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CAREER & ENTREPRENEURSHIP, PARTNERSHIPS, NEW ARRIVALS

LETTER FROM
THE EDITOR:

Starry Night

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is a Sagittarius living in Cole Valley with a Scorpio, a Virgo, an Aquarius, two Pisces, two cats, and a dog. Maybe one day, if the stars align, she will enjoy a moment of quiet.

For as long as I can remember, I've been in love with the night sky: its size, its beauty, its many mysteries. Fortunate to spend much of my childhood in a place far from the halogen glow of urban lights, I took full advantage of Vermont's isolation, spreading out pillows and blankets on our lawn on weekend nights and staring at the sky until late in the night, when the cold crept in under my parka or the sounds from the forest began to spook me. My younger brother, our friends, and I spent countless hours on our backs, pointing out stars, satellites, constellations, and, occasionally, objects we couldn't quite explain. With the hazy smudge of the Milky Way hovering above us, we pondered life's many questions, both big (*Is there a physical end to the universe? What's at the edge?*) and small (*Is Soundgarden better than Pearl Jam?*). The darkness allowed our minds to run free, our small voices trying to make sense of the universe and our place in it.

As I grew up, my attention wandered and opportunities to enjoy the sky shrunk. College and my 20s brought me to bright-lit, urban areas, and as I found my footing as a worker, then a wife, then a mother, I began to focus on what was in front of me, rather than above me. It wasn't until the pandemic stripped my life to the basics that I found myself with the time to look at the big picture again. With in-person school and

work on hiatus, I began looking to the stars again to entertain and enchant me. I started doing overnight hikes with a friend, setting up blankets on the sides of Mt. Tamalpais and watching the sky. And I brought my children into the mix. With a throttled ability to visit the places and the people we loved, I let nature educate my kids, as I took them on excursions to see full moons, meteor showers, and the 2020 NEOWISE comet. Between grumbles they experienced moments of pure

“The darkness allowed our minds to run free, our small voices trying to make sense of the universe and our place in it.”

awe, asking questions about the universe, some easy, some unanswerable—all important in helping to undergird our sense of understanding and wonder about a world that didn't always make sense anymore.

In this issue, our writers wonder about a lot of things, and wonder about the process of wonder itself. Molly Craft explores the power of music to transform the human brain, showing us how to harness its potential to help center us and become calmer, happier parents. H.B. Terrell cuts through the noise to explain how to help our children think critically about all the information they're bombarded with in our oversaturated society. And in an article from our archives, Gail Cornwall looks at the history of fairy tales and their timeless ability to help children process emotions, strengthen resilience, and nurture their imaginations.

These days, I often have to remember to look up, but I'm never sorry when I do. As my children grow, I hope they hang on to the magic of the night sky that has helped guide my own path in the universe.

Sonya Abrams

LETTER FROM
THE BOARD:

The Magic of Childhood

By Connie Lin



Even after living in the heart of SF for more than 10 years, Connie and her family keep discovering new parts of the city they've never experienced before.

Now that my kids are solidly in elementary school, I've started to think about how to help build up that feeling of anything-could-happen magical possibility that sparks in childhood. With the last weeks of summer drawing to a close, we embarked on playing board games together, and I started to put together a short list of kid movies that should be part of their lives.

Naturally, I thought about the movies that helped to define my own childhood. They've already devoured the entire *Star Wars* series and dabbled in *Willy Wonka*, and my two kids are just now becoming old enough to not have nightmares after watching scary scenes. While I can't wait to introduce *The Princess Bride*, *The NeverEnding Story*, and *The Sandlot* to them, I knew it would be safer to start with something where positivity and delight outweigh the uneasy unknown.

We chose to start with one of my favorites, *Flight of the Navigator*, where a 12-year-old named David is whisked away by a friendly if not goofy robot/alien in a spaceship, with his confused but loving family trying to support and bring him back. My kids loved it, laughing at the jokes from Max, the endearing Pee Wee Herman (pre-scandal) spaceship robot,

and empathized with David's love of and frustration with his brother and parents. What's next? We might try to watch *Batteries Not Included*, if I can find a service that will stream it. I can't wait for more family movie nights with popcorn and warm chocolate brownies.

“Now that my kids are solidly in elementary school, I've started to think about how to help build up that feeling of anything-could-happen magical possibility that sparks in childhood.”

I hope you and your little ones are able to carve out some time to experience the beautiful and warm weather San Francisco typically has in late fall. There are many stroller walks and mom get togethers throughout October and November where you'll get to connect with and build friendships with other parents. The holiday rush will soon be here, so it's nice to step back and take time for our relationships.

If you'd like to help to organize events or volunteer with GGMG more generally, we would love to have you. We are looking for a wide variety of help—from board directors, committee chairs, and volunteers across communications, marketing, recruiting, and beyond. Please email recruiting@ggmg.org to learn more.

Looking forward to seeing you online on our GGMG forums and at our upcoming events!

Connie Lin

HOUSEKEEPING

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

This issue made possible by: The joys of potty training; Wrangling my child's 'beast'; Recovering from Disneyland hangover; I swam the English Channel in 19 hours and 16 minutes; Multitasking and trying to keep my head above water during the back-to-school rush.

COVER OUTTAKES



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

Cover photo by Natasha Saravanja Photography
Models: Ray (6) and June the dog (about 14)

Exploring the Wonders-ful Bay Area (and Beyond)

By Sonya Abrams

Mother Nature has been hard at work, with volcanoes, earthquakes, ice ages, and sea level changes shaping and reshaping Northern California over eons, creating beautiful natural wonders along the way. With fall’s friendly weather upon us, this is the perfect time to get outside and share some of these fascinating spots with your families. Here is just a sampling.

Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, Antioch

Tectonic activity and sedimentation in the area just north of Mount Diablo created a coal jackpot for miners who established several towns and an intricate mining and transit system in the decades following the Gold Rush. Today, the area is home to a 6,000-acre preserve boasting trails to hike and bike on. When little legs grow tired, children can peer into portions of the coal mines, take a tour of a sandstone mine on the site, or visit a historic cemetery. Admission is free, and parking is \$5.

Bear Gulch Cave Trail, Pinnacles National Park

Pinnacles is the closest National Park to the Bay Area, just over two hours from San Francisco, and is known for its spectacular rock formations. There are places for climbers and hikers of all ages and abilities to scramble, but the Bear Gulch Cave Trail is not to be missed, and at 1.5 miles long, it’s accessible to many children. It’s a tight squeeze at points, and you need to come prepared with flashlights and other safety equipment, but it’s a seasonal highlight and a unique opportunity to see rock formations and possibly even bats up close. Weather, fire, and crowd conditions can affect access, so make sure to check online before visiting. nps.gov/pinn/planyourvisit/conditions.htm

Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve, Oakland

Named for an extinct volcano that erupted a million years ago, this nearly 1,000-acre preserve offers tectonic-driven rock formations to marvel at, including bake zones, where lava changed surrounding rock colors to a deep red. Little ones can examine cool stones, and slightly older children can enjoy what

many agree is the park’s highlight, the man-made labyrinths. The 2-mile trip to the Mazzariello Labyrinth is an especially accessible journey for many elementary-aged children. AllTrails has a detailed route. Check ahead, so that climate-driven trail closures don’t derail your day.

Earthquake Trail, Point Reyes National Seashore

On this stroller-friendly 0.6-mile paved walking trail along the Marin coast, your children can see the exact place the earth split open during the 1906 earthquake, including a fence that moved 20 feet as the Bay Area shook. There’s also a charming visitor center and spots to picnic and play. To make a day of it, head slightly north to Tomales Point to see the famous herds of tule elk. Fall is rut season, so keep your ears open to hear the cries of male elk bugling, their vocal attempt to boast their fitness and score impressed mates.

Bean Hollow State Beach, Pescadero

The Northern California coastline is rich with rock formations perfect for tidepooling. Unfortunately, the secret is out, creating traffic jams and crowd headaches at many of the most popular spots, such as Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. Escape the hoards and stop by Bean Hollow, just south of Pescadero, which features two crescent-shaped beaches punctuated by rocky points perfect for tidepooling. Bring a net to catch (and release) some crabs, then try to spot some harbor seals. Dog owners will be happy to know that this is one of the few dog-friendly state beaches around, so bring your (leashed) pooch. Note that the water is not generally safe for swimming.



Sonya lives in San Francisco with her three kids, and 22 years into her California experiment, she continues to marvel at the natural wonders she encounters around every corner.

Lil’ Kid, Big City: Ingleside Terraces

By Jessica Franklin

Ingleside Terraces, one of the last areas of San Francisco to be incorporated, was built around the former Ingleside Racetrack in the southwestern part of town, and offers plenty of opportunities for fun with the kids. Spend a few hours at **Little Oceanauts** on Ocean Avenue, an indoor playground and party venue for ages 12 and younger with walk-in play. Inside the ring of **Urbano Drive**, built on top of the former Ingleside Racetrack, there’s a 28-foot marble and concrete sundial in the otherwise nondescript **Sundial Park**. A few blocks to the west is **Lakeside Landing**, boasting a giant octopus mural underfoot, a nature exploration area for kids, a stage, picnicking, giant chess, and edible gardening. Options for food along Ocean Avenue abound, including **Whole Foods**, near the **Ingleside Library**, with something for even the pickiest palate. **Ocean Ale House** is family friendly, with games to play with your littles while you enjoy a beer or sandwich. Or check out **Beep’s Burgers**, a classic burger joint serving the neighborhood for more than 50 years. There are several parks nearby: **Aptos Playground** has a huge grassy field with an outer track and a large blacktop great for kids to practice on their wheels. A few blocks south, the newly renovated **Merced Heights Playground** features a huge new play structure, basketball and tennis courts, and an enclosed dog park. On the other side of Interstate 280, **Balboa Park** contains activities for all ages—including a skate park.



Jessica has been shuttling her two kids to school on or near Ocean Avenue for 10 years. She’d tell you more about the history of Ingleside Terraces if she had more space—and if she were writing for a history magazine.

