



HEN NEWSLETTER

*No distance of place or lapse of time can
lessen the friendship of those who are
thoroughly persuaded of each other's
worth.*

Robert Southey

SPRING 2020



Editor's Note

Dear all,

at the time of writing the plan ahead has just been released and it looks like social distancing is going to stay as part of our lives for quite a while longer. Well, I don't know about you but this is not really what I had in mind for summer 2020. Still, this is what lies ahead and we will navigate it.

There is a long for normalcy; even though, to be honest with you I would love society to take a leap and become fairer, more inclusive, with a much bigger emphasis on protecting not exploiting the environment... so basically not the usual normal at all. Well, a woman can dream, right? (And maybe do a thing or two to help the process).

There has been ongoing talk about homeschooling, but we all know that learning at home in isolation is not our reality. We all miss our meet ups, chatting while our children are busy playing, socializing, enjoying, learning... living. There is nothing like the feeling you get when you talk to somebody that shares some of your experiences and gets your struggles. So there are a couple of stories from members that can help all of us feel nearer each other even in times of social distancing.

I believe we have all come, maybe drastically, to realise how much Nature and time spent outdoor are truly important in our lives. So this issue sees a poster entitled "We and the Earth" plus some resources to talk to children about the current situation of our dear planet. In order to accommodate a 2 pages spread, things have been shuffled about a bit, but you will find most of your favorites.

In this issue, there are also very interesting ideas on how to approach numbers through Nature and news from abroad... plenty to read to make you feel that, truly, you are not alone.

We are all here, just a little bit apart, but still sharing the (very strange) journey. But hey, who can be more used to weird and strange if not us, with the home education journey we are on? We who have braved hostile families, sometimes teachers or principals, uninvited strangers' comments or suggestions... we who have stick to our guts and pushed through? We CAN DO THIS.

A toast to all of us, and especially our children. Thanks for being in our lives, for reminding us that things can be done differently and that, by changing the way we approach things, we can, indeed, find new paths and happiness.

Marta Dorigo Salamon

Original cover photo by Jon Sailer on Unsplash

ChickLit's Editor's Note

Hi,

The newest edition of Chicklit is out!

I'd like to say thanks to everyone who sent something in ;)

Also note that there is a new email address, for the ChickLit: chicklit.hen@gmail.com so please send all contributions to future issues here.

- Theo Monaghan, Chicklit editor



Content

Editor's Note and Chick Lit Editor's Notes.....	1
Feature: We and the Earth by Nelleke McGrath	3
We and the Earth Home Ed Resourcesby Marta Dorigo Salamon	5
We are One: DIY Experiments .by Nelleke McGrath	8
Chairperson's Letter.....	9
News from Local Meet Ups.....	10
News from the Camping Group by Irene Doran	12
Guest Blog post: .Seeing Numbers in Nature by Lisa Lillywhite	13
A Journey into Home Education by Jennifer Poussin	15
Reviews.....	17
Recipe: Gingerbread Men by Claire Mulligan	19
Growing up as Homechooler: Megan Dring	20
Homeschooling Around the World (Italy) by Erika Di Martino	22
A Chat with... .Michelle Conboy	24
Colouring pages.....	27
Funny sentences you hear in this house.....	29
Regional Contact Officers.....	30
NCB Contacts.....	31





FEATURE

FOOD AND WATER



We use mineral fertilisers: they destroy the humus in the soil, killing all the network of soil organism. It is a forced feed component and cannot be avoided by any who live in the fertilised soil.



It also ends up in the ground water.

We eat fruits and vegetables, cereals that have been sprayed with fungicides, pesticides, sometimes herbicides we ingest them and then they end up in the sewage, which does not filter them out either, so back to the rivers and oceans.



We and

HEALTH



Did you know the allopathic medicine we ingest go back to the Earth, her land and water?

The sewage treatment plants do not filter them out either, and it flows into the sea. They could, but they baulk out at the prohibitive costs.

All sea creatures, fish, dolphins, whales they end up swimming in a pharmaceutical soup and ingesting them!

Please remember there are alternative to allopathic medicine for common ailments - homeopathy, acupuncture, herbal medicine, Ayurveda... There are also energy medicine, quantum touch, reconnective healing, Kinesiology, Reiki... they are all way to make our bodies return to a harmonious state.

