloween, she leaned heavily on the "it must have expired" response when her then-5-year-old asked where all her candy went.

Ask the Expert

Public Education

With Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss, School Leader at SFUSD



Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss has worked as a school leader for 15 years. She writes for Edutopia and School Leaders Now and has a book coming out called *Entering the Lion's Den: A School Leader's Guide to Earning Trust, Inspiring Others and Not Getting Eaten in Year One*. Find out more at jenniferkuhrbutterfoss.com.

How has public education changed in the past decade?

The adoption of state Common Core learning standards has shifted the dialogue regarding what students should be learning to be successful in the 21st century and how teaching can accommodate this. Students no longer come to school to receive information; with a quick internet search, they can find the answers to any of their questions. Websites offering video lessons like Khan Academy have flipped learning on its head—students don't need to rely on their teacher to deliver the explicit instruction to solve a complex algebra equation, for example. They can instead watch an expert explain it on the internet at home and then at school be guided towards mastery by teachers. Instead of learning to search the internet in a computer lab, school is where students should be learning, in teams and on laptops, how to use technology to create content for others as opposed to simply consuming content themselves in isolation.

How do you foresee it changing in the next decade?

Innovation in technology keeps occurring at such a fast rate that schools, in general, are struggling to keep up. For students to remain competitive with their peers, and for traditional public schools to keep pace with independent and public charter schools, we should expect to see more focus, training, and support for educators to access and fully integrate technology into their practice. On the flipside, as we begin to gain greater awareness and wariness of the negative effects of screen-saturated youth, we may start to see more pressure on schools to have stronger, more definitive approaches in place dictating how, when, and why students are on screens during school hours.

In your experience, what do many parents not know or not understand about public education?

I find myself fielding many questions about San Francisco public schools specifically. Most parents have little understanding of what it means to be in a system that includes a teachers union. With rising housing costs and salaries that can't compete with private sectors, it is imperative we have strong advocacy for this work force. It is also important to know that SFUSD is known to

protect teacher autonomy in lesson planning, delivery, grading, and even parent communication as each individual teacher sees fit, sometimes more so than private and charter schools. This can make for a more varied experience from year to year and even classroom to classroom for SFUSD students.

How is public education different in California compared to other states? Or is it?

California is ranked 46 out of the 50 states in per-pupil spending. In San Francisco, we are fortunate to have the Public Education Enrichment Fund (PEEF) that ensures our kids have access to the arts, school libraries, and physical education instruction. However, these important staff members are not necessarily full-time. Not only do these classes provide enrichment for students, but they also allow teachers to participate in common planning time to ensure a more consistent education experience for students across classrooms. With less human capital to support time for professionals to meet, implementing school-wide initiatives can be more challenging.

Innovation in technology keeps occurring at such a fast rate that schools, in general, are struggling to keep up.

What can you tell us about IEPs?

It is critically important that parents understand that Individualized Education Plans are legal documents meant to ensure that proper supports and instruction are in place for students with learning disabilities who are having trouble accessing the core curriculum. They are not for every challenge a child might be experiencing. If there isn't a demonstrated inability to access the curriculum (i.e., the student is performing at or above grade level), assessment and implementing an IEP is not the most appropriate route. The true goal of an IEP is for a student to eventually perform at grade level and therefore no longer need the IEP. Parents confuse getting assessed in school and qualifying for an IEP as a means to get more help, and it's not. Nationwide, about 13 percent of public school students receive special education services—this includes students with serious processing issues and other disabilities. Students outside this 13 percent should get their needs met through differentiated instruction, tutoring, and other services that don't come with a "special education" label. Parents with concerns about their child's learning or behavior can ask the teacher for a Student Assistance Program (SAP) meeting, which may lead to a Student Success Team (SST) meeting. These are both mechanisms to take a hard look at the child's needs and ensure proper supports are in place without the complexities of a traditional IEP. ❖

GGMG AT WORK

Community Outreach

Give to Grow

GGMG's annual fund drive for Homeless Prenatal Program (HPP) families is kicking off in November. We're letting you know now so you have plenty of time to add HPP to your holiday giving list.

If you would like to know more about HPP, read on. There is also a great opportunity to learn more about HPP in person on October 25. See page 32 for details.

HPP has three major goals:

- **Healthy Babies:** ensure that parents give birth to healthy babies and successfully bond with their infants.
- **Safe, Nurturing Families Where Children Thrive:** ensure that parents are knowledgeable, motivated, and empowered to support their children's success and healthy development.
- **Economically Stable Families:** ensure that families have access to information and resources that move them towards permanent, stable housing and economic self-sufficiency.

Please join us in continuing this incredible tradition of moms helping moms and make a donation to HPP this holiday season. Any amount is greatly appreciated and will be put to good use supporting HPP families.



You can donate at homelessprenatal.org/donate. Be sure to choose "GGMG Gives" in the gift designation scroll down to help us track donations.

If you have any questions about this or any of GGMG's community outreach drives, email us at communityoutreach@ggm.org.

Contest

Home Design SOS



Do you have a room that screams "make me over!" every time you walk through? Do you eagerly tear out magazine pages of beautiful rooms as inspiration for that happy day when you can redo your own kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and/or living room?

Bring your ideas and questions to a 90-minute consultation with Lexie Saine—valued at more than \$250. Lexie is a talented interior architect, interior designer, and San Francisco mom. Her beautiful design aesthetic was also informed by her master's degree in interior architecture and her experience working for numerous high-end interior design and millwork firms before starting her own firm.

Check out her website at www.lexiesaine.com for stunning examples of her work. Then enter the contest for a chance to consult with her about your own home.

ENTER THE CONTEST BY EMAILING CONTEST@GGMG.ORG WITH "SOS" IN THE SUBJECT LINE BY OCTOBER 31, 2018.

Congratulations to **Adrianne Ford**, winner of the August contest prize, a pizza party at Pasquale's.

Teaching Imitating Life

By Andy Reed

I am a preschool teacher with the privilege of working with over 400 families over the course of 25-plus years. Part of my job is reassuring parents that it is OK that their 5-year-old can't read yet even if his 3-year-old cousin can. I often advocate patience when a child is slowly evolving out of a biting phase. Most difficult to comprehend is the uneven development in young children. The kid can write 0 to 100 but has bathroom accidents. She can focus on a classroom pet for 30 minutes but can barely sit through a 32-page story. Most parents are pleased to focus on the positives, as they should.

One common refrain when conferencing with parents was, "Wait until you have your own..." It took another 15 years to fully appreciate what they meant.

San Francisco's cost of living, our profession's pay scale, and the Midwestern need for stability postponed my family life enough to learn about "geriatric pregnancy."

I, and the incredibly talented kindergarten teacher who married me, felt confident that our combined years of experience in child development would make parenting come naturally. And it did.

We committed to best practices we'd learned. Our children would have a routine so predictability would lend confidence. There would be generous allocations of play, sleep, books, "educational" toys, nature, and social interactions. We would not watch any movie until we'd read or heard the original book.

I was even granted a year leave to raise my son. At the "Baby Park" in Noe Valley, I was that guy doing story times on a blanket with a ton of board books for the wee ones, while enjoying the company of other dads during the Great Recession.

He learned to write his name and draw detailed figures at age 2. By 3, he'd mastered upper and lower case alphabet and had a strong inventory of sight words. By 4, he could draw and label the entire solar system, including most moons and dwarf planets. The classroom was a lab of discovery and community. He loved preschool, his comfort zone. Though his birthday was at the tail end of SFUSD kindergarten eligibility, we concurred that he was ready, based on his academics.

He thrived initially, approaching kindergarten end-of-year benchmarks by November. His teacher commended his abilities and commented that she didn't need to do much for him. So he fell under the radar. We later discovered she'd stopped assessing him once he reached benchmark. His work slipped in quality and pride. To make matters worse, I became critical of this decline, knowing he was capable of better. I was wrong.

He lacked one thing all my "teacher-parenting" could not provide: real-world context.

All that amazing early learning occurred within an "educational" framework. Protected well at home and at my preschool, he never had to overcome the discomfort that motivates change and practical learning. In structured games and play where inclusion is compulsory, he was exceptional. In the wild west of the recess

playground where you compete and compromise for attention, he was excluded because he had little practice navigating negative feelings. All that academic ability meant little to a mind preoccupied with the confusion of being ignored.

Back in the classroom, this experience was the impetus to completely revamp my outlook and curriculum. We now emphasize social-emotional learning and community-building. Social skills are taught with puppets, photos, and real-life anecdotes. We explicitly teach

skills like introducing and calming yourself, identifying feelings, inviting or entering into play, respectful assertiveness, and restorative practices. A common vocabulary is used so the children understand one another and can adopt their own social

Part of my job is reassuring parents that it is okay that their 5-year-old can't read yet even if his 3-year-old cousin can.

norms. The ABCs and 123s are taught at their speed, but no time is wasted in learning how to be their wonderful, vibrant selves within a community.

Fast forward a few years. My son has a slightly younger brother who is completely different in almost every way, though their upbringing was nearly identical. One is stoic, moody, and feels things deeply. The other is shallower but wears his feelings. One is adventurous with food; the other won't tolerate cucumber. Both are avid readers and, despite the anti-commercial bias in our house, are into Pokemon and Nintendo as much as any kid.