Off the Beaten Workout Path

By Christine Chen

Have you been looking to mix up your workout routine? There are many wondrous and unique workout classes that make staying in shape fun and offer ways to explore new areas that might be out of your comfort zone. For anyone who ever dreamed of being in a circus (or just wants an exhilarating workout), **Circus Center** on Frederick Street in San Francisco offers classes for all levels in flying trapeze, acrobatics, aerial arts, contortion, and juggling, for both adults and kids. It is one of the most advanced schools of circus arts on the West Coast and its teachers are all professional performers or troupe members. Founded during the pandemic, **The Hive** on Grant Avenue in San Francisco specializes in aerial silks and sling, lyra (aerial hoop), ropes and straps, and trapeze yoga, for those who want to explore more adventurous yoga classes. They also offer more traditional yoga classes; both formats feature classes for adults and kids. **San Francisco Pole + Dance Studios** in SoMa has two pole rooms with eight poles, six aerial points, and a private pole room with a single pole for individual training. It is harder than it looks and a fun way to build strength while embracing your inner diva. Live out your Bollywood dreams at **Bollywood Dance Central** in Haight-Ashbury, which offers Bollywood, bhangra, semi-classical, and Bolly cardio classes at all levels for both adults and kids.



Christine hopes you will try some of these classes so she can live vicariously through you while she spends her time at various school activities for her two kids.

Art Therapy

By Dr. Noel L'Esperance, DAT, ATR-BC, LPC



Dr. Noel L'Esperance, DAT, ATR-BC, LPC completed her Doctorate of Art Therapy in 2014 and is a board certified art therapist and counselor. She has practiced in her field for 15 years in crisis care and family therapy as well as in private practice and teaching in both the graduate and undergraduate levels of art therapy.

What are the differences and potential benefits of art therapy versus more traditional talk therapy? What kind of client can benefit from art therapy?

Today in the United States, a licensed and board certified art therapist is also trained in talk therapy and, more often than not, is also dual-licensed as a talk therapist or social worker. Art therapy provides an entire array of modalities that can allow a person to communicate verbally, nonverbally, or both—entirely through their art process.

Many people imagine that art therapy might only be for children, or for those in hospitals, but my reality as a practitioner has covered the entire scale of humanity. My clients' experiences represent nearly any life issue, including depression, life transition, grief, behavioral and family issues, eating disorders, etc. A large portion of clients come to me without a diagnosis or the desire to have one. They simply wish to find a new way to explore themselves as they navigate life changes, rediscover what they enjoy, and be guided clinically and confidentially as they begin a new life plan.

The true benefit that people can expect from an art therapist is the ability to provide what is needed in the moment, with the flexibility and training to do so. The fine arts and craft media in art therapy are there to support communication, in whatever way the clients needs that day. There have been times when I have been in session with a client working through trauma, and they presented as “just wanting to talk.” But, when speaking alone became too overwhelming, I was able to provide something as simple as a sensory activity to busy their hands and thus free their minds in order to lessen anxiety and provide a secondary focus as they tackled tough issues.

Is there a typical course of treatment? What does a typical session look like?

Very rarely is there a length of treatment and certainly not a typical session, which is a benefit of art therapy. Assessing a client's needs and wants is the job of the therapist, and is incredibly individual. I once worked with a young teen with obsessive compulsive behaviors. We had agreed that he

would actively participate in a directive of my choice for 20 minutes. If he felt overwhelmed, he would play me two songs from his playlist of the day and then return to the task if he was able. This may sound simple, but the trust and communication that was built through mutually sharing art and music, confronting maladaptive behaviors through creation and structure, and the verbal communication that resulted were incredibly effective for him. The possibilities that can occur in art therapy are infinite. One client may work exclusively on an oil painting as an exploration of self, while another may wish to learn an art activity like knitting while engaging in structured talk therapy.

“Art therapy provides an entire array of modalities that can allow a person to communicate verbally, nonverbally, or both—all entirely through their art process, whatever that may be.”

Do you think of yourself as an artist first, or a therapist?

It is equal. It is my job, my vocation, as an artist AND an art therapist to have a thorough and expansive knowledge of art techniques, art materials, and the diverse range of their potential impacts as used in therapy. I believe, too, that it is important for therapists to develop their identity as an artist, and as an evolving and changing human—as this disclosure to clients can often remove the intimidation we can feel when facing art materials. I am still defining what art means to me, what my style is, experimenting with new tools and materials... and am not liking my art product a lot of the time. The greatest art AND emotional breakthrough is often produced through the willingness to not be perfect, and this shared ideal can combine to create trust and healing.

Is art therapy right for me?

As with any kind of therapy, it is incredibly important to match with a therapist whose technique and personality are beneficial to you and your goals. It is helpful to interview therapists. It is OK to leave after a session or two if you are not aligning. The therapeutic relationship is the most important aspect in healing, and finding a practitioner that can provide that technique you require while still challenging you is invaluable. Don't expect to always be comfortable, but you should feel safe to explore in whichever way you choose. Don't be afraid to take charge of your own care; it's the first step.

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Understanding Sports-Related Concussions in Young Athletes: A Guide for Parents

By Celina de Borja, MD and Faustine Ramirez, MD

In this issue, Doctor Dads has two guest writers, Celina de Borja, MD and Faustine Ramirez, MD, both Assistant Professors in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at UCSF. They are pediatricians with additional training in primary care sports medicine and specialize in the care of young athletes. Dr. de Borja sees patients at the UCSF Pediatric Orthopaedics clinics at Mission Bay and Redwood Shores. Dr. Ramirez sees patients at the UCSF Pediatric Orthopaedics clinics at Mission Bay and Greenbrae.

As the new school year begins, many kids are excited to participate in sports activities. While sports offer great benefits to the physical health and development of children and adolescents, it's important for all parents to be aware of potential injuries, such as concussions, in order to understand how to keep their children safe while engaging in sports.

What is a concussion? A concussion is considered a mild traumatic brain injury, caused by either a blow to the head or a sudden forceful jolt to the body, resulting in the brain shaking rapidly inside the skull. It can temporarily disrupt brain function and lead to a broad spectrum of signs and symptoms. Most concussions occur without loss of consciousness.

What are the observable signs of concussion?

Common signs of a concussion that you may recognize in your child include confusion or memory problems surrounding the events, appearing dazed or "out of it," speaking and responding to questions slowly, being forgetful, acting emotional, or any mood, behavior, or personality changes. Sometimes these changes are subtle, so it's important to get evaluated by a physician if you have any concerns about a possible concussion.

What are typical concussion symptoms? Common symptoms that your child may describe include headache, dizziness, confusion, memory problems, sensitivity to light or noise, nausea, head "pressure," vision disturbances, feeling emotional, fatigue, or difficulty sleeping. Sometimes children and teens may have difficulty explaining their symptoms, and may describe feeling "out of it" or "not right." It's important to remember that symptoms might not appear immediately and only some symptoms may be present, and they can vary from child to child.

How common are concussions? Based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2020 nearly 7 percent of all children and 12 percent of teens aged 12 to 17

in the United States ever had symptoms of a concussion or brain injury. Concussions can happen in various sports, but they are more prevalent in contact sports like football, soccer, and hockey.

What makes children more vulnerable? Several factors are thought to make children more vulnerable to concussion compared to adults, including incomplete brain development, reduced neck strength, and increased head size relative to their body. In addition, certain factors can increase the risk of concussions in all athletes, including a history of previous head injuries, playing style, and individual factors like age, gender, or co-existing medical conditions.

How are concussions diagnosed?

Concussions are a clinical diagnosis, which means there is no single blood test or imaging test that can diagnose a concussion. They can be diagnosed

through a combination of methods that involve observation, sideline evaluation, and an in-office comprehensive evaluation by a physician. In the state of California, any child with a suspected concussion must be evaluated by a physician (MD or DO) before returning to play.

- **Immediate sideline assessment:** In some cases, concussions can be observed and evaluated immediately on the sidelines or field, especially during sports events. Coaches, athletic trainers, or team physicians may conduct simple sideline assessments, such as the Sport Concussion Assessment Tool (SCAT), to quickly evaluate the presence and severity of concussion symptoms.
- **Comprehensive in-office evaluation:** All youth athletes with a suspected concussion should be evaluated in-office by a physician who will perform a comprehensive assessment, which involves a detailed review of the individual's medical history, including any past concussions or head injuries, as well as a neurological exam to evaluate cognitive function, balance, coordination, eye movements, and other brain-related functions.



- **Imaging tests:** While concussions are diagnosed based on symptoms and clinical evaluations, imaging tests like head CT scans or brain MRI may be performed to rule out more severe brain injuries. However, imaging is not required for diagnosing concussions.

For any child or teen with a suspected concussion, it's essential to seek medical attention from a healthcare professional with expertise in concussion management within 72 hours of injury. Early diagnosis and appropriate management can significantly impact the recovery process and reduce the risk of complications.

How are concussions treated? An athlete with any signs or symptoms of concussion must be removed from play (practice or competition) immediately and cannot return to play on the same day. Concussions are treated with rest, removal from sports, modifications in daily activities, including academic activities if needed, and a gradual return to activities under the supervision of a healthcare professional. Research suggests that light aerobic activity (such as walking, light jogging, or biking) is helpful in concussion recovery, but this should be under the guidance of a healthcare provider or athletic trainer. The timeline for recovery will differ from child to child. Most children and teens will recover within 2 to 4 weeks, although some will have prolonged symptoms for as long as 3 months.

- **Returning to school:** Your child needs rest and time to recover from a concussion. Inform the school about the concussion so they can accommodate the child's needs during the recovery process. Sometimes, academic accommodations may be recommended during this time by your physician.
- **Returning to sports:** After a concussion, your child can't immediately return to sports. They must follow a

step-by-step process under the guidance of a healthcare professional. This helps them safely return to play and reduces the risk of further injury. Returning to play before resolution of symptoms puts youth at risk of prolonged recovery and repeated head impacts, which can lead to more serious brain injury.