Did you know?

At Findhorn, the eco-community in Scotland, they installed a Living Machine sewage treatment! Check it out here <https://www.ecovillagefindhorn.com/index.php/water>

And the whole system got a whole lot better since they installed it! Worth considering!

the Earth



CLOTHING AND LAUNDRY

Fleece and polyester has become ubiquitous in the past years. It can be so convenient! Comfy, soft, needs no ironing...

Yet every time you put in the washing machine, small particles get washed down... in the sea!

Best thing would be not to buy these anymore. Or at least using a mesh laundry bag*: they are made of plastic, yes plastic to filter plastic *but these are fully recyclable, and you can put all your synthetic clothes in it and the bag catches the fiber shedding, thus protecting our oceans!

And please do not forget what you wash your clothes in, laundry detergents, fabric softeners, laundry sterilising fluids! It all ends up in our oceans and our water, so go for an eco/friendly one—this does not mean a bio detergent!

And why don't you try the Eco Egg or the Soap Nuts?



Our Bees Need Us!

Our bees love to take moisture from fresh cow patties. Whatever cattles get fed, it goes back to Earth, and the bees ingest it too!

So, by all means, leave dandelions and daisies in your garden; plant pollinators friendly plants too... but don't forget the full circle!



Don't forget... our bodies need movement! In our past we would use our energy to bring in the hay, help a neighbour build a stone wall, help to build a house, a barn. A physical body would be challenged to experience its strength to maximum capacity. There is something very wrong with not using our hands to help mother Nature.

In my opinion climate change is not something to go to the streets for, have big placards and then not also have a good look at all the personal contributions we make. It is a personal matter, very personal.. I try to ask myself daily what am I contributing to today? How can I be more and more in harmony with all living fellow creatures and the big mamma on who we all live.

When I see the ripped devastated state of vegetation after so called hedge trimmers, I feel shame. I feel shame at the attitude of cutting back vegetation in this way. It could be done with consideration and respect, if truly needed.

We really should be more considerate of all in our natural world. It is not just us humans, it is all of living critters!

Nelleke McGrath

*Graphic and format by the Editor



Resources

The current situation of our planet can be tricky to explain and to approach with children. We might feel they need to be protected, to preserve their innocence. I believe we would do us and them a disservice shielding them from reality; children can play a central role in helping us - and, thus their own future. The Friday for Future movement is a great example of this.

I think that we can approach the subject from two different angles.

The first is that we simply cannot continue doing what we have been doing in the past century - our planet's resources are finite and we are behaving as if they are not - or, as if, in a certain point in a somewhat near future, we will discover new resources to exploit and/or a way to be able to progress with our lives the way we have so far. This, to me, is simply postponing (thus making it worse) or entirely avoiding the problem. I think we have to come to accept that we have to change our ways and that our lifestyles will necessary be impacted some way or another.

Consume less - of everything - is one part. The other side of the coin is pollution; to go on like we are would simply mean more and more pollution. This is not an externality, this is something that affects us as well. We might try to consider ourselves as separate from Nature but that is simply not the case; and there are, finally, studies that show that we are part of the ecosystem and everything that affects the ecosystem affects us in a never-ending and inexorable circular motion.

The second angle is climate change. Our climate is changing due to several factors - like the Earth's changing orbit around the sun, for example, but it is clear that the way we live is making the situation worse.

As individuals we can do our part - the poster by Nelleke McGrath gives excellent examples. During the lockdown, however, the world's emissions re-

duced by little more than 5%; which is to say we, as individuals, are little players in this. Yet if we all reviewed our ways, becoming more and more aware of the actual situation, implementing changes in our daily lives, we would end up reviewing our choices in many many areas. This would accelerate change enormously and we would feel far less powerless.

Talking about this with children is not easy, so below you will find a list of books, documentaries, movies and websites that can be of help to speak about our current predicament. Please look at these as conversation starters: there are books about plastic pollution, endangered animals, water and ocean life, green energy, documentaries on inequality, climate change... The list is by no means complete! I just gathered as much info as possible. If you have used another book or another website or have seen another movie or documentary... do let me know!