We are, however, holding fast to the "read it before you see it" movie rule.

Do I regret the decision to send my son to kindergarten when I did? Yes, but not for the aforementioned reasons. My regret is selfish: I may have advertently cheated myself out of a year with this wonderful person. ♦

Teacher Andy is an artist, mechanic, and preschool teacher in San Francisco.



MEMBER PROFILE: Jeanette Barzelay

Photograph by Katya Mizrahi Photography

GGMG staff writer Tara Hardesty sat down with Jeanette Barzelay to talk to her about life with two children and how she juggles full-time work as a commercial litigator with her partner's role as owner and operator of San Francisco restaurants Lazy Bear and True Laurel.

HOW DO YOU JUGGLE BEING A MOM, A LAWYER, AND A PARTNER WITH THE OWNER OF SUPER SUCCESSFUL RESTAURANTS?

With difficulty. I'm always learning and trying to get better and establish better routines and schedules. As the owner of the restaurants—not just the chef—my husband thankfully has more flexibility. He drives our older son to school a few days a week. We have an awesome nanny who watches our younger son from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. We have no family here, so we are completely on our own for day-to-day childcare needs. Thankfully, my job is fairly flexible, too, and I can come in a little late or leave early if I need to. I also work from home sometimes. Our schedule is challenging; I'm always either parenting or working, which doesn't leave a lot of time for other things.

BIGGEST STRUGGLE AS A MOM?

Having enough energy at the end of the work day to really engage and be present with my kids. It's cliché, but it's hard to put the phone away with work email coming in at all hours and wanting to check in on news, personal things, etc. Most nights, as soon as I get home I have to launch immediately into preparing dinner for all three of us, so I can't take the time to sit and play with them. I try to take a little time during the nighttime routine for playtime and connection, but it's not easy. This is a good reminder that I want to keep trying to improve at this!

CAN YOU SHARE A GUILTY PLEASURE?

Mostly food, especially junk food. I have a lot of favorites, like donuts and cake, when I'm really craving something satisfying that I don't get to have all the time.

YOUR LAST "LOST IT" MOMENT?

My husband and I tried really hard to make my son's fourth birthday memorable. In addition to the birthday party we planned for him, I wanted to make his actual birthday special because I knew his dad had to work that night and would not be able to go with me to school for his "Birthday Circle." So my husband and I stayed up late the night before, blowing up 60-plus balloons to pile outside his door so that when he woke up in the morning, he'd be inundated. I spent five hours meticulously painting a treasure box as a gift for him where he could keep his little knick knacks. For breakfast, my husband made him pancakes, at his request, and we put candles in them. So, after all of that time and effort and just wanting him to have a great, special day, he turned sullen and grumpy and didn't want to go to school. I didn't actually lose it, but I nearly did. Thankfully, he perked up quickly once we got to school—don't they always?—and had a great rest of the day. But man, these emotions are hard to navigate sometimes. When they have those big emotions, it's often hard to make room for ours, too.

MOST SIGNIFICANT THING EXPERIENCED AS A MOM?

I would say it is the way in which your kids end up consuming you and your life. Not the fact that they do—everyone knows that and tells you about that before you have kids. But you cannot really appreciate how deeply and intimately your kids take over your life and your heart, in the most natural way, like they've always been there. It's amazing how quickly and immensely it happens.

THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE

MOTHERHOOD

Consuming. Joyous. Unparalleled. ♦

Know a mom you want to spotlight in the next issue?

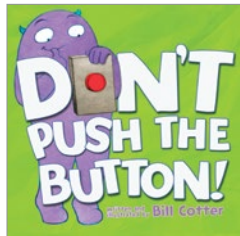
Email editor@ggmg.org with her name, email, and a few sentences about what makes her an awesome mom for our next Member Profile.



BOOKS for Kids Halloween & Fall

By Laure Latham

Apples, pumpkins, and ghouls are everywhere in the fall season, reminding us that Halloween is around the corner. No matter how old or young your children are, it's a special time of the year when darkness means changing seasons and autumn magic. May these books help you get into the spirit of Halloween and fall.



Don't Push the Button! (A Halloween Treat)

Written and illustrated by Bill Cotter

On Halloween night, most trick-or-treaters will find themselves ringing doorbells, on the hunt for treats. What if a house looks scary; do you ring the doorbell? Here's a fun book that you can easily play-act with your little one with every single button, switch, and bell you have around the home. With easy words and a simple yet engaging plot, this book is a winner for toddlers. *Ages: 0 to 2 years*



Little Blue Truck's Halloween

Written by Alice Schertle, illustrated by Jill McElmurry

On its way to trick-or-treating, the Little Blue Truck picks up animal friends for a Halloween party down

the road. What costumes will they wear? Who's hiding under that mask? Children will lift flaps to reveal the truck's friends in Halloween costumes, focusing on the fun part of Halloween. Looking carefully at the vintage-style illustrations, young ones will love finding elements of traditional Halloween parties: apple bobbing, jack-o'-lanterns, punch, and treats.

Ages: 3 to 5 years

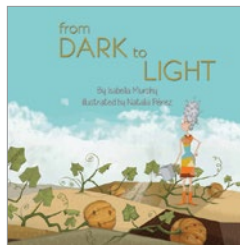


Goodbye Autumn, Hello Winter

Written and illustrated by Kenard Pak

A brother and sister walk through the woods and a town, noticing signs of the fall

season and welcoming winter. Along their journey, they exchange greetings with trees, birds, wind, snow, and other members of the natural world, hearing how they are transitioning to winter. This quiet bedtime read will delight younger readers, and as a bonus, is ethnically and culturally diverse. *Ages: 3 to 6 years*



From Dark to Light

Written by Isabella Murphy, illustrated by Natalia Pérez

How does a pumpkin grow in the ground and become a jack-o'-lantern? Written by a fifth grader, *From Dark to Light* is a whimsical tale about a little seed's emotional

journey from the ground to a home for Halloween. Young children will relate to the little seed's yearning to belong to a family and will love the seed's transformation into a beautiful pumpkin in a pumpkin patch. The text might be long for toddlers, but preschoolers will definitely enjoy this book.

Ages: 3 to 8 years



City of Ghosts

Written by Victoria Schwab

After a near-death experience, young Cassidy Blake enters the spirit world and is able to lift the veil that separates the dead from the living. Her parents, TV hosts for a "most-haunted places" show, take her to Edinburgh, Scotland, where things spiral out of control. First, she

discovers that she's not the only person with the "gift" to lift the veil. Second, Edinburgh is where *Harry Potter* was written, and for good reason. This city is teeming with ghosts and spirits. *Ages: 8 to 12 years*

Laure is the author of the mommy blog *Frog Mom* (frogmom.com), as well as the book *Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area*. She writes for several parenting websites and lives in London, where she peppers adventures with her husband and two daughters with compulsory cream tea stops. You can find her on social media @frogmomblog.

BOOKS for Parents

By Gail Cornwall

Two authors—one British, one Canadian, one a mother, the other not—write brooding novels tackling the question: What does it mean to be a mother?



Motherhood

by Sheila Heti

In *Motherhood*, Sheila Heti's narrator spends most of her pages agonizing over whether or not to have children: "I always came back to this formula: if no one had told me anything about the world, I would have invented... sex, friendships, art... to fulfil real longings in me, but... [child-rearing] wouldn't have occurred to me as something to do. In fact, it would have sounded like a task to very much avoid." Her partner helps by adding "that it sort of blows your load, parenting, because it's the perfect job—it's very hard but only you can do it." And yet, she seriously asks whether her problems "would be solved by stuffing my days with childcare, and my heart with my own child." But if she had children, would it be just "to be admired as the admirable sort of woman who has children"? And if she didn't, would it owe merely to a contrarian's "feeling of not wanting to be someone's idea of me"? It goes on and on.

Why would I, a mother of three, allot precious minutes to the story of a woman who ultimately decides that resisting the hormonal urge to have a child "feels as blissful and intimate as having a child"? Because along the way Heti provides intellectual and emotional fuel, questions and answers sure to stoke the fire of anyone grappling with a big decision—or their own self-concept, and who among us isn't doing those things? "Pain is not imaginary," Heti's narrator says: "Those who skip town do not escape it, and those who skip between lovers do not. Drinking is no escape; gratitude lists are not." For probing thoughts like this, I tolerated her characters' more controversial remarks (e.g., "Of course raising children is a lot of hard work, but I don't see why it's supposed to be so virtuous to do work that you created for yourself out of purely your own self-interest"). And I took breaks when my eyes started to roll or glaze over.



Sight

by Jessie Greengrass

I had to accord Jessie Greengrass's *Sight: A Novel* the same treatment. Like Heti, Greengrass wraps existential questions in language that can be as cumbersome as it is beautiful. She too tries to break up her protagonist's intense rumination. (For Greengrass it's dalliances into 17th-century scientific breakthroughs and the birth of psychoanalysis, rather than Heti's coin tossing, and descriptions of grief, as opposed to depression.) And *Sight* is also far from a page-turner, though it includes breathtaking passages like the following: "She was at birth a half-size model of herself, her blueish skin stretched tight across her skull, the line of her vertebrae showing along her back like threaded pearls beneath a cotton sheet."