Can concussions be prevented? Prevention remains the biggest challenge in managing sports-related concussion. Here are some steps parents can take to reduce the risk of serious brain injury:

- **Focus on learning proper technique:** Encourage your child to learn and practice proper techniques for their sport. Proper training and coaching can help them avoid risky plays and minimize the chances of severe impacts.
- **Promote sportsmanship and fair play:** Teach your child the importance of sportsmanship and following the rules of the game. Encourage them to play fair and avoid aggressive or dangerous behaviors that could lead to injuries.
- **Use protective equipment appropriately:** In sports that use helmets, it's important to ensure that the helmet is appropriate for age and size, fits correctly, and is worn consistently. While helmets do not prevent concussion, they can help protect against more serious brain injuries. Mouthguard use in ice hockey is also recommended for concussion prevention.
- **Educate your child:** Help your child understand the risks of concussions and the importance of reporting any injuries or symptoms to their coach, athletic trainer, or to you as their parent.

As kids head back to school and sports, it's crucial for parents to understand concussions and how to keep their children safe. By recognizing the signs and symptoms of concussions and taking proper precautions, we can protect our young athletes and make sure they enjoy sports while staying out of harm's way. Remember to partner with healthcare professionals to ensure your child's well-being and a smooth recovery if they ever experience a concussion.

Additional Resources:

cifstate.org/sports-medicine/concussions/index
cdc.gov/headsup/index.html

Honoring My Body, a Miracle Maker

By Elizabeth Neal

I never cared for my body. As a girl, I scrutinized every imperfection. My body was an annoyance, a source of deep insecurity. As an adolescent, my body became a burden. It was something to be gawked at. A performance. A size. A problem to fix. It wasn't until I became a mother in my 30s that I finally renewed my relationship with my body, and even came to revere it.

I have never been softer, squishier, stretchier, fuller, and more fragile—and yet, after going through labor, I've never felt more powerful and physically limitless. My body is capable of wondrous miracles. My body can create and sustain life. That bears repeating—again, and again. My body can tear, heal, and renew. My body can generate a new organ and expand to extraordinary lengths and shrink back. My body wisely guided me through labor, and it can withstand incomprehensible pain. I'm forever grateful to my body because it's the home that gave safe passage to the miraculous child I cherish.

My body birthed the purest, most organic love—I didn't know it was possible to love this hard.

My child knows my heartbeat's signature, my warmth, and my smell. She studies every facial microexpression of mine to confirm whether she's safe. In her most vulnerable moments, my body is capable of comforting my daughter with a smile or warm embrace. I love my body's inherent wisdom that guides me to read her every mood, cry, or gesture so I can fulfill her every need.

I am her comfort. I am her shelter. I am her sustenance. I am her home. I am her safety. It's with this body that we've built a forever bond of love and trust. In my daughter's blue-hazel eyes, I'm her superhero. Donning my baby carrier—which I lovingly refer to as my superhero cape—I'm covered in baby



**“My body is capable of wondrous miracles.
My body can create and sustain life.”**

spit stains, tousled dirty hair, unbrushed teeth, and sunken eyes from sleep deprivation, but I'm absolutely overflowing with love for her..

While there are days I don't recognize my body after having given birth, I have a deep acceptance for the trials and tribulations it's undergone to reward me with the greatest gift of my life. I didn't know that in my hardest, most vulnerable moments—milk supply issues, painful latching, slow weight gain, combo feeding, illnesses, not knowing what the hell I was doing—that I'd feel so held by a loving and supportive sisterhood of mamas who get it and pay it forward because they, too, received the same grace.

There are also the doctors and nurses who've given me extra time in a room, or privacy to feed or change my daughter. Parking attendants who've heard my daughter crying in the car and taken the time to generously smile and say, “She'll calm once you start driving.” Women in online motherhood communities reassuring me to trust my intuition. Mama friends I've made across the country who I've never met who remind me I'm doing a great job and that I'm the perfect mother for my little one. Friends who rally around me to sing nursery rhymes in the middle of a 5K walk to soothe my child. They all get it. They

understand that mothers need tending to, and also the endurance, exhaustion, and physical and mental fortitude that comes with being initiated into motherhood.

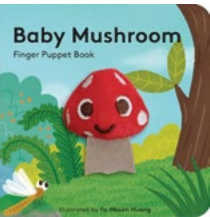
So the next time I come across a mama who's struggling with body issues or a screaming child, I, too, will pay it forward and remind her of the miracle she is—in case she's forgotten.

Elizabeth is a free-spirited creative, writer, nature lover, and mother.

Wonder

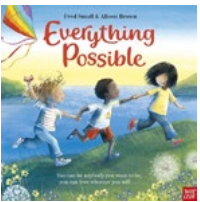
By Laure Latham

Wonder can be a feeling of amazement and admiration, spurred by something beautiful, remarkable, or unfamiliar. It can also represent doubts or questions about something new or unusual—and if anybody knows anything about questions and wonder, it's children. These books will inspire your little ones to dream big and believe in themselves.



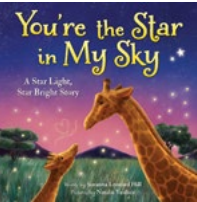
Baby Mushroom: Finger Puppet Book

Written and illustrated by Yu-Hsuan Huang
What is more adorable than a board book whose main character is a plush finger puppet? At an age when young kids start to manipulate objects, imitate gestures, or learn through exploration, a finger puppet book is a never-ending source of wonder. On each page, the text invites the finger puppet to take a different action (such as sway, stretch, or rest). The resulting interaction will have babies and toddlers excited to read the book and discover the natural world of forest mushrooms. **Ages: 1 to 4 years**



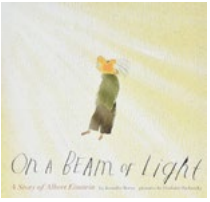
Everything Possible

Written by Fred Small,
illustrated by Alison Brown
If you are not yet familiar with the folk song “Everything Possible,” now's the time to discover it reimagined as a wonderful illustrated book. The narrator tells a child tucked in bed that they can be anybody they want to be, sharing a positive message of love and acceptance. “You can dream all the day never reaching the end / Of everything possible for you.” Make every day special with this great song book. **Ages: 2 to 5 years**



You're the Star in My Sky: A Star Light, Star Bright Story

Written by Susanna Leonard Hill,
illustrated by Natalia Vasilica
Inspired by the timeless nursery rhyme “Star Light, Star Bright,” this bedtime story celebrates the lure of adventure and a parent's pride in seeing their child being strong and true in their endeavors. The different verses encourage little ones to “dazzle, sparkle, dance,” and “be brave enough to take a chance,” alternating praise with encouragement. Showing stars looking down on different animal families, this book makes a heart-warming read-aloud for parents and children. **Ages: 2 to 5 years**



On a Beam of Light: A Story of Albert Einstein

Written by Jennifer Berne,
illustrated by Vladimir Radunsky
As a child, young Albert was very different from the other kids. While they behaved in class, he asked question after question, “disrupting” class. All he wanted was to discover the hidden mysteries of the world—a simple ask for a curious mind. In this book, kids will discover the life of Albert Einstein, how he loved the language of numbers and learning, and how he figured out that everything was made out of atoms (even sugar and tea). For all budding scientists, all kids who don't take the status quo for granted, and those who question things, this book will be an inspiration. **Ages: 5 to 8 years**



Rebecca Reznik Reboots the Universe

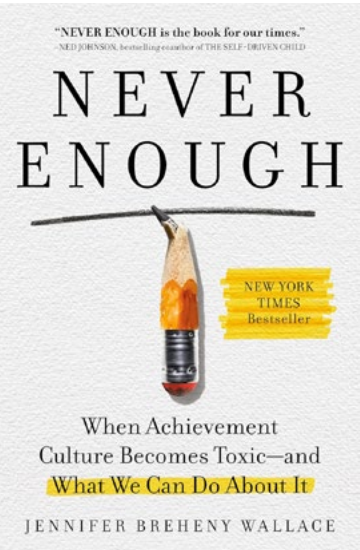
Written by Samara Shanker
Magic and monsters can cause fear in many children, but 13-year-old neurodivergent, Rebecca Reznik, is not like other children. When her friends discover that her house is haunted by obscure Jewish demons, only wits and thinking outside the box will help. How Rebecca sees and interprets the world will give her supernatural powers to defeat the tiny “not-a-goblin-maybe-a-Mazzik” that's making her life hell, and will empower her to become her best self. **Ages: 9 to 12**

Laure blogs on healthy living and adventure travel at Frog Mom (frogmom.com), and is the author of Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She is the founder of a tech startup and lives with her teenage girls in London, where she is training to swim the English Channel in 2023. You can find her on social media @frogmomblog.

Swimming Against the Cultural Tide

By Gail Cornwall

Some amount of wonder will break through into the life of every child and adolescent, but there are things you can do to make that experience more frequent. Jennifer Breheny Wallace focuses on the importance of increasing our offspring’s sense of “enough” and “mattering,” while for Katherine Johnson Martinko, getting screens out of the way is key. They both make the compelling argument that, to safeguard child development, we must turn the cultural tide—or at least swim against it.



Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic—And What We Can Do About It

By Jennifer Breheny Wallace

“[O]ur kids are absorbing the idea that their worth is contingent on their performance—their GPA, the number of social media followers they have, their college brands—not for who they are deep at their core,” writes Wallace, a journalist who conducted a national parenting survey with help from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. “They feel they only *matter* to the adults in their lives, their peers, the larger community, if they are successful” using an “increasingly narrow definition of ‘success.’”

Wallace uses the example of Amanda, whose opinion of her own value “would go up or down depending on the number on the scale or the score on a test.” Wallace points to research documenting a significant rise in perfectionism and decrease in empathy in young adults over the last several decades. So there are many Amandas out there, feeling they have to earn love, esteem, and “mattering” with deeds, missing a sense of unconditional value.