Marta Dorigo Salamon

0-4

Little Helpers, Green Start

What Do You See?: A Lift-the-Flap Book About Endangered Animals, Stephen Krensk

Little Seeds, Charles Ghigna and AG Jatkovska

One Love by Cedella Marley, illustrated by Vanessa Newton

Baby Loves Green Energy! by Ruth Spiro

4+

I Want to Go Green! But What Does that Mean? by Jill Dunn and Bodhi Hill

Someone Swallowed Stanley by Sarah Roberts One Plastic Bag by Miranda Paul 5-9

I Can Save the Earth by Alison Inches

Don't Throw That Away! by Lara Bergen

Miss Fox's Class Goes Green by Eileen Spinelli

Pesky Plastic: An Environmental Story by Leticia Colon De Mejias

Saving the Countryside: The Story of Beatrix Potter and Peter Rabbit by Linda Marshall and Ilaria Urbinati

Anywhere Farm by Phyllis Root and G. Brian Karas



We Are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade
My Friend Earth by Patricia MacLachlan and Francesca Sanna

4-8

Don't Let Them Disappear by Chelsea Clinton
Ten Things I Can Do to Help My World by Melanie Walsh
The Great Kapok Tree - A Tale of the Amazon Rain Forest by Lynne Cherry
Miss Maple's Seeds by Eliza Wheeler
Follow the Moon Home - A Tale of One Idea, Twenty Kids, and a Hundred Sea Turtles by Philippe Cousteau, Deborah Hopkinson, Meilo So
Kate, Who Tamed the Wind by Liz Garton Scanlon, Lee White
Red Knit Cap Girl and the Reading Tree by Naoko Stoop
The Tantrum that Saved the World by Megan Herbert and Michael E. Mann
Adventures of a Plastic Bottle - A Story About Recycling by Alison Inches
City Green by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan
The Lonely Polar Bear by Khoa Le
Grandpa's Garden by Stella Fry e Sheila Moxley
We Planted a Tree by Diane Muldrow and Bob Staake
One Plastic Bag - Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia by Miranda Paul and Elizabeth Zunon
Topsy and Tim: Go Green by Jean and Gareth Adamson
Superfrog and the Big Stink by Michael Foreman
George Saves The World by Lunchtime by Jo Readman
One World by Michael Foreman
Charlie and Lola: Look After Your Planet by Lauren Child
Here We Are: Notes for Living on Planet Earth by Oliver Jeffers
The Last Polar Bear by Jean Craighead George and Wendell Minor
The Water Princess by Susan Verde
Mister Seahorse by Eric Carle
Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth by Mary McKenna Siddals and Ashley Wolff
Bee & Me by Alison Jay

Touch the Earth by Julian Lennon with Bart Davis and Smiljana Coh
Seeds of Change: Wangari's Gift to the World by Jen Cullerton Johnson and Sonia Lynn Sadler
On the Reef by Judith and Shandley McMurray
A Hole in the Bottom of the Sea by Jessica Law, Jill McDonald, and The Flannery Brothers
Ocean Seasons by Ron Hirschi and Kirsten Carlson
All the Water in the World by George Ella Lyon and Katherine Tillotson
Enough Water? A Guide to What We Have and How We Use It
Flotsam by David Wiesner
First Big Book of the Ocean by Catherine D. Hughes
A Symphony of Whales by Steve Schuch and Peter Sylvada
What Lives in a Shell? by Kathleen Weidner Zoehfeld and Helen K. Davie
Life in the Ocean: The Story of Oceanographer Sylvia Earle by Claire A. Nivola
The Boy Who Grew a Forest: The True Story of Jadav Payeng by Sophia M. Gholz
The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind by William Kamkwamba
The Earth Book by Todd Parr
The lost words by (author) Jackie Morris and Robert Macfarlane (plus spell songs)
The Lorex by Dr. Seuss

Movies/Documentaries:

WALL E (2008) Director: Andrew Stanton
The Blue Planet BBC documentary 2001 (series documentary)
The Lorax (2012) Directed by Chris Renaud

8+

I am Farmer: Growing an Environmental Movement in Cameroon by Baptiste Paul
The lost words by Jackie Morris and Robert Macfarlane (plus Spell Songs)
The Magic School Bus and the Climate Challenge by Joanna Cole
What Milly Did by Elise Moser
Seeds Of Change by Jen Johnson and Sonia Sadler
A Wild Child's Guide to endangered Animals by Millie Marotta