Since Greengrass's narrator decides to have children, we get vivid descriptions of what that's actually like—"I hold my daughter close and sing to her as though I might with such tendernesses obliterate her recollection of all the times I haven't come quite up to scratch"—rather than Heti's necessarily less precise imaginings of what having kids would mean: "On the one hand, the joy of children. On the other hand, the misery of them." And yet, it is Heti's book I must recommend to those who have chosen the path she left untrod. Her writing, though slightly less pretty, is equally brilliant and more piercing than that of Greengrass, which in turn makes it more engaging. Her words are an invitation for growth. And isn't that what motherhood is really all about?

Gail is a former public school teacher and recovering lawyer who now works as a stay-at-home mother and freelance writer in San Francisco. You can find her on Facebook (@gailisalwayswrite) and Twitter (@gailcornwall), or read more at gailcornwall.com.

From Womb to World

Prenatal Classes

By Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss

Preparing for the arrival of a baby can bring upon a host of key tasks for expectant parents, including participation in prenatal classes. Between getting the nursery ready, making it to various appointments, a busy work schedule—it can be hard to discern which classes and which formats are worth the time. Fortunately, there are a variety of options across San Francisco and online.

Labor and delivery

Often taught in either a one-day intensive format or through a six- to eight-week evening schedule, couples walk away understanding the labor process, the use of birth plans, interventions, effective pain coping practices, birth partner support skills, massage techniques, and much more. Go through a traditional hospital like **Newborn Connections at CPMC** (sutterhealth.org) or the **UCSF Women’s Health Resource Center** (whrc.ucsf.edu) to find classes at their main locations. **Birthing from Within®** is a curriculum taught around the city of San Francisco and according to its site, “offers a modern interpretation of childbirth education, tapping into ancient inner knowing in conjunction with evidence-based modern knowing.” Both **Community Well** in the Excelsior and **Natural Resources** in the Mission offer these classes.

Breastfeeding

Taught by certified lactation consultants, these classes are generally a one-time, 2- to 3-hour event that covers the benefits and basic techniques of breastfeeding, how to prevent, recognize and manage potential difficulties, and considerations for partners. While offered at institutions like **CPMC** and **UCSF**, moms in search of a more personalized format can get one-on-one support via a lactation consultant like **Katie Howser** (katiehowser.com) or **Caroline Kerherve** (carolinekerherve.com)



after baby is born. You can also find peer support from fellow moms through the SF chapter of **La Leche League** with monthly meetings offered on weekday mornings, evenings, and weekends.

Caring for an infant

Eager to master swaddling your newborn into the cutest burrito ever? Want to overcome your anxiety about diaper changing? **Recess** has a host of newborn care classes at their new location in the Outer Sunset (recesscollective.org). Or check out classes inspired by the late Sarah McMoyler, RN, BSN, who, saw over 25,000 expectant parents come through her doors for her signature **McMoyler Method** course. Offered both online and in-person at **Kinspace** in San Francisco for a more hands on approach, the McMoyler Method has an array of coursework including the ins and outs of newborn care and even a class specifically designed for parents preparing for a second child. Find out more at thebestbirth.com.

Infant first aid and CPR

There is no better course to head off some of the ramped up anxieties that come with first time parenthood like infant first aid and CPR. Being prepared is the best line of defense for new parents and there are numerous courses in the Bay Area. **Bay Area CPR** (bayareacpr.org) has a popular five-hour course offered on Tuesdays and Saturdays that teaches CPR for all ages, AED, choke saving, bleeding control, seizures, poisoning, and other first aid emergencies. **Ouch! CPR** (ouchcpr.com) is another organization located in the Outer Sunset that offers a blended learning format for busy professionals. This means participants can learn the content online and then schedule an in-person skills check.

Preparing for baby’s arrival doesn’t have to be all seriousness and hard work. Use this special time for a date night by scheduling dinner out before or after the class. See if the instructor is willing to share an email list of class participants to make connections with other expectant parents in the city. Snap a few photos of you and your partner swaddling a doll and use these as keepsakes for the baby book.

With the right attitude, taking a few useful classes will be part of your new family’s memories. ♦

Jennifer is a mom of two, a school educator, and leader for over 15 years. She is passionate about making sure classrooms, whether for adults or children, bring the same joy and community she experienced growing up. Find out more at jenniferkuhrbutterfoss.com.

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Our Strange and Wonderful Public Schools

SFUSD's school selection process isn't as scary as it seems. Here's a freshly updated version of our hugely popular article from 2015

By Gail Cornwall Photographs by Carmen Dunham Photography

It happens all the time. A mom and I bond over our desire to explore this vibrant city with our budding urbanites in tow. I envision a friendship that blossoms over the years. Then she says, “We’re looking in Marin.”

“Why? Your place is perfect. You love San Francisco!”

“Yeah, but Mabel will be ready for kindergarten soon so...”

Or, just as often, a mom brings up the topic of the public school lottery at a GGMG Neighborhood Meetup, fretting over the limited number of “good” schools, the extremely low odds of getting assigned to one of them, and the nightmare that is the lottery. “What if my kid gets the lowest number in the city? Then he’ll be at the very end of every school’s list!” Anxiety spreads through the room like peanut butter on hot toast. I intervene, asking the speaker about her experience with the process. “Oh, Henry’s only three, but I hear...”

It’s natural to worry, especially about a system that’s more complex and less predictable than most. Yet much of the discussion among parents of young kids in San Francisco features a dearth of accurate information and an abundance of apprehension. The truth about our public schools may surprise you.

Getting started assessing schools

To a parent hoping to evaluate the 72 public elementary schools in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), several sources of information are available, including state test results, past years’ demand rankings, school tours, the Enrollment Fair, the Enrollment Guide, demographics (as well as other data) from SFUSD’s website, and word of mouth—which includes websites, blogs, and guidance from the nonprofit Parents for Public Schools of San Francisco (PPS-SF).

Parents looking for quantitative analysis usually turn first to test scores and demand rankings. When my oldest applied to kindergarten in 2013, the Academic Performance Index (API), allowed parents to access each school’s raw standardized test scores as well as a statewide rank on a 1-to-10 scale. The California Department of Education (CDE) has since revamped the system and now releases the California School Dashboard (www.caschooldashboard.org/#/Home). By pulling up SFUSD on the dashboard and then clicking on the link that says “list all schools in this district,” you

can see a colored pie chart representing each school in the “English Language Arts” and “Mathematics” columns. That color is meant to represent both last year’s scores and how the school is trending over time. Clicking on an individual school and then the “Status and Change Report” column provides more specific information. My kids’ school, Rooftop Elementary, is listed as “High” for English scores at “17.9 points above level 3,” for example, while Bessie Carmichael comes up as “Low” at “41.2 points below level 3.”

If it sounds like the state is making test scores more difficult to find, that’s because it is. The CDE’s website says “reducing the multiple measures to a single number would leave out information that is important.” Indeed, test scores are not, and never have been, a reliable proxy for school quality. Students described as “Socioeconomically Disadvantaged,” “English Learners,” and “Students with Disabilities” tend to score lower. A school with a higher percentage of these students will therefore have lower test scores, even if it is making tremendous strides educating them. The phenomenon has led many to assert that the numbers say more about incoming students than school quality and to refer to the old statistic as the “Affluent Parent Index.” And it’s why the new report shows Bessie Carmichael as green and “High” in the column marked “English learner progress” while Rooftop is yellow and “Medium” in that regard.

What’s more, all standardized testing fails to capture educational success—actual learning—to some degree. As Albert Einstein said, “Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.”

That doesn’t mean the numbers are worthless, however. Back in 2013, I figured at a school with a statewide rank of 1, 2, or 3, the majority of students struggled to meet state standards for one reason or another. Conversely, at a school with a rank of 8, 9, or 10, most students—whether because of



background or school quality—likely exceeded the standards. The same inference can likely be drawn using the new “High,” “Medium,” and “Low” labels (though I personally wouldn’t rule out all “Low” scoring schools).

Demand rankings should also be used circumspectly. SFUSD releases a list of the top 25 most requested schools in the prior year’s lottery as well as supporting data that enables a parent to put the remaining schools in order of popularity. Yet factors unrelated to school quality—such as start time, availability of after-school care, geographical location, school size, and busing availability—play into parental preference. Also, demand rank can function as a self-fulfilling prophecy for two reasons. First, parents assume that the most in-demand schools from last year must be the best ones and rank them high on their list of desired schools. Second, for many years, including this past one, it was advantageous to slap high-demand schools at the end of one’s list (because of the lottery “swap” or “transfer” feature that has now been disabled). Since the metric is calculated using the total number of requests, the result is a demand-rank that doesn’t

accurately reflect actual eagerness to enroll.

Moreover, both sets of numbers are unreliable indicators of personal desirability thanks to differing instructional character. Different parents want different educational environments. Luckily for all of us, SFUSD is incredibly diverse.

Beyond test scores and popularity

Although all public schools use the Common Core State Standards, quite a bit of pedagogical variation remains. There’s SF Public Montessori, which focuses on the Montessori method, and other schools feature project-based learning or have a science focus. Back in 2013, I walked into one classroom where the children sat rigidly around a long table, their hands tightly clasped in front of

them. A teacher stood at the front of the room and used a wooden pointer to tap an overhead transparency displaying the letter “B.” She stated, “B, B, B says buh.” The children repeated in chorus, “B, B, B says buh.” At another school, instruction seemed predominantly child-led. One school I toured placed a premium on discipline, requiring uniformed students to walk in silent, single-file lines down the hallways, while others allowed more bodily freedom. Though the maximum number of students per class is set at the state level (22 for kindergarten), schools have two, three, or four classes. A school with 44 kindergarteners will be different than one with 88 in a way that cannot objectively be called good or bad.