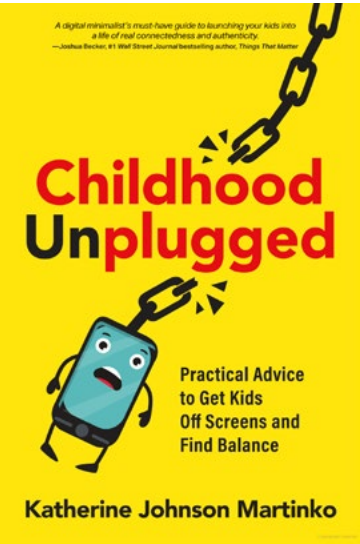
Wallace does an excellent job describing the cultural shifts that got us here. It’s a place where kids yearn for free time but face “credentials bottlenecks” if they don’t ratchet up their involvement in, say, soccer, when everyone else does; a place where colleges “go to great lengths and expense to court students whom they know they will ultimately reject, a technique known as ‘attract to reject’” meant to increase the schools’ selectivity stats.

Parents’ job now, she says, quoting a family she interviewed, is to “take the kettle off the heat.”

You can start with one mother’s metaphor: “She crumpled [a \$20 bill] up, put it on the floor, theatrically squashed it, then dunked it in a glass of water. Picking up the soiled, soggy money, she said to her son, ‘Remember, like this twenty-dollar bill, our value doesn’t change, even when we’re dirty and bruised and soaking wet, like when we get a bad grade or get cut from the team or mess up in a million ways.’” Wallace asks us to check out strengths-based parenting and “micro-practices” meant to increase “mattering.” And she extols the wisdom of holding our kids back from signing up for all the things and then trying to give each one of them 100 percent.

Wallace orders us to model “mattering.” “When we put every family member’s needs above ours because that’s what ‘good’ parents, particularly mothers, do, we are showing that we don’t think we matter,” and “all the ways that we are overstretched... can deaden our ability to be sensitive, responsive parents” and make us “moody and critical and controlling.” Instead, ask for help, demonstrating interdependence rather than individualism and hypercompetition. “When we teach our kids how to live a life of purpose, how to contribute meaningfully to others, their drive becomes self-sustaining,” she writes, implying that we’re not just destroying our kids’ mental health and our own with the status quo but also shooting our Yale ambitions in the foot.

She makes these points so thoroughly that my first instinct was to say the book should have been tightened up, but the problem Wallace identifies is so important that I ultimately felt grateful to be beaten over the head with her message.



Childhood Unplugged: Practical Advice to Get Kids Off Screens and Find Balance

By Katherine Johnson Martinko

Katherine Johnson Martinko seeks to issue “a call to action” and offer “a nonjudgmental example of what’s working for [her] family” when it comes to kids and screens. *Childhood Unplugged* succeeds in the former, not so much the latter.

I found loads to agree with in the facts and people cited by Johnson Martinko. “In 1971, 80 percent of 7- and 8-year-olds walked to school, either alone or with friends, but by 1991, less than 10 percent did—and were almost all accompanied by parents. Now it’s worse. Two-thirds of 10-year-olds have never been to a shop or park by themselves.” This is bad. “Time spent on screens is time spent not doing other things.” True fact. “When it comes to fostering creative play, screens get in the way.” There are some exceptions, but as a rule, yup. “As far as developing resilience and capability goes, screens become a crutch for children.” Abso-f*cking-lutely. I also fully agree with her Lenore Skenazy quote saying we can’t take independence, exploration, risk, and play out of our kids’ lives and then sign them up for extracurricular activities to try to put back in the benefits of those things. The French and Dutch studies she cites showing that surveillance poisons adolescent-parent relationships made perfect sense to me. Since all of this is true, it is “OK to push back against technological creep and not resign yourself to the inevitability of it just because everyone else has.”

But Johnson Martinko veers into zealotry with statements about creating humans with “a shallow online existence” through “a strange shell of childhood that has had the life sucked out of it...a dehydrated skin of an experience.” Unlike many free-range and low-tech advocates, she fully embraces intensive parenting, even taking multiple shots at “baby containers,” like bouncy seats and strollers, and encouraging parents not to use their phones during newborn feedings. She underestimates the role of privilege in producing a screen-free childhood, and she overestimates the risk to kids of posting online, trotting out the tired and disproven specter of a college admissions officer combing through a teen’s social media feed.

And yet, there’s a lot of value here. Johnson Martinko points to a podcast episode suggesting we ask of each type of tech: “What does it amplify, what does it amputate?” When we can hold out no longer, go with a Light Phone, she recommends. “As for social media...[s]ign them up, but from a computer, making it the only place they’re allowed to access it.” She says we should teach our kids not to phub, relax curfews, “[r]esist the urge to provide reminders for deadlines,” and advocate for more recess and “less tech in the classroom.” So read *Childhood Unplugged* for inspiration and commiseration, but read it critically, taking that which pushes your family toward habits that are healthier for everyone—and leaving the rest.

Gail works as a mom and writer in San Francisco. Read about parenting and education from the perspective of a former teacher and lawyer at gailcornwall.com or by finding her on Facebook and Twitter.

Wonderland

Help your kids understand how to answer questions and instill a hands-on approach to life and learning that can last a lifetime.

By H.B. Terrell



Are you feeling unmoored in the midst of our current environment of intertwined crises? If you feel uncertain about the future, you may understand how and why young people are feeling bleak about it too. With the upheavals of the past few years, what historian Adam Tooze has called a state of polycrisis, children don't have the sense of "hiatus" that we adults do; for them, there is no normal from which they're taking a break. As surreal as these compounding crises may be for adults, they are the bizarro-world status quo for our kids.

What can we do to help tots, children, tweens, and teens retain their curiosity while mitigating the dispiriting effects that come with a fuller understanding of the precarious state of our world? Critical thinking exercises can help kids become problem-solvers rather than problem-dwellers. The ability to confidently assess complex issues can foster a sense of agency in a world that seems to be spinning out of control. The caregiver's task is to help kids understand how we know what we know, when to question received knowledge, and how to reach reasoned conclusions when presented with myriad facts and interpretations of those facts.

In libraries, this way of approaching what is known (and what is unknown) is called information literacy. In schools we might call it critical thinking. And in the sciences, it's called epistemology. No matter which slant, each of these disciplines fosters the ability to solve problems, make decisions, and set goals based on reliable facts—while also acknowledging the limitations of our current best understanding of the world.

Reading comprehension and critical thinking together form the foundation of education, which makes for an information-literate generation of thinkers and actors. Not only does information literacy help kids in the classroom, it is also essential to self-reflection, goal setting, and relationship-building. These so-called "soft skills" underpin individuals' life satisfaction, which makes them some of the most rock-solid skills that caregivers can impart to their kids.

Teach information literacy

After a decade at the librarian's reference desk and nearly four years as a mom, I've learned a few things about how critical thinking is developed. One useful information literacy framework is The Big6 problem-solving model, which outlines the process of finding, using, applying, and evaluating information for specific tasks. Developed by Mike Eisenberg and Bob Berkowitz based on their research into information problem-solving, the steps are 1) defining the problem and identifying what information is needed, 2) seeking out all possible sources and selecting the best ones, 3) locating sources and finding information within them, 4) engaging with the material and extracting the relevant information, 5) organizing and presenting the information, and 6) judging the product's effectiveness and the efficiency of the process. Simplified for beginners, the Super3 process is written out as "Plan, Do, Review."

"Information literacy is one of the most important life skills we can pass on to our children—skills that can help them make better decisions, form healthy relationships, and determine what they value."

The best way to impart critical thinking skills to your children is authentic interaction with ideas—your children's ideas and those floating around "out there" in the information ether.

Do as I do

Children pick up their caregivers' mannerisms and figures of speech—and their ways of approaching new ideas. Model critical thinking by practicing it: research what you don't know, challenge statements that don't make sense, and show your intellectual work. Verbalize your thinking skills so your kids can hear the process of thinking something through.

"That didn't sound like what I have read elsewhere, so I looked at the source of the statement and guess what—the study they cited said their findings were inconclusive, but the writer used it to say his ideas were supported by the study!"

This helps both you and your kids build a mental "muscle" that requires continuous exercise.

Play

Play is often a process of trial and error. This is how kids learn to make choices.

"The puzzle piece doesn't fit here. Where else could we try?"

When you play alongside your children, you have the opportunity to guide their inquiry if they begin to feel frustrated, helping them consider new angles of approach or demonstrating how you might build this block tower or assemble that doll's outfit. As older kids learn abstraction, opportunities for conversation are woven into game night or long hikes or marathon Dungeons & Dragons campaigns.

Resist quick answers

It may be tempting for parents to "rescue" their kids from faulty reasoning by offering the "right" answer to a question on the table. Instead, give them the tools to come to a conclusion independently. Caregivers who answer a question with a clarifying question might infuriate their teenagers, but used at the right time, this is a strategy for encouraging them to dig deeper.

In a recent issue of Nick Cave's "The Red Hand Files" substack, a young person asked Cave a question akin to "what's the point of doing anything in this transitory, inexplicable world?"

He responded by likening these attributes of existence (impermanent, mystifying) to human values, which are in a state of continual flux, and suggesting that the



reader consider two qualities: humility and curiosity. Cave says, “Cultivating a questioning mind, of which conversation is the chief instrument, enriches our relationship with the world.”

Embrace “Why?”

Most parents understand the exhaustion that can come with answering a barrage of “whys,” but this kind of interrogation is a necessary developmental stage in every kid’s intellectual development. Questions form the basis of information literacy, and focusing on how we answer questions is essential.

“What is that sound?”
“It’s the wind blowing outside, making the gutter rattle.”
“Why does the wind make the gutter rattle?”
“It’s loosely attached to the house.”
“Will it fall down?”
“No.”
“How do you know?”
“Because it hasn’t fallen down before.”
“But what if it falls down now?”
“Then we’ll fix it.”
“How do we fix it?”

If you follow any litany of questions, it will eventually reach the “I don’t know” moment. And this is where it gets interesting for your kids. They will see how you find out the answers to the things you don’t know and, bonus, they will understand that no one—not even YOU—knows everything!

Confront bias

One strategy to surface the assumptions we harbor is to brainstorm five different explanations for a person’s behavior, appearance, or words. When your child confides a heartbreak—“Sophie wouldn’t play with me today”—ask them why they think that happened and play the “maybe something else” game.