I found myself looking for a mid-range school in terms of both size and structure. I wanted an environment where not everyone knew my child’s name, but most recognized her face. I liked seeing kids smiling and skipping through the halls, but I didn’t want chaos. An extremely high-demand school with some of the best test scores in the city felt too rigid for me. I valued diversity, rejecting homogeneous schools, whereas others want their children to be surrounded by those of a similar background. A lot of

parents prefer language instruction of some sort; we had no interest, which drove us toward the confusingly labeled “General Education” track. A lack of either arts or movement during some part of the day was a deal-breaker for me, but a friend couldn’t have cared less. I was ready to rally the troops; others want to know the PTA is already well-established.

All this is to say, what one parent considers a “good” school can be very different from what her neighbor seeks.

Though the SFUSD website contains quite a bit of qualitative information, tours and the Enrollment Fair (generally held in October) are the best way to learn about school culture as well as things like classroom feel, the presence of play structures, field trips, collaboration with businesses, sports teams, parent involvement, and the quality of the principal (which, by the way, should be judged based on what teachers and parents at the school think of their leadership not whether listening to their pre-tour spiel makes you want to hire them or grab a beer together).

Word of mouth can be invaluable if from a primary source, not the rumor mill. The hype schools receive is often both overblown and outdated, as schools change quickly. One source described Miraloma and McKinley as “dumping grounds” just a few years ago; now they’re two of the most in-demand schools in the city. Also, keep in mind that every school will have at least one disgruntled family, and most will have a few mega-fans. One way to get to the bottom of things is to attend a school event open to the public, like a PTA meeting or fundraiser.

After completing my online research, I thought I’d be competing for a handful of slots. Then I toured 16 schools. I found five that had everything we desired within walking distance. An additional five schools would require a longer commute but were still exciting in terms of quality and character. Here’s the part that shocks most people: half of those 10 schools sat low enough in the demand ranking that we could safely rely upon getting a seat.

How the lottery works

The SFUSD enrollment lottery is infamous for being confusing, and it is in many ways a terribly outdated, overly cumbersome disappointment. But it’s also a quick study.

Parents can apply to as many of SFUSD’s kindergarten programs as they like; that’s more than 100 options, counting language programs separately. There are “attendance area” (AA) schools for which residing near the school may come into play in the enrollment process and “city-wide” schools and programs for which it won’t. Each school that is not “city-wide” has an area of

In the 2018 lottery, 73 percent of kindergarten applicants received their first or second choice placement in the first round of the lottery.

neighboring streets delineated on a map, but the school doesn’t always sit right in the geographical center; as a result, your AA elementary school may not be the one closest to you.

Parents submit an application in January (January 11, 2019, for the 2019-2020 school year) with supporting paperwork (like a birth certificate) that lists the programs they wish to apply to in order of preference. This form effectively functions as a separate application to each program listed. Each program then runs a lottery and randomly assigns each student in its pool of applicants a number. In other words, your child will have a separate lottery number at each school, meaning the common fear of ending up at the end of every school’s list is misplaced.

When there are more applicants than available seats, seats are not filled strictly in lottery order. Each school first pulls out students that have “tie-breaker” statuses.*

- **Tie-breaker One:** Younger siblings of enrolled students receive seats first. That means if your son was assigned lottery number 11, but a girl assigned number 135 has an older sibling attending your first-choice school, she will get a seat first.
- **Tie-breaker Two:** Students who live in the attendance area of an AA school and are already attending a pre-K or transitional kindergarten (TK) in that same attendance

area—or, for citywide schools, students attending a PreK or TK program at that school—get preference next. A small number of children qualify for this tie-breaker.

- **Tie-breaker Three:** The “test score area” or “CTIP-1” (Census Tract Integration Preference-First Percentile) category attempts to give disadvantaged students access to the city’s most in-demand schools. Applicants who reside in census tracts (basically chunks of neighborhoods) with the lowest average test scores get pulled out next. That means if your son has lottery number 11, but a girl assigned number 135 lives on Treasure Island, she will get a seat first. Since location is an inaccurate proxy for need, some children of means

benefit from this preference, especially in rapidly gentrifying areas like the Mission. (For this and other reasons, the CTIP-1 tie-breaker is the most controversial part of the lottery process. Some have sought to give this tie-breaker less sway, but the Board of Education has thus far rejected these proposals, noting that public school choice in San Francisco is intended “to help create diverse learning environments.”)

- **Tie-breaker Four:** Finally, students who live in the attendance area of an AA school will receive seats.

Only after offering these groups placement will each school tick down its remaining applicants in the order assigned by its lottery. That means your child could draw lottery number 11 at your first choice kindergarten, there could be 66 seats available, and you still might not get a seat. The highest odds of this happening are for applicants living outside the attendance area of a high-demand AA school.

You will always be given your highest ranked choice that is available. If the

**NOTE: The order of tie-breakers is slightly different at city-wide language pathway schools, something SFUSD’s Educational Placement Center (EPC), PPS-SF, and the Enrollment Guide provide more information about.*

computer runs through this whole process and a seat is not available at any of your listed programs, your child will be offered a seat at your AA school if any seats remain, or, if they don’t, at the school closest to your street address that has a seat available (unless you’ve specified a preference for a language pathway on the application form, in which case it will be the closest language pathway with openings).

If you’re unhappy with your child’s March school assignment, there are subsequent rounds. In the second round, with applications due in April, you list only those schools you would prefer to the one to which your child was first assigned. Offers will go out again in May. Families who miss these deadlines or are unhappy with their assignment can enter a “waitpool” request for a school in June and again in August, though at that point close contact with staff at SFUSD’s Educational Placement Center is the best bet, since seats continually open as kids move out of town or opt instead for a private or charter school (which use separate application and admissions processes).

Your odds and the bird’s-eye view

Of the 30-plus families with whom we navigated the enrollment process for our daughter in 2013, about 25 got their first choice in the first round. Every single family who stuck with the process eventually obtained a seat in their first choice program. Some put down a private school deposit in order to quell the fear of an unacceptable option come August, ready to walk away from a seemingly big chunk of change knowing that it actually pales in comparison to saving upwards of \$10K per child per year, the state average for private school tuition. (One can even recoup a deposit or tuition payment through careful navigation of the contract termination process or by purchasing tuition reimbursement insurance.)

SFUSD statistics support this anecdotal evidence. In the 2018 lottery, 73 percent of kindergarten applicants received their first or second choice placement in the first round of the lottery. More than half (63 percent) got assigned to their first choice school right off the bat. It’s true that these

statistics include the younger siblings of already enrolled students, but they’re impressive nonetheless. It’s unclear exactly how many families obtain their first choice school assignment by hanging in there through the summer, but Rachel Nip, formerly of PPS-SF, reported in 2015, “Last year about 700 kindergarten families received a seat at their waitpool school.”

A small number of families inevitably receive the short end of the stick, but the odds are in your favor. The notion that SFUSD has very few good schools that are impossible to get into is just plain wrong. The more families trust in this fact and invest in our schools, the more wrong it will be.

When I meet parents who accept this premise but are still frustrated with the complex process and lack of predictability, I try to provide perspective with two points. First, the biggest time suck is in learning the system. By reading this far, you’ve done that. You don’t need to tour 16 schools. Just pull up the map of schools, flip through the Enrollment Guide, attend the Enrollment Fair, tour the handful of schools that seem

like they might work well, and add on any others you’d be willing to give a try. Filling out and submitting the actual application takes only an hour or two, and the mechanics of the process are spelled out clearly in the Enrollment Guide. Second, when we lived in downtown Seattle, our kids were zoned for a school a 25-minute bus ride away from our home. There was no ability to maximize for walkability, to contemplate whether our child would thrive in a larger or smaller school, to seek out a disciplinary ethos that felt right to us. Coming from that situation, the opportunity to engage in the SFUSD lottery felt like a blessing.

Choice and uncertainty can be overwhelming, but both breed opportunity. Ignore the hype; quell the panic. Look for the beauty in our big, multicultural, and pedagogically diverse school system. And then do what’s best. ❖

Gail is a former public school teacher and recovering lawyer who now works as a stay-at-home mother and freelance writer in San Francisco. You can find her on Facebook (@gailalwayswrite) and Twitter (@gailcornwall), or read more at gailcornwall.com.





Preschool 101

By Gabriella Judd Cirelli

Photos by Marie Hamonic Photography, taken at the Associated Students Early Childhood Education Center at San Francisco State University

Finding the perfect preschool doesn't have to be overwhelming if you know what to look for

Did you know that preschool is not required for your child? The state of California does not actually require formal instruction for children until first grade, yet many parents opt to send their children to preschool for developmental benefits and/or for child care reasons. But among the myriad preschool options out there, how do you figure out what's what?

Preschools by funding type

When selecting a preschool for your child, start by evaluating their sources of funding.

Public programs are free to those who qualify using primarily income criteria. Subsidized programs have a third-party sponsor paying all or part of the tuition, again usually for families who qualify primarily on an income basis. Private programs are fee-based, where each family pays tuition. A private program may be nonprofit or for-profit, religious or secular. A school may also have a combination of programs; for example, a private program may have a certain number of slots set aside for children receiving scholarship funds to cover tuition costs.

Preschools by organizational type

A second way of sorting preschools for your search is by organization, each offering pros and cons. Large, center-based child care takes place in a commercial building and often has larger classrooms, outdoor play spaces, organized training for staff, and multiple teachers to serve larger groups of children. Family child care takes place in the provider's home and offers enrollment restricted by the facility's license. Small centers can accept 6 to

8 children, and large family centers can accept 12 to 14 children. The state of California does not require specific educational training for family child caregivers; however, many facilities are operated by experienced parents and hired assistants. A co-operative nursery school (or co-op) relies heavily on parent participation, usually in exchange for reduced tuition rate. Co-ops have a combination of paid teachers and parent volunteers teaching on any given day. Lastly, SFUSD offers school district preschool programs at a limited number of their schools. Once enrolled in these programs, children may have a chance to progress into kindergarten at the same school, offering consistency and minimizing transitions.

Timing and transitions

Another factor to consider is how long your child will be at each care location before starting kindergarten. For example, if your child is with a parent, grandparent, or nanny until age 2 before entering group care, you may wish to select a preschool where your child can remain until they leave for pre-kindergarten or transitional kindergarten at an SFUSD school, rather than change schools at age 4 for pre-kindergarten (pre-K, which is different than preschool) or transitional kindergarten (TK), and then change schools again for kindergarten. As another example, if your child enters an infant-toddler family child care, and you later choose to move your child to a larger preschool to experience a larger peer group, you may plan for your child to "graduate" from that preschool directly into pre-k/TK/kindergarten.

Preschools by curriculum

Preschools of all types generally fall into one of several curriculum categories. Academic programs often provide direct instruction that is didactic in nature and teacher-centered, meaning that the teachers prepare and present materials for the children to learn. Developmental curricula, such as Bank Street or High Scope approaches, are often packaged by companies for teachers to execute. Rather than being entirely teacher-centered, they rely on interaction between teachers and children as fundamental to the learning process. Emergent programs are

child centered, meaning that the curriculum themes and learning spring from the children's demonstrated interests. This is sometimes also called project-based or project-approach curriculum. Reggio Emilia, or in the U.S. "Reggio inspired," is one such well-known emergent program. The curriculum will evolve over the course of the school year according to teacher's observations of the children's interests. At Montessori schools, children work in mixed-age classrooms at their own pace, often individually, in service to Dr. Maria Montessori's belief that children educate themselves. The Waldorf curriculum is highly artistic and strongly focuses on the natural world and emphasizes the use of natural materials. The classroom is presented as "homelike," and Waldorf schools typically

do not endorse children's exposure to electronics. Language immersion or bilingual programs focus on introducing a second language at an age when the human brain is well-equipped to learn it. The focus is on cognitive development, i.e., language acquisition, in the context of the respective school's curriculum.

In the end, trust your instincts

Once you've considered the funding type, organizational type, and curriculum, you can start narrowing down your search for schools. But what should you look for when touring preschools?

First, go with your gut. Carefully consider whether that super highly regarded school is worth the extra expense or the inconvenient





commute from your home. When you visit the school, how do you feel? Those feelings and first impressions are usually important indicators down the road. If you felt the space was too small or dark, or that the caregivers weren't aligned with your values, listen to those feelings.

The Children's Council of San Francisco offers the following guidelines on choosing child care. Start with the basics: inspect health and safety conditions and check the program's license with the State of California Community Care Licensing. It's important to start your search early if possible, at least a year in advance of your preferred start date. Become an educated consumer about available care options. Ask to visit with the actual caregivers for your child, not just the tour guide, to get a sense of their philosophies. Many preschools follow a similar admissions schedule: tours in the fall (often mandatory to apply); applications due in December or January; admissions decisions mailed in March to start school in September.

Consider the emotional setting: Is your impression one of warmth, nurturing, listening? Do the children appear happy, relaxed, comfortable? Evaluate the

environment: Is the space clean, bright and pleasant, are the materials well cared-for and developmentally appropriate? Are the environment and daily schedule good matches for your child's personal temperament?

Finally, consider which disciplinary techniques are used. It's also important to speak with other parents in the program if possible or consider parent testimonials and reviews.

The importance of self-directed play

Parents sometimes ask, what is my child learning in preschool? Children develop across four developmental domains: physical, cognitive, psychosocial, and creative. Ideally, preschool programs, regardless of type, should seek to meet children's needs across all four domains.

The important work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) posited that children learn as they play. By World War II, when women were working in factories where child care was provided, Vygotsky's theories had ample opportunity to be evaluated and developed. Play became understood as a key way to foster children's development across

the four developmental domains.

Many preschools provide free play time, recognizing that when children play with open-ended materials such as blocks, sand, water, and paint, they build foundational skills that they will use in kindergarten and beyond. For example, repeated exploration with painting allows children to learn to express ideas on paper and out into the world, while using paint and paintbrush serves as a type of writing tool. Sensory play with water allows children to explore movement as well as scientific concepts such as gravity, flow, and measurement. Playing with blocks provides children with opportunities to make discoveries, act out their ideas, work with variables such as weight and balance, and to consider spatial relations and measurement. Fostering a love of learning and discovery is ideal preparation for kindergarten and life in general.

Most importantly, play stimulates children's social and emotional learning as they work together on a project and navigate failures such as when their blocks fall down.

They participate in collaborative conversations and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas. "A child who has the opportunity for self-directed play builds social and emotional health, confidence, creativity, self-discipline and problem-solving skills," says Amanda Riccetti, director of Big City Montessori School in San Francisco. "To support this, we must learn the art of observation, so not to interrupt their ideas, goals, and motive of activity."

Although preschool isn't required by the state, it can be a time of rich development for your child. Says Erica Almaguer, director, Early Childhood Education Center, Associated Students of San Francisco State University: "A high-quality play-based program will develop and enhance children's soft skills. These early experiences truly set the foundation for them in having a positive sense of self and successful human interactions." ♦

Gabriella is a student at San Francisco State University's Master's program in early childhood education. She is the director of Primeros Pasos, a Spanish immersion preschool in San Francisco. Her favorite job is being wife to husband Franco and mother to daughter Donatella, 8, and Salvatore, 3.

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Sex Education in America

Let's talk about sex (ed) in school and why we need more of it

By Anna Gracia



Growing up, my friends and I thought sex was a bad word. Our rebel eight-year-old selves would wait until all adults were out of earshot then whisper it amongst ourselves, cackling at our bravery. It wasn't our fault, really; sex was one of those words adults only used when they thought we weren't listening. Sex was a *grown-up* word.

Many years later, long past the point at which “the talk” would have been either helpful or informative, my dad *still* avoided saying the actual word *sex* when he decided to finally address the topic. He slung his arm over my shoulder and speculated that while I might be “feeling excited,” I wasn't mature enough to make those kinds of decisions

about my body because I wasn't married. All the while my now-husband looked on. I wished to sink into the ground and disappear forever.

Many of us have similar stories: parents fumbling their way through an awkward sit-down, addressing the topic far too late, or avoiding the topic altogether, trusting the school system to fill in any blanks. Data backs up these observations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that young people ages 15 to 24 represent 25 percent of the sexually active population. Unfortunately, a 2012 survey conducted by Planned Parenthood Federation of America and *Family Circle* magazine, with support from Center for

Latino Adolescent and Family Health at New York University, also found that one in six teens ages 15 to 18 said their parents had never spoken with them about *anything* related to sex, educational or otherwise. With so much of the heavy lifting relegated to schools, what exactly is it they're teaching?

A brief history of sex education in schools

Though religious pamphlets and books on “solitary vice” have been available since the 1830s (hint: Google the origin of the Graham cracker), it wasn't until 1913 that sex education was first introduced to schools. Ella Flagg Young, Chicago's superintendent and the first female head of a major urban

public school district, developed a “sex hygiene” course for her high school students, but thanks to heavy resistance by the Catholic Church and conservative school board members, both she and the program were ousted from the district a short time later.

Sex ed resurfaced during World War I, when rampant sexually transmitted diseases among soldiers reached such a fever pitch that American society began to view it as a

[O]nly 24 states and the District of Columbia currently require that public schools even teach sex education, and only 13 states require that the information be medically accurate.

public health issue (estimates suggest half of all servicemen had an STD). In 1919, a White House task force on child welfare endorsed sex ed in public schools, and three years later, the U.S. Public Health Service released a manual on sex education in high schools. According to *Newsweek*, between 20 and 40 percent of U.S. school systems in the 1920s had programs in social hygiene and sexuality. However, these programs still focused primarily on the risks of masturbation and intercourse outside of marriage.

Over the next three decades, sex ed exploded in both primary and secondary school campuses. The U.S. Office of Education published materials and trained teachers on the subject and the U.S. Public Health Service labeled school sexuality education an “urgent need.”

Ironically, it was during the sexual revolution of the late '60s and early '70s that sex ed began to face fierce resistance. Religious groups like the Christian Crusade and the John Birch Society attacked sex education for promoting promiscuity and moral depravity, including encouraging students to become homosexuals. The conversation around sex education turned political and by 1975—two years after *Roe v.*

Wade—20 state legislatures had voted to restrict or abolish sexuality education.