“I’m so sorry you didn’t get to play with Sophie today. Why do you think she didn’t feel like playing?”

“She doesn’t like me anymore.”
“What might be a different reason she didn’t want to play?”

Encourage your child to come up with multiple possibilities:

- “Maybe she noticed Clay was feeling sad and wanted to pay extra attention to help him feel better.”



- “Maybe she didn’t feel well.”
- “Maybe she stayed up late last night and was sleepy today.”
- “Maybe she just wanted to be alone.”
- “Would you like to ask her tomorrow and see if she wants to talk about it?”

This is a game that helps children (and adults) assume positive intent and foster stronger relationships built on understanding rather than assuming another person’s reasons for their actions. Open-mindedness is the act of intentionally setting aside your assumptions and judgments to learn from others. As Nick Cave advised his young correspondent in “The Red Hand Files” #252, “Humility amounts to an understanding that the world is not divided into good and bad people, but rather it is made up of all manner of individuals, each broken in their own way, each caught up in the common human struggle and each having the capacity to do both terrible and beautiful things. If we truly comprehend and acknowledge that we are all imperfect creatures, we find that we become more tolerant and accepting of others’ shortcomings and the world appears less dissonant, less isolating, less threatening.”

This or that

Children learn about opportunity cost by making decisions. Give them some self-determination from a young age so they understand potential consequences of different decisions. “Which of these two

outfits do you want to wear today? Do you want to go to Jamila’s party on Saturday or stay home and help Daddy in the garden? Which one of the fifteen toys you’ve said you want today do you want Mommy to buy you?”

As they get older, you can coach them on making healthy choices about social media and peer pressure, deciding which classes they want to take, or dealing with difficult social situations.

Question your own answers

Above all, don’t aim to be the authority, the one who has all the answers. Encourage kids to fact check you and proactively acknowledge when you got something wrong.

“Remember the other day when I told you that if you drop a penny from the top of the Transamerica Building it could kill a pedestrian? I found out this afternoon that the penny’s total mass isn’t big enough to penetrate human skin.”

What a wonderful world

Historian Adam Tooze says, “If you just read a newspaper or watch the news, you are presented with this collage that begins to look incoherent to the point where you begin to wonder whether you will actually be able to trust your own senses.” Information literacy is one of the most important life skills we can pass on to our children—skills that can help them make better decisions, form healthy relationships, and determine what they value. Little critical thinkers become information-literate adults who maintain a sense of wonder because questions are there to be answered, and answers that don’t withstand testing and doubt are found to be questions that are open for investigation after all!

Critical thinking helps kids become independent, enhances their creativity, and stokes their curiosity. People who have developed a solid set of critical thinking skills interrogate assumptions and ask questions. So, the next time your kid—whether 3 or 13—asks “Why?” take it as a good sign that they are building a healthy curiosity about the world they will inherit.

H.B. is a former librarian and current museum professional whose mantra in response to her daughter’s persistent “WHY?” is, “Let’s find out!”

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The Scientific Superpowers of Music

Harness music to transform your stress into clarity.

By Molly Craft

Music’s transformative powers can help guide your path on the rocky road through motherhood. You’re cruising down that curvy mountain road, singing your favorite song loudly (and only ever-so-slightly off-key). You’re feeling good. Your mind is basically empty, your body vibrating with the effortless release of pent-up tension with every line you belt out. Gone are the frustrations you were feeling moments before, sucked out of the open window. That low-grade anxiety that’s been pulsating in the background for the past few days? It doesn’t stand a chance against this well-worn classic tune.

Rolling in the deep

Music is magic. The ancient Greeks spoke to its power well before it was an inescapable part of most of our lives. Plato believed that music was able to bypass reason and penetrate into the very core of the self, having a serious impact on our character: He pointed out that “more than

anything else rhythm and harmony find their way into the inner soul and take the strongest hold upon it.”

While many of us experience music in many ways in our daily lives, we don’t harness it for one of its most incredible abilities: soothing our nervous systems and changing the emotional state we’re in when the challenges of motherhood are taking their toll. As a parent coach who works with moms who want to change their relationship with anger, I wield music as one of my favorite tools. And you can, too.

Ask yourself, in your life as a mom...

- *Am I accessing the full power of music as an emotional regulation tool?*
- *Do I know how to harness music to transform my stress and overwhelm into clarity and release?*
- *Am I ready to take the medicinal melodies I already love and use their alchemical abilities to make me into the mom I really want to be?*

The mesmerizing world of music can serve as your secret weapon for navigating the highs and lows of motherhood. It’s simple. It’s (nearly) instant. And it’s as close as your nearest playlist.

Bridge over troubled water

Music has the remarkable ability to activate almost every corner of your brain. Music is your brain’s Pilates class, keeping it agile, flexible, and resilient. The benefits are profound, from strengthening and reinforcing learning and memory to aiding cognitive function and even reducing anxiety, blood pressure, and pain.

According to an AARP survey referenced in *Harvard Health Publishing (HHP)* in 2020, music activates almost all brain regions and networks, and keeps a myriad of brain pathways and networks strong, including those networks that are involved in well-being, learning, cognitive function, quality of life, and happiness. In fact, there is only one other situation in which you can activate so many brain networks all at once, and that is when you participate in social activities, as *HHP* noted in a 2019 article, “Want a sharp mind, strong memory? Ramp up activities.” (Can you say family dance party?)

Let’s decode some neuroscience. Your brain is not a stagnant entity. It continuously learns new tricks and adapts to life’s twists

and turns. It orchestrates your body’s movements, adapting in unimaginable ways when you lose a limb or experience a stroke. Sound, in all its forms, is the architect of this complex cerebral community, shaping your experiences and influencing your thoughts and feelings.

A 2021 *Frontiers in Psychology* study representing 6,975 people of different ages and nationalities demonstrated that intentional music listening reduced pain through changes in physiological arousal, playing a musical instrument was associated with improved cognitive health and well-being in school students, and dance and movement were linked to improved well-being in women with postpartum depression. The same study also found that rapping, songwriting, and composition helped the well-being of marginalized people through effects on social and cultural inclusion and connection, self-esteem, and empowerment.

We are all trying to be the best moms we can be for our kids. And we all have a history that affects how we react in moments of stress, frustration, and

overwhelm. As Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson assert in *The Power of Showing Up*, your history is not your destiny. No matter how we were raised, we can rewire how our brain interprets stress and find new, genuine ways to create deeper connection to ourselves and our children. Your favorite song is the perfect tool to downshift from chaos to calm, and it will only take a couple of minutes!

Scientific superpower #1: Emotional relief

The moment certain songs come on, everything else stops. You could be feeling really blue, but when a certain jam hits your ears, suddenly you don’t feel the same. This is because music activates the limbic system, whose main job is to process and regulate emotions, as well as behavior and long-term memory.

In 2018, *Progress in Brain Research* found that listening to music changes the levels of cortisol, blood glucose, and immune system responses, thereby creating a stress-reducing effect. It’s time to create the prescription playlist for your





life. This is where you create the recipe for your own personal shortcuts to joy, relaxation, frustration release, validation, and playfulness.

Having a bad day? Are you yearning to have your feelings of frustration and despondency acknowledged? Feeling like you need the gentle and loving nudge toward positivity from a friend to remind you that not everything is terrible while also seeing and holding your sadness? Start by making a list of all the moments when you'd love a magic wand to shift the energy of the moment, then choose songs that sing directly to this part of your soul.

Scientific superpower #2: The soundtrack of cooperation

Think about moments where getting on the same page can lead to family frustration or resistance. These times could be cleaning up together, getting ready to leave the

house, or relaxing in the afternoon for some down time. Instead of struggling with your kids, what if you could create positive associations that nearly hypnotized your broom into a smooth routine? Music in all

“While many of us experience music in many ways in our daily lives, we don’t harness it for one of its most incredible abilities: soothing our nervous systems and changing the emotional state we’re in when the challenges of motherhood are taking their toll.”

forms has the ability to create lasting associations between sounds and experiences. We have the power to lay down neural tracks in our own minds and in those of our children. Think of the possibilities! We can shape these tracks positively or inadvertently embed less pleasant ones.

Have you ever watched a movie without a soundtrack? To say it loses something is a wild understatement. Music takes significant moments and adds or subtracts intensity. So use that to your advantage

and add the kind of feeling you’re looking for in your daily life. Make it fun. The song to get out the door might be an upbeat tune to get everybody moving like it’s a race to the car. Every time it comes on, everyone knows the clock has started. Give them the heads up it’s coming with a “Ready? Set? Go!”

The same rules apply to things like cleaning. Make it fun, not just for your kids, but for you. In the hustle to get everything done in a day, it’s easy to forget that once upon a time, before kids, when you would clean your apartment alone on a Saturday, you would treat yourself to some energizing music and make it a party.

Want to get everyone to chill out in the afternoon for an hour? Get that spa music going in the background so that every time you turn it on, everyone’s brain kicks into downtime mode.

These associations are created through repetition. You will strengthen neural pathways linking your soundtrack to your activities and the vibe you want them to carry. Get creative and play around until you find what fits your needs. Then you can create playfulness, relaxation, or any other mood you desire.

Wake me up before you go-go

Who couldn’t use a little extra help in promoting good sleep habits? This is definitely where music magic comes in.

Getting enough shut-eye is a nearly universal goal of moms everywhere and it turns out music is also the cure for this silent saboteur. A study in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* found that participants who listened to 45 minutes of classical music before

bed slept much better than those who either did nothing or listened to an audiobook. So it may be time to snuggle up with a little Yo-Yo Ma to boost your bedtime benefits.

Scientific superpower #3: Performance-boosting beats

Whether it’s you or your little ones who need motivation, keep a playlist of the guaranteed-to-get-you-moving songs that you and your kids love. In her article, “How



Music Motivates Us to Be Our Best Selves,” Music Therapist Kristin Wright highlights research which shows that not only is dopamine released when we listen to music we like, but this feel-good hormone is being released with each beat of the song! The physiological impact that music has on our brains is another reason that music is magic. You’ll be ready for anything that requires more energy than you may have, when you hit your body-boosting playlist. As David Byrne says in his beautiful book, *How Music Works*, “Music tells us things—social things, psychological things, physical things about how we feel and perceive our bodies—in a way that other art forms can’t.”