The HIV pandemic of the '80s, however, brought the topic back to the forefront, and by 1993, approximately 47 states mandated some form of sex education for students—up from a mere three in 1980—and all 50 supported education about AIDS. For the first time, previously off-limits topics like anal sex were introduced into classrooms. It was at this same time that conservatives and religious groups began to gain momentum, rebranding “sex education” as “abstinence education.” In 1996, Congress directed a record \$250 million toward abstinence-only education as part of the Welfare Reform Bill.

Since then, Congress has continued to appeal to both progressive and conservative causes, directing tens of millions of dollars each year toward what are now dubbed “abstinence-only-until marriage programs,” or AOUms, while simultaneously funding competing programs such as the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs (TPPP), one of a number of factors credited with slashing the teen birth rate in half between 2007 and 2017. But recent changes to the funding guidance for TPPP (following a lawsuit to halt the premature ending of the program entirely) may shift the direction of future sex ed programs in the U.S., with the current administration no longer mandating LGBTQ-inclusiveness and requiring an emphasis on “sexual risk avoidance,” a frequently-used term for “abstinence only.”

What is sex education?

The CDC has a list of 16 topics it deems critical to sex education, ranging from “how to properly use a condom” to “how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to HIV, STDs, and pregnancy.” However, it also found that as of 2014, fewer than half of high schools and only 20 percent of middle schools provided instruction on all of the 16 critical topics. In fact, the Guttmacher Institute reports that as of August 1, 2018, only 24 states and the District of Columbia currently require that public schools even teach sex education, and only 13 states require that the information be medically accurate.

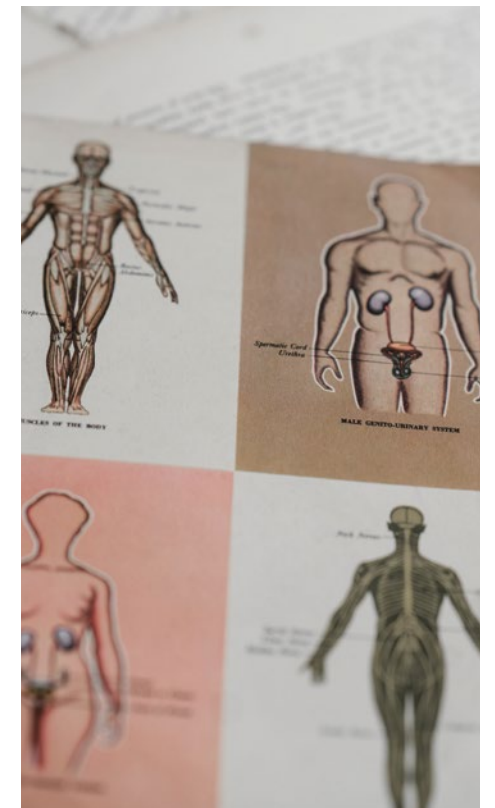
Some advocates believe that sex

education should expand beyond the scope of anatomy and sexual intercourse. Planned Parenthood, for example, argues that sex education should cover not only sexual behavior and sexual health, but also gender roles, sexual orientation, gender identity, and relationships, among other topics. The Center for American Progress analyzed the education standards in each state and found that only 10 states and the District of Columbia mention the terms “healthy relationships,” “sexual assault,” or “consent” in their sex education programs.

LGBT-inclusivity in sex education is even more rare. A 2013 survey of nearly 8,000 students between the ages of 13 and 21 conducted by The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that fewer than 6 percent of LGBT students reported that their health classes had included positive representations of LGBT-related topics.

Sex education in California

California has many policies in place to ensure standardized and wide-reaching access to sex ed. The California Healthy Act, which took effect January 1, 2016, requires that all school districts in the state provide



students with integrated, comprehensive, and accurate HIV prevention and sexual health education at least once in high school and once in middle school. Much of the education was already in place (such as HIV prevention education), but the law ensured all districts were in compliance and updated curriculum to include information about sexual harassment, sexual assault, adolescent relationship violence, intimate partner violence, and sex trafficking.

Schools are required to notify parents 14 days ahead of any sex education instruction and parents may opt their child out of it, but the law prohibits active consent, where parents must “opt-in” for their child to receive the information in the first place. Abstinence-only education is also prohibited in the state, and while the curriculum does discuss positive benefits of abstaining from sexual activity, it is required that this perspective be accompanied by “medically accurate information on other methods of preventing HIV and other STIs and pregnancy.”

[O]ne in six teens ages 15 to 18 said their parents had never spoken with them about anything related to sex, educational or otherwise.

Most notably, the California Healthy Youth Act specifies that instruction and materials should “affirmatively recognize that people have different sexual orientations and, when discussing or providing examples of relationships or couples, shall be inclusive of same-sex relationships” and “teach pupils about gender, gender expression, gender identity, and explore the harm of negative gender stereotypes.” It also expressly prohibits the teaching or promotion of religious doctrine in relation to sex education (more information about the California Healthy Youth Act can be found at www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/se/faq.asp).

Additionally, California was the first state to recognize affirmative consent, otherwise known as “yes means yes,” back in 2014. The law sought to clarify the definition of when



two people agree to have sex, stating, “[l]ack of protest or resistance does not mean consent...nor does silence mean consent.” Though originally enacted to help resolve rape and sexual assault cases on college campuses, the idea has spread to high school curricula, with affirmative consent now required as a part of California sex education.

San Francisco Unified School District is leading the charge with a progressive program that is being copied throughout California. At the high school level, students receive a minimum of one semester of health education, which breaks down to about 78 discrete lessons. Though there are many topics covered in a general health class, from tobacco use to nutrition and physical activity, SFUSD has made it a point to emphasize instruction from its “Be Real, Be Ready” program—comprehensive relationship and sexuality curriculum created by SFUSD teachers in collaboration with the San Francisco Department of Public Health and the Adolescent Health Working Group. These classroom-ready lesson plans run the gamut, from anatomy and STDs to relationship communication and youth health rights (interested parents can find the lesson plans at sfusdhealtheducation.org/be-real-be-ready-2). At the middle school

level, students are required to receive a minimum of 30 periods of health education each year—sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. In the latter two years, the district stresses its “Healthy Me, Healthy Us” curriculum that covers everything from birth control and personal boundaries to sexual harassment and LGBT issues.

While The California Healthy Youth Act does not require sex education in elementary schools, SFUSD does. Sometime within the mandated 20 lessons of health education per year, teachers are expected to lay the groundwork for important concepts like violence prevention and family diversity. The problem, says Ariana Contreras, a kindergarten teacher in the district, is that while the district has created lessons on the subjects, the curriculum is not stored on site. Instead, teachers must request it, and then travel to obtain specific lessons for the students—a monumental task during the already-busy school year. “You can mandate these things, but if you’re not providing resources...” she shrugs. Instead, teachers at the elementary level are left largely to their own devices, with only a survey at the end of the year asking whether or not they taught anything health-related and what subjects they covered.

Part of the problem, Contreras continues,

is the lack of social workers or nurses at many school sites. Both are a vital resource for health-related information, and often teachers simply aren’t trained to respond to a six-year-old loudly announcing the mechanics of sex in the classroom—a situation she dealt with last year. “I would love to give my kids more information,” she says. “But I don’t have time to come up with more stuff on my own.”

Is sex education really necessary?

In a word, yes.

Despite dropping to record lows in recent years, the U.S. still has the highest teen birth rate of any industrialized country by a wide margin. In 2016, young people ages 13 to 24 accounted for 21 percent of all new HIV infections in the United States. And almost half of the nearly 20 million new STDs reported each year are among people under age 24.

California was the first state to recognize affirmative consent, otherwise known as “yes means yes”...

The fact is a significant portion of American youth is engaging in sexual activity, though rates have dropped dramatically over the past decade—a fact many experts largely attribute to access to straightforward information about contraception and sex both in schools and online. According to a 2017 survey by the CDC, 40 percent of high school students say they’ve had sex, while 10 percent have had sex with four or more partners. And while data is much more limited on the sexual behaviors of children before high school, a 2009 CDC survey found that 6 percent of high school students reported having sex before the age of 13. Additionally, a 2014 study published in the journal *Pediatrics* found that 20 percent of middle school students with text-capable cell phones had engaged in sexting (sending and receiving sexually explicit cell phone text or photo messages), which the authors of the study associate with an increased probability of risky sexual behavior.

Both the United Nations and the World Health Organization argue that young people have the right to information about sexual health and parents largely agree. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States reports the opt-out rate for sex education is low across the country, ranging from less than 1 percent to as high as 5 percent in cities where data on this issue is kept. The American Psychological Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Public Health Association all agree that comprehensive sex education and HIV prevention programs are effective in reducing high-risk sexual behavior in adolescents.

But perhaps the best argument for sex education comes from Laura Lindberg, a research scientist at the Guttmacher Institute: “We tell people not to drink and drive,” she says. “We don’t teach them not to drive... We would never withhold information about seat belts because they wouldn’t know how to protect themselves.” ♦

Anna Gracia is a former teacher who is currently working on a young adult novel that highlights the good, the bad, and the frequently awkward side of teen sex and dating.