Pay attention to the songs in the car that suddenly have everyone bouncing in their seats. Do some incognito research and put on jams to test the effect they have on you and your crew. Then make a few playlists for energizing times, mood boosters, and instant party tracks.

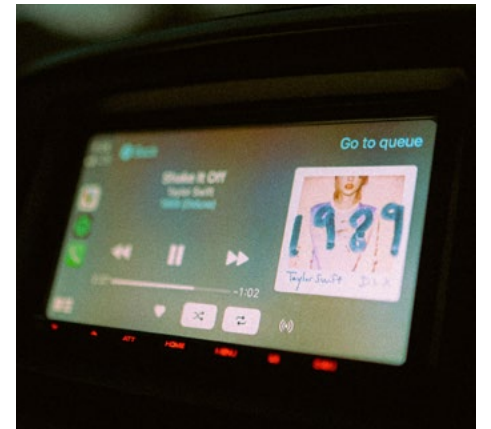
Some good times to fire-up the tunes:

- It’s been a long week and you can feel your tanks are close to empty. Move your body for 5 minutes to get things circulating. (Hot tip: Give yourself an actual physical hug and rub your arms to stimulate your nervous system.)
- It’s the end of the day and dinner still needs to be made even though you feel like putting a jar of peanut butter in the middle of the table with four spoons in it instead of cooking...time for your Kitchen Classics playlist.
- There’s been some tension or conflict and it’s lingering like a little gray cloud. Time to change the direction of the weather system and pop on those compelling songs that no one in the family can resist. (Playing these a little quieter in the background is a nice way to ease on through the rough patch without jolting people into a pushback position.)

No matter what your musical preferences are, the power of music remains the same. Sometimes the most powerful tools we

have are not that far away or complicated to put to use. So give some of these a try. You deserve to feel good, have some fun, feel soothed, and have the support you need to get through your day, one song at a time.

Molly is a parent-coach and a recovering yellor. She lives in San Francisco with her family. To learn more go to badassmomcoach.com.



Greatness in Grimmness: Fairy Tales and Today's Child

Traditional fairy tales have helped generations of children foster imagination, process their fears, and build resilience.

By Gail Cornwall Photographs by Carmen Dunham Photography

Originally published in the June 2015 Raising Readers issue.

As a lover of books, I was thrilled when my first child finally stopped squirming during storytime. Opening *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales*, I began to read: "I will tell you what, husband," [said] the wife; "we will take the children...into the forest...and leave them alone; they will never find the way home again, and we shall be quit of them." "Gah! I skimmed ahead: "Then Gretel gave her a push...Oh how frightfully she howled! But Gretel ran away, and left the wicked witch to burn miserably." I snapped the book shut and shoved it under our chair, having no interest in adding the encouragement of separation anxiety or the normalization of violence to our bedtime routine.

Unfortunately, experts say that succumbing to this common protective impulse does our kids a disservice. From a young age, children intuit life's constant threats of death, abandonment, and maltreatment. When presented in a certain way, traditional fairy tales actually help kids process their fears of physical and emotional tragedy, as well as provide a slew of other developmental benefits.

A brief history of fairy tales

The stories we think of as fairy tales began as folk tales with paranormal elements crafted for an adult audience in the tradition of oral storytelling. Well-known collections produced by Charles Perrault

and the Brothers Grimm—as well as the works of Hans Christian Andersen and George MacDonald—are based upon these "fast-paced adventure stories filled with bawdy episodes, violent scenes, and [bathroom] humor," writes Maria Tatar in *Off with Their Heads!* The goal was to entertain, and there was no need to sugarcoat. In the original "Sleeping Beauty," for example, the king doesn't awaken the slumbering princess with a kiss; he rapes her.

In producing their first edition, the Grimms made drastic changes, mixing versions of the tales, filling in plot holes, resolving paradoxes, and eliminating off-color humor. They also added a Christian sensibility, including moral instruction and happy endings. The resulting tales were still awfully intense. The wicked stepmothers in "Snow White" and "Hansel and Gretel" were biological mothers, Rapunzel got pregnant, and Cinderella's stepsisters cut off parts of their feet to fit into the glass slipper.

In subsequent editions, the Grimms further "censored...to make the tales more accessible to [middle-class reading audiences] and more considerate of children as readers and listeners of stories," explains Jack Zipes by way of introducing *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. They left in the violence, however, and actually added quite a bit of bloodshed to cautionary tales.

Over the last 200 years, countless versions have further modified the original tales. We are left with stories that feature adult themes like love without the sex, subversive plots with abrupt happy endings, and gruesome violence described in a nonplussed tone.

Why can't our kids get enough of this strange genre?

In almost all versions, the "descriptions are bare; the dialogues, curt; and the action, swift. The storytellers get to the point quickly," writes Zipes. In *Enchanted Hunters*, Tatar explains that children are drawn in by "wow" moments "that offer up the exquisite, the terrifying, and everything in between." Though many tales moralize, quite a few feature excitingly illicit behavior like lying and stealing. Moreover, she tells us, the blood and gore that result when fairy tale characters are disobedient, "meant to repel children," can actually prove "a source of unending fascination."

Kids are also attracted to the simplicity of fairy tales. The characters' problems are ordinary, and the "figures are clearly drawn"; they are "either good or bad, nothing in between," explains Bruno Bettelheim in his famous Freudian treatise on the subject, *The Uses of Enchantment*. "All characters are typical rather than unique," he tells us, and as a result they are known only by their roles like "girl," "stepmother," or "giant" (when they do have names they tend to be either descriptive,

like Cinderella, because she was covered in the grime of cinders, or common, like Gretel was in the Grimms' Germany).

As a result, the characters are readily relatable. Kids see themselves in exploited Cinderella, who's forced to do chores, impish Pinocchio, who fails to be good despite multiple attempts, innocent Snow White, who suffers at the whim of a grown-up dealing with her own issues, and impetuous Jack, who is denied the wonderful things that big people have. They see others as well. Archetypes such

as kings, queens, and giants stand in for power-wielding adults; wolves, witches, and tricksters represent predators and evil impulses; charming princes, helpful animals, and wise old people personify the forces of good; and fairies, godmothers, and other meddling magical creatures symbolize the vagaries of life outside one's control.

The transparency and familiarity of fairy tale characters and their woes—in addition to quick plot development, shock value, and repetition—greatly appeal to children.

The benefits of reading fairy tales

Whether we should read the dark tales that so enthrall them is another matter. As it turns out, there are many reasons to do so:

1. Enable kids to work through fears and conflict

In both literal and symbolic fashion, fairy tales address what Bettelheim calls "the psychological problems of growing up": issues such as sibling rivalry, transformation, being tested, forbidden fruits, feeling



oppressed, powerlessness, and learning to identify those who wish one ill, as well as fears of abandonment, being unloved, and death.

According to Bettelheim, by “project[ing] themselves onto fictional characters, [children] work through real world fears and internal conflict on an imaginary stage.” Under this school of thought, children need “dreadful creatures of the imagination to conserve idealized images of their parents,” Tatar writes. In Bettelheim’s most famous example, the “typical fairy-tale splitting of the mother into a good (usually dead) mother and an evil stepmother” allows kids to feel angry about the small injustices they suffer at the hands of their mothers without threatening that bond. Similarly, he says, “since a giant is an imaginary figure, the child can fantasize...to overpower...him, and still retain real grownup people as protectors.”

When we attempt to hide life’s ugliness, children are left feeling that they alone have destructive impulses. But “these older tales legitimise the murderous and violent instincts that all children experience, freeing them from...guilt,” British author Tim Lott writes. And when we read them the stories, we tacitly credit the difficulties they face and sanction their stormy internal worlds.

2. Foster imagination

The fantastical elements of fairy tales—such as supernatural creatures and magical powers—provide children with a framework for their own imaginings. Make-believe play in turn enriches children cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

3. Teach history and promote cultural literacy

Fairy tales offer a springboard for historical discussion (“What is churning, and why is she doing that to the butter?”). Also, since they are part of a shared culture, familiarity with fairy tales means understanding references to things like “the Goldilocks principle” down the line.

4. Encourage literacy through storytelling

Reading tales aloud leads to compounding literacy growth, since kids who hear stories develop a “sense of story”—a basic understanding of style, setting, narrative voice, character, plot, sequencing, and theme—that makes them more likely to tell stories themselves, and in so doing learn to comprehend, and then relate, more complicated stories. Beginning with “once

“The transparency and familiarity of fairy tale characters and their woes—in addition to quick plot development, shock value, and repetition—greatly appeal to children.”

upon a time” starts our kids on the path to reading and writing “happily ever after.”

5. Impart morals

Parenting guru Harvey Karp describes “side-door lessons” as a way to “sneak into our children’s minds and plant seeds of kindness and good character without our little ones feeling lectured to.” By relating fantastical struggles with right and wrong, but not explicitly stating morals, fairy tales provide one such “gentle, indirect, undemanding, and therefore psychologically more effective way” to convey “the advantages of moral behavior,” writes Bettelheim.



6. Building problem-solving skills and resilience

In *How Children Succeed*, Paul Tough reports social science data linking character skills like “effort, diligence, and perseverance” with success. We can foster these skills by teaching children that we all face obstacles, and that hard work can make us both smarter and more creative. Fairy tales do just that. Although their specific solutions, like chopping down a beanstalk,

rarely apply to our kids’ problems, fairy tales model how the downtrodden and overwhelmed can conquer adversity. Bettelheim tells us that amoral tales—like

“Puss in Boots,” who arranges for the hero’s success through trickery—are particularly good at promoting ingenuity, effort, and tenacity.

How to make the most of fairy tales

These general benefits leave quite a few loose ends. At what age should we start? With which version? Do we allow kids to stew over the story independently or add our own thoughts?