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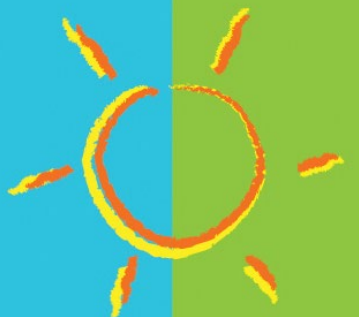
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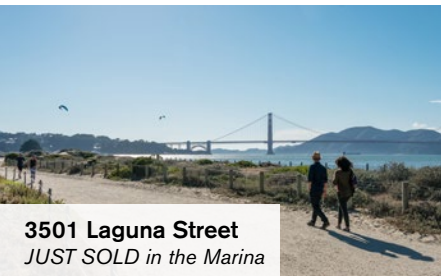
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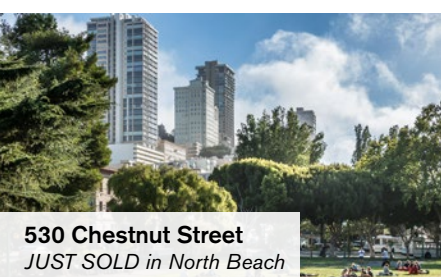
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CAREERS AND ENTREPRENEURS

Moms October Networking Lunch at Cafe Venue Downtown

Everyone is welcome, from pregnant moms to working moms to stay-at-home moms, and everyone in between! We look forward to seeing you there. This place fills up quickly, so we usually get there a little early to snag a table. Look for the GGMG Moms Downtown Lunch Group sign on the table.

- DATE: Tuesday, October 2
- TIME: Noon to 1 p.m.
- PLACE: 70 Leidesdorff St.
- COST: FREE

Moms in Tech Mixer at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati

Do you work in tech or are you considering a career in it? Join us at this event hosted by the Careers and Entrepreneurs Committee! All GGMG members and those with a special interest in tech are welcome. We will have wine and cheese and plenty of opportunities to network and get to know other GGMG moms in tech.

- DATE: Thursday, October 18
- TIME: 4 to 7 p.m.
- PLACE: 139 Townsend St., Ste.150
- COST: FREE

Moms in Nonprofit Panel Discussion

Ever wonder what it's like to work in the nonprofit world? Join us for this event, where a panel of moms who work at nonprofits will share their experiences and answer your questions. Feel free to bring your lunch!

- DATE: Friday, October 26
- TIME: Noon to 1 p.m.
- PLACE: 833 Market St., Ste. 306
- COST: FREE

Moms November Networking Lunch at Specialty's Cafe Downtown

Everyone is welcome, from pregnant moms to working moms to stay-at-home moms, and everyone in between! We look forward to seeing you there. Look for the GGMG Moms Downtown Lunch Group sign on the table.

- DATE: Wednesday, November 7
- TIME: Noon to 1 p.m.
- PLACE: 100 California St.
- COST: FREE

KIDS ACTIVITIES

Pumpkin Decorating at Midtown Terrace Playground

Add some personal touches to your Halloween decorations this year with custom pumpkins decorated by your kids. We'll provide pumpkins, decorating supplies, snacks, and drinks. Bring the family and join us!

- DATE: Sunday, October 21
- TIME: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- PLACE: Clarendon Avenue and Olympia Way
- COST: FREE



Thanksgiving Storytime and Crafting at Charlie's Corner

Join us for music, story, craft, and snacks centered around the theme of "Thankfulness" along with extra-special GGMG festivities. Drop in any time during this open house event, but please RSVP as it is sure to sell out! This activity is most suitable for kids ages 2 to 6, but younger and older kids are welcome.

- DATE: Sunday, November 11
- TIME: 9 a.m. to noon
- PLACE: 4102 24th St.
- COST: FREE

REGISTER FOR EVENTS AT GGMG.ORG/CALENDAR

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

Neighborhood 1 and Neighborhood 3 are now combined under Neighborhood 3. Please visit our Neighborhood Group on the GGMG website for details on all of the below and more!

Movie Night

Join us for Movie Night at the Presidio Theater on Monday afternoons. At these sensory-friendly shows, the lights are low and the sound is turned down slightly. Everyone is welcome (including crying babies) and talking and noise are allowed. Check ggmg.org (Calendar and Neighborhood Groups) for movie info and to RSVP.

- DATE: Monday afternoons
- PLACE: Presidio Theater (2340 Chestnut St.)

Storytime with the Elderly at Providence Place Assisted Living

We'll do an informal story time with songs and books at the facility, then visit with the residents after. All ages are welcome. Contact jpallasrd@gmail.com for more information.

- DATE: Thursday, October 18 at 10:30 am
- PLACE: Providence Place (2456 Geary Blvd.)

Halloween Playdate

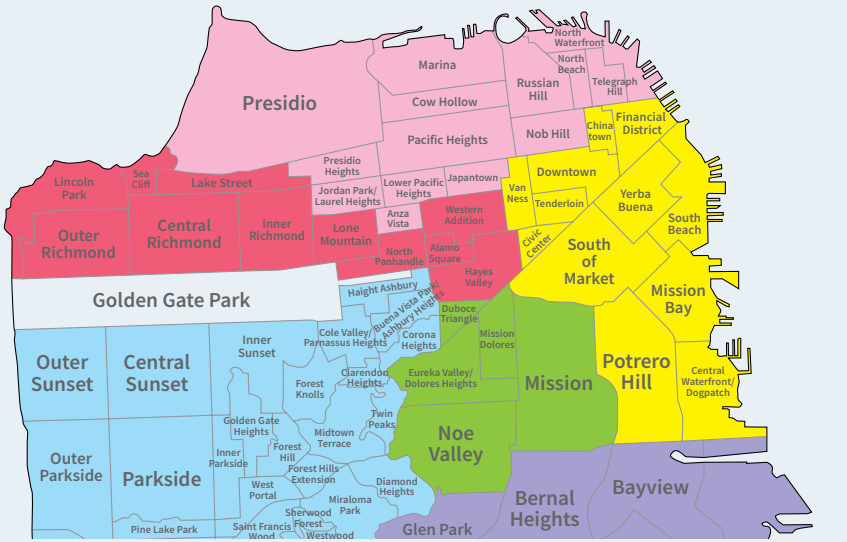
Join us for a festive Halloween playdate at Presidio Heights Playground. All ages are welcome and arrive whenever works for your schedule (even feel free to stop by with a sleeping infant!). We'll have a face painter and a table set up with some snacks and Halloween crafts. Costumes are encouraged!

- DATE: Friday, October 26 from 10 a.m. to noon
- PLACE: Presidio Heights Playground (3437 Clay St.)



Neighborhood 3

Marina, Cow Hollow, Fisherman's Wharf, Presidio, Russian Hill, Nob Hill, North Beach, Cathedral Hill, Fillmore, Japantown, Laurel Heights, Pacific Heights, Lower Pacific Heights, Presidio Heights, and surrounding neighborhoods.



GGMG’s Fall Festival

Please join us for GGMG’s Annual Fall Festival at a new location, SFF Soccer Field!



DATE: Saturday, October 13
TIME: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
PLACE: 701 Mission Bay Blvd. North.
RSVP: ggmgfallfest2018.eventbrite.com

Please email any questions to rsvp@ggmg.org.

We’ll be kicking off the season with a day of fun! There will be bounce houses, live music for kids of all ages, pumpkin decorating, a photo booth with photo souvenirs, food trucks, a nursing lounge, and lots of other fun activities! Be sure to visit each activity booth as most sponsors organize their own raffles. The first 250 members will receive a goody bag.

Fall Festival is free to members, their partner, and child(ren). Limited tickets are available for purchase for non-member adults and children. This year we are scanning tickets for a more efficient check-in process; please download your tickets to your mobile device prior to your arrival, or present your printed tickets at check-in. Be sure to download or print a ticket for each member of your party.

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Volunteers needed! All Fall Festival volunteers will receive a gift card and qualify for the volunteer-only raffle! To volunteer, fill out the form at <https://tinyurl.com/y75qld5u>.

MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Make a Connection



Whether you are a new member or a longtime veteran, the Membership Committee wants to thank you for your loyalty to GGMG. Our committee ensures that members are engaged and aware of all the benefits that membership offers. Our ever-popular **Newborn Playgroup Formation** event is coming up on **October 20** at Presidio Sports Basement. If you are a new mom or just had another baby, this is the event for you! In addition, due to popular demand, we are holding our first **Toddler Playgroup Formation** event on **October 23** at Alamo Square Park. This is suited for moms seeking to form a new playgroup with children ages 2 to 3 years old. Come join us at the playground and make some new friends. Don't forget to RSVP to these events on ggmg.org.

Use GGMG to meet other moms face to face and turn online connections into real-life friendships; GGMG playgroups can be a lifesaver for expectant new moms. Find your due-date subgroup at www.ggmg.org/groups.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Día de los Muertos:
Celebrating Those We Have Lost
Perspective from the Diversity and Inclusion Committee

By Marcie Longoria-Chardavoine



Growing up in South Texas, we were more involved in Halloween activities than Día de los Muertos. It wasn’t until my grandmother set up an altar for her deceased brother that the essence of the day hit home for me. Día de los Muertos (October 31 to November 2) originated with the Aztec belief that the deceased should be celebrated without mourning.

The Día de los Muertos altar starts with a photo of the person you’re honoring. Place the photo on a tiered altar, which can represent heaven, earth, the underworld, or even the seven sins. Light a candle to guide the spirit home and leave out a glass of water and the person’s favorite foods as an offering. Add *cempasuchil* (marigold) flowers, which represent death in Mesoamerican culture. Other *ofrendas* (offerings) include *mariposas* (butterflies), which embody the spirits migrating home for a visit, or skulls and *calaveras* (skeletons) made with bread, sugar, or chocolate. Whether an altar is a simple photo with a candle or an elaborate multilevel showpiece, remember the spirit of celebration. Día de los Muertos is for those we have lost and carry forever in our hearts.

Join our team! diversity@ggmg.org

CAREERS AND ENTREPRENEURS

The Mom Network at Work

Are you thinking about changing companies or careers? Or just hoping to network with other moms? The Careers and Entrepreneurs Committee has lots of opportunities for you to do just that in October and November!

Back by popular demand, we are hosting our second tech mixer of the year on Thursday, October 18 from 4 to 7 p.m. Whether you work in the tech world or are interested in learning more about it, we hope you will join us for some wine, cheese, and networking.

If you’ve ever considered working at a nonprofit or joining a nonprofit board, we hope you’ll join us on Friday, October 26 from noon to 1 p.m. We’ll be hosting a nonprofit panel where moms who work in the nonprofit world will share their experiences and answer your questions.

We will also be hosting our regular monthly networking lunches in October and November, which—like all of our events—are open to all GGMG members. We hope to see you there! Check out the GGMG calendar at www.ggmg.org/calendar to learn more and sign up for these events.

MEMBER SUPPORT

Guidelines
to Live by

Work for what you believe in.

Your choices and actions have consequences. You can be someone’s hero.

Life has ups and downs. Be grateful for the ups, and rely on your friends and family to get through the tough times. We are stronger together.

Other people may try to tell you what to do. Think for yourself before you act. Use your own judgment.

The world is filled with people, and each of us is but one small part. Support those who feel ignored.

Strive to earn respect from others. When someone does or says something unkind, give them the benefit of the doubt that something else going on in their life could be causing their behavior.

Do your best. Aim for better, not perfect.

Do the right thing, without the expectation of gratitude or reward.

If you encounter someone losing control, be kind to them. Those who need kindness the most are often the ones who are least able to express it.

Listen well and often. Learn by observing.

And remember: we are all in this together.



Volunteers of the Month

Congratulations to **Esha Dash, Semmantha Chie, Kyra Jablonsky, and Jenny Shaw**, our volunteers of the month! Esha is co-chair of the Social Media Committee; Semmantha is an ambassador for Neighborhood Meetups in Neighborhood 6 and co-chair of the Kids Activities Committee; Kyra is a volunteer with the Diversity & Inclusion Committee, and Jenny is senior editor of *GGMG Magazine*.



ESHA, WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAVORITE...
Parenting Advice: Keep an open mind and listen to the advice everyone has to offer, but decide for yourself which advice you want to take.



SEMMANTHA, WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAVORITE...
Book: Any epic fantasy, preferably with dragons; **Destination:** Any tropical location with a beach and a cocktail with my name on it.



KYRA, WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAVORITE...
Book: *Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson; **Film:** *In America*; **Restaurant:** Garibaldi's.



JENNY, WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAVORITE...
Restaurant: Any place with Northern Chinese food. It's what I grew up on, so it's my "chicken soup for the soul." Or boba tea.

Our winners will enjoy gift cards to International Orange Spa (2044 Fillmore St.). Book yourself a massage today at www.internationalorange.com.

New Arrivals



- Brittany Lasky **Baby Marlowe Jean**
- Kathleen M. **Baby Nora Josephine**
- Sara Isaacs **Baby Talia Hannah**
- Chandani P. T. **Baby Aurora Ray**

Congratulations to Brittany Lasky! She will be pampering her little one with products from Babyganics. These plant-based, tear-free, hypoallergenic cleansers and lotions clean and protect skin from head to toe.

To announce your new arrival in the magazine and for a chance to win a Babyganics gift set, fill out the form at <http://tinyurl/ggmgNewArrivals>.



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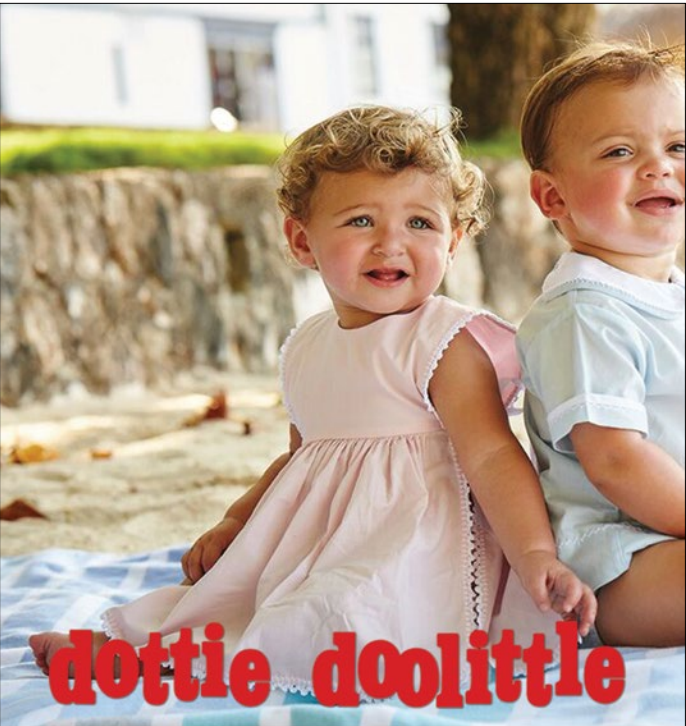
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I ♥ Mom

Home-Taught By Sandy Woo

On day two of kindergarten, my son surprised me by proudly writing numbers one through five. In Chinese. He can barely write his numbers in English, so this development was indeed unexpected, considering it was the first day of a twice weekly Mandarin Chinese after-school program. Wary of drilling, I had specifically asked the teachers about curriculum; they assured me that learning Chinese would be fun via games and songs. As I watched him practice writing numbers four and five with correct pen strokes on special one-inch square grid paper, I cringed. Was I turning into my parents?

My parents, educated until high school in China, had decided it would be genius to homeschool me for the Mandarin language. Neither had any teaching credentials or experience with children before me. But they had passion and dogged determination that I would learn to speak, read, and write Chinese. They also had a curriculum, if you could call advice cobbled from Chinese Reader's Digest and their own recollection of their education a formal plan.

My "formal" language education started at age 3 when mom started teaching me rhymes from children's books on tapes. At my best, I might have memorized 20 or so songs on par with "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." My family's favorite rhyme was one that essentially made fun of my generous head circumference: Big head. Big head. Rain no fear. You have umbrella. I have big head. It is far more endearing in Mandarin, I promise.

I expect he will, like me, resent the language and its complicated beauty.

By age 4, I had memorized and written the bopomofo, a transliteration of pinyin invented in Taiwan. It had 26 symbols, each representing a sound in Mandarin that allows you to recognize and "read" a Chinese character, which can have up to 57 strokes! You could sing the bopomofo much like the ABCs, and it is the closest equivalent to the English alphabet. In Chinese, you really can't spell or sound out a word; rather, you have to learn the parts and maybe have half a chance at being literate. Chinese has approximately 80,000 characters combined to create 370,000 words. (English has about 171,000 words in

use). However, an educated person need only know 8,000 characters; to read a newspaper, just 3,000.

Written Chinese is a collection of hieroglyphs evolved from pictures. Children learn to read by rote memorization of characters made of radicals, which are graphical components of a Chinese character. For example, the radical for female and the

radical for male placed together forms the word "good." The female radical combined with the horse radical creates the word "mother." Horse sounds like mother, only in a different tone, so adding the female radical creates a new word (and meaning) altogether. These occasional tidbits at least made my lessons interesting.

Unfortunately, most lessons involved writing pages of Chinese stories or whatever words my parents decided I needed to practice (180 daily characters to be precise). My favorite uncle, an engineer, designed special paper for this endeavor. This paper had nine columns of 20 squares that fit perfectly on standard A4 paper. I hated it. The tedious repetition, the rote memorization,

the weirdness of it all. My classmates played ball after school. I had boring parent-imposed Chinese lessons.

After college, I decided to go overseas to take a Chinese language program. Prior to that, I wanted nothing to do with learning the language on my own, feeling that speaking it fluently was enough. Without bopomofo, I read at the first grade level, if that. With knowledge of bopomofo, I deciphered the official English pinyin system and learned how to use a Chinese dictionary (before Google Translate).

Today, I marvel at the beauty of the written language, the internal logic of how the radicals are combined, and lament the simplified characters adopted by mainland China to increase its abysmal literacy rate. To me, this simplification comes at the expense of losing some of the language's rich history.

With this backstory in mind, I embark on a new language journey with my son. It's time for some formal education in Chinese for just a few hours a week; perhaps he will even have some fun. I expect he will, like me, resent the language and its complicated beauty. Perhaps, though, his chest will continue to puff with pride as he shows me his newfound skills. ♦

Sandy is a reluctant but stubborn Chinese "teacher" (at her German husband's urging) to her son, who would rather speak English except when he needs something.



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