According to Bettelheim, “[t]he simplified and bowdlerized fairy tale loses all value.” Yet, as Tatar notes, there is “cultural dissonance generated by telling nineteenth-century stories”—written for children growing up with high mortality rates—to today’s kids. She also highlights the sexism inherent in the originals: “Curiosity and disobedience, along with a variety of other vices, are seen as the besetting sins of both children and women.” Then again, she says, Disneyfication usually only exacerbates the problem; in American versions of “Snow White,” two types of femininity are contrasted: a power-obsessed, “forbiddingly cold woman” and “a girl who makes her dreams come true through her flirtatious good looks and her effortless ability to keep a house clean.”



Fortunately, “each [generation] creates its own folklore through rereadings as well as retellings,” notes Tatar. “The places where we wince, cower, laugh, comment, whisper, [or] shriek...determine the way the child perceives the story.” We should therefore read the original tales conscientiously, and in tandem with explicit discussion about social mores and violence. Zipes agrees that sanitizing the tales is misguided, even hypocritical. By instead acknowledging the physical and social brutality of the stories, we can teach our children to think critically about their world.

As for age, luckily there are hundreds of well-known tales with varying degrees of complexity and explicitness. In “Choosing Fairy Tales for Different Ages,” Joan Almon provides a handy guide:

- Young 3s: Simple nature stories such as “Sweet Porridge”
- Older 3s: Sequential, repetitive tales such as “The Turnip”

- 4s and young 5s: Stories that are “slightly more complex” but cheerful overall, such as “Three Little Pigs” and “Billy Goats Gruff”

- 5s and 6s: More challenging tales that still “do not weigh too heavily on the soul of the individual” such as “Frog Prince,” “Rumpelstiltskin,” and “Hansel and Gretel”

- Older 6s: “Tales in which characters have a personal experience of suffering or sorrow,” such as “Cinderella” and “Rapunzel”

Be brave of heart

In *The Genius of Natural Childhood*, Sally Goddard Blythe writes, “If as parents or society we seek to protect children from all unpleasant events, we do not equip them to deal with the real world.” Having internalized this message, I eschewed helicopter parenting in favor of inculcating independence when exploring the city

streets. And yet, I overprotected my kids in the safety of their own bedroom.

Seeking untold emotional and developmental riches, I tackled my own fears and stepped into the mean world of fairy tales. After just a few readings, my kindergarten-er saw herself in “Little Red Riding Hood,” my 3-year-old related to Jack, and I...well, with a new baby in the house, I deeply identified with all the sleepy characters.

Gail Cornwall works as a mother and freelance writer, covering education, psychology, child development, and parenting. You can find more of her work on Facebook and Twitter and at gailcornwall.com.

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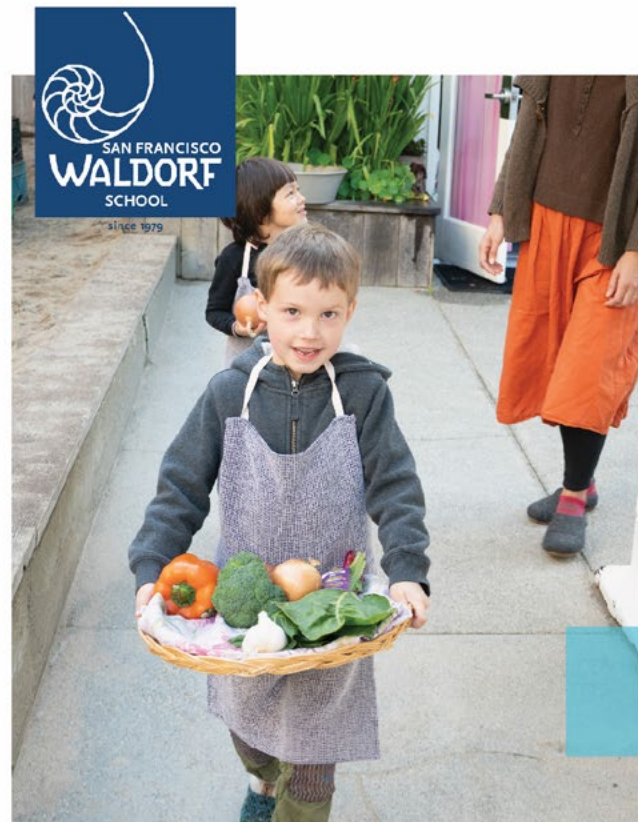



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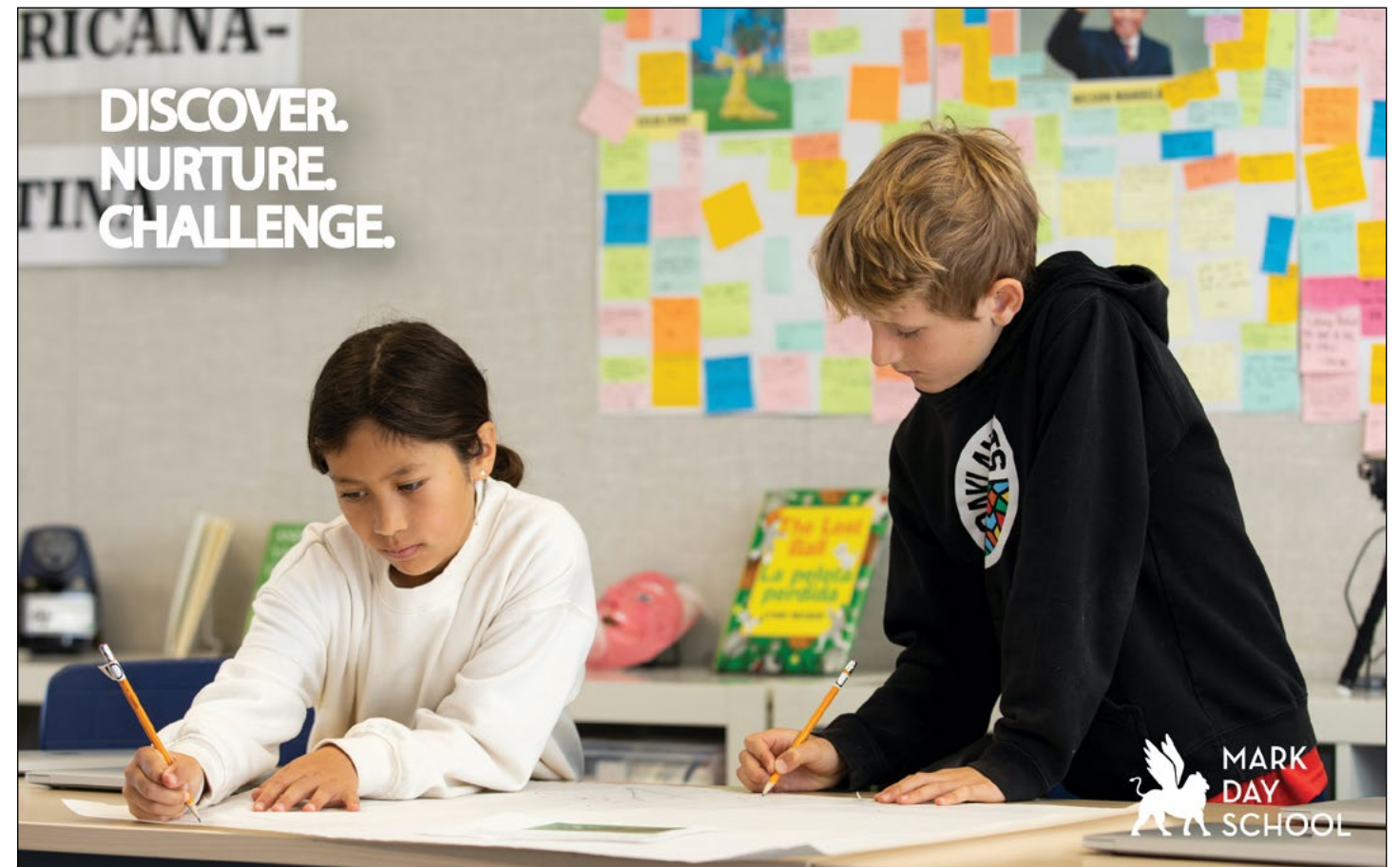
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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

Monthly Queer Family Hike

Join queer families for a walk/hike, which includes casually mingling/ chatting, discussions on agreed-upon topics, and just sharing unique experiences and issues we have encountered as queer families. All queer families are welcome!

Date: First Saturday or Sunday of each month
Time: Typically 10 a.m. to noon
Place: TBD
Cost: Free for members
Contact: Email Dy Nguyen for details (dy.nguyen@gmail.com)

Moms Supper Club

Explore new restaurants in the city, enjoy dinner and drinks, and meet new moms in your community! Details for each venue will be announced through ggmg.org.

Date: Thursday, November 30
Time: 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Place: TBD
Cost: \$10 for members, \$20 for non-members

Glen Park Coffee + Stroller Walk for Mommies (and Babies)

Would you like to meet neighborhood moms, grab a coffee and enjoy a stroller walk together? We're organizing this Coffee + Stroller walk for you! We'll meet at a coffee shop before we go for an hour of fresh air, light exercise, and great conversation!

Date: The first Wednesday of every month (November 1, December 6)

Time: 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Place: Bosworth and Diamond side lot by Pono Skincare in Glen Park. We can figure out which coffee shop to stroll to.

Cost: Free for members

South of Glen Park and Bernal Monthly Moms Night Out

Each month we will visit a different venue in our neighborhood, moms only! After kiddo bedtime, enjoy a drink and some appetizers with other mothers.

Date: The second Thursday of every month (November 9, December 14)
Time: 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.
Place: TBD (different place each month)
Cost: Free for members

Little Oceanauts \$7 Playdate

Looking for an afternoon playdate for your kiddos? Little Oceanauts in Ingleside is open and is the perfect place for children to run off their energy before dinner time! Meet fellow GGMG moms and enjoy a fun afternoon together.

Date: The third Friday of every month (October 20, November 17, December 15)

Time: 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Place: 1917 Ocean Ave.

Cost: GGMG members pay a special rate of \$7 per child. Infants 6 months and under are free. Parents/caretakers are free. Limited spots available. Must prepay at ggmq.org.



Monthly Moms Happy Hour

Join us for drinks and appetizers at a local restaurant to meet and connect with other moms in San Francisco. There will be a different venue in neighborhoods all around SF each month. Info will be announced two weeks before the event. All parties, feel free to take a COVID test in advance.

Date: The third Thursday of every month (October 19, November 16, December 21)

Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Place: TBD

Cost: \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members

Contact: Text or email Jessie Lee for details (Leejessiesf@gmail.com) or 415.518.6402

Marina/Pac Heights/North Beach Monthly Moms Happy Hour

Drop in anytime for drinks and appetizers with other moms!

Date: First Thursday of every month (November 2, December 7)
Time: 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Place: Wildseed, 2000 Union St.
Cost: \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members

Register for events at ggmg.org/calendar unless otherwise noted.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

Originally published in the November 2021 Indulgence issue.

Native American History Month



Ohlone Woman. Almaden Community Center and Library, San Jose

November is designated as Native American History Month. While a month is not nearly enough time to acknowledge the colonization, atrocities, and deliberate attempts to erase Indigenous cultures and people, Native American History Month offers an opportunity each year to continue educating our communities and ourselves and to honor the experiences of the original inhabitants and stewards of the land of the San Francisco Peninsula.

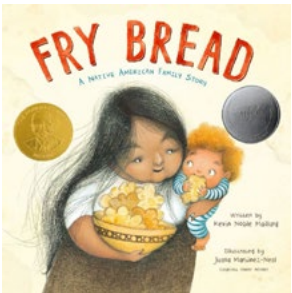
Help dispel the myth that Christopher Columbus “discovered” the Americas by learning more about the history of the land. Native Land Digital ([Native-Land.ca](https://native-land.ca)) offers a simple starting point in the form of an interactive map to identify which Native nations originate from the land on which you live, work, and visit.

We recommend learning more about the experiences of the Ohlone people by listening to local Ohlone leaders. In 2021, the de Young Museum hosted an Ohlone Land Acknowledgement Series. The first event in this series was “We are OF the Land,” with Dr. Jonathan Cordero, chair of the Association of Ramaytush Ohlone, and Gregg Castro, principal cultural consultant, in which they discussed “the cultural and spiritual significance of Land to the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples.” The second event, “Rematriation: Going Beyond Land Acknowledgement,” featured Corrina Gould, the tribal spokesperson for the Confederated Villages of Lisjan.

Read and share these books recommended by the *American Indians in Children’s Literature* blog with your family:

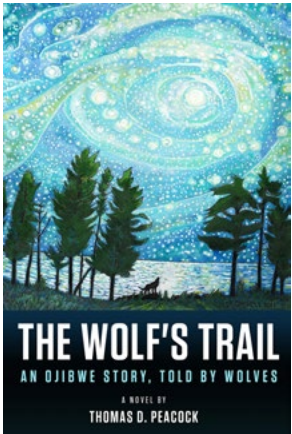
Picture Books

- *Fry Bread: A Native American Story* by Kevin Noble Maillard
- *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom



Chapter Books

- *Peggy Flanagan: Ogimaa Kwe, Lieutenant Governor* by Jessica Engelking
- *The Wolf’s Trail: An Ojibwe Story, Told by Wolves* by Thomas D. Peacock



High School, Young Adult, and Adult

- *Apple (Skin to the Core)* by Eric Gansworth
- “What’s an Indian Woman to do?” in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through: A Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry* edited by Joy Harjo

Lean in, listen, and support Indigenous voices that protest symbols of oppression and cultural appropriation. To begin, please check out:

- **The Association of Ramaytush Ohlone (ARO)**
ramaytush.org
ARO represents the interests of the original peoples of the San Francisco Peninsula with the purposes of ancestral responsibilities to care for Mother Earth and to care for the people who reside in Ramaytush Ohlone ancestral homeland.
- **Coastal Families Taking Action (CFTA)**
coastsidefamiliestakingaction.org
CFTA is a group of families devoted to making the San Mateo coast a welcoming, supportive, active, and empowering place for children and families. They are working for a diverse, progressive, sustainable, and equitable coastside.
- **American Indians in Children’s Literature (AICL)**
americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com
Established in 2006 by Dr. Debbie Reese of Nambé Pueblo, AICL provides critical analysis of Indigenous peoples in children’s and young adult books. Dr. Jean Mendoza joined AICL as a co-editor in 2016.

Have any questions or comments, or want to volunteer? Email us at diversity@gmg.org.

CAREER & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Are you passionate about supporting women in their careers or in starting or building their own business? The Career & Entrepreneurship Committee is looking for new volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering please email entrepreneurs@gmg.org so we can share more details with you and answer any questions you have. There are many ways to contribute and we would love to have your help!



PARTNERSHIPS

The Friends branch of the Partnerships Committee collaborates with local organizations and businesses to provide substantial discounts and resources for our members. We aim to develop mutually beneficial relationships with businesses in the Bay Area that provide useful services to mothers. Our goal is to work preferentially with small local businesses run by women and/or people of color in an effort to promote their professional advancements in our society.

The Partners branch of the Partnerships Committee manages our relationships with our large Partners including the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco (JCCSF), Luke’s Local grocery, and UrbanSitter.

Committee duties in Friends:

- Input new offers by local businesses (Friends) looking to provide substantial (20 percent or more) discounts to GGMG members
- Maintain our relationships with our current Friends
- Seek out potential new Friends who provide services useful to our members
- Negotiate new business discounts
- Update members on new discounts

Committee duties in Partners:

- Maintain relationships with current Partners and seek out new Partners
- Negotiate new business discounts to expand the discount offerings for GGMG members
- Outreach for new Partners of interest with preference to small local businesses run by women and/or people of color

Open Roles: Committee Co-chair in Friends (one hour per week) and Committee Co-chair in Partnerships (one to two hours per week)

To volunteer, email partnerships@gmg.org.

VOLUNTEER BENEFITS

We know that when you volunteer for GGMG, you are giving up precious time you could be spending with your family or splurging on yourself. We thank our volunteers in the following ways:

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- Social time at every general volunteer meeting
- Annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner
- Annual membership reimbursement after one year of service

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Paula E. Camila Ines

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To announce your new arrival in the magazine and for a chance to win a \$150 gift card from **Mini Anna Photography**, fill out the form at ggmg.org/about-us/ggmg-magazine.



On the Road Again

By Alyson La

Imagine embarking on the most epic road trip of your life—driving 2,600 miles across the Southwest, visiting eight national parks and countless roadside attractions—as a job. This was MY job, the summer after college. The job also included leading 14 European tourists on gorgeous hikes, organizing the logistics of camping and cooking every night, and instructing my newfound friends in understanding strange U.S. customs, like tipping. We spent every day together for 3 weeks as I drove our 15-passenger van down the California coast, then passed through Arizona to visit Lake Powell, Monument Valley, and the Grand Canyon, tackled the Utah Mighty 5 National Parks, visited Las Vegas, and, finally, Yosemite. Then I dropped the travelers off in San Francisco and did it all over again with another group.

Many lessons were learned and memories made on tour. Early on, while camping in Malibu Creek State Park, I fell asleep with the door to my tent slightly ajar and awoke to a raccoon on top of me. There were numerous U-turns as I navigated the trip using a paper atlas—it was 2008, before

Zion are awe-inducing. From that time on, I made it my goal to visit all 63 of the U.S. National Parks.

Post-college, I settled down in San Francisco and got a “real job” as an accountant. I managed to visit several more National Parks on another incredible road trip up the coast to Oregon and Washington, checking off Crater Lake, Redwood, Olympic, and North Cascades. Next came marriage, kids, mortgage, responsibility, and a new dream: to buy an RV for family camping trips.

Mid pandemic, my partner and I found a Winnebago motorhome for rent and spent a weekend in it with our two kids. I was immediately sold on RV life. Upon returning our rental, I asked the owner if she would be willing to sell it. She was. We drove it back to our place in the Excelsior District of San Francisco and parked in front of our house for 6 months. At 24 feet long, it was the same length as our house lot was wide.

Investing in a motorhome was an important step in getting our family outside and enjoying nature together. But you don’t need to buy an RV to get a taste of RV life. Several websites offer rentals, including Outdoorsy and RVshare. With RV camping, we have all the amenities of a tiny home on wheels—comfy beds to sleep in and a kitchen to cook, but it’s cramped enough that the kids naturally want to spend most of the day outdoors. From San Francisco, we regularly took trips to Santa Cruz, made a trip up to Lassen National Park, and, most

recently, to Great Basin National Park on the way to visit my family in Utah. The kids love getting the junior ranger booklets at the visitor centers, and my mom heart swells seeing them experience the wonder and awe of the great outdoors and our national treasures. We’ve recently moved (back) to Utah with plans to take our kids on their first tour of the Utah Mighty 5 this fall. In the words of Willie Nelson, “I can’t wait to get on the road again.”

Alyson is a mom of two, book lover, cross stitcher, and road trip enthusiast. Explore her RV for rent at roadtripperr.com



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smartphones. Perhaps the most memorable activity was the hour-long, majestic helicopter tour of Grand Canyon National Park. Or maybe it was the night we spent at Monument Valley, eating delicious fry bread tacos and staying up late around the campfire listening to stories from our Navajo guides.

Over the course of the summer, my love for the National Park system grew. As a kid, I had visited several National Parks with my family, but I felt an even deeper connection with their natural beauty as a young adult. It’s hard to pick favorites, but being my home state, the Utah National Parks have a unique significance for me. The hoodoos and amphitheatres of Bryce Canyon are otherworldly and the sheer rock walls of

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Think of my open house kit as a real estate diaper bag.

We moms know the wisdom of carrying everything, just in case. In that spirit, I pack dozens of items for each listing. Goo Gone, a Magic Eraser, a Swiffer - every mess covered! Door wedges and bungee cords - no doors slam shut on my watch. A full toolbox - who needs to hold out for a handyman? I take my responsibility to be prepared seriously.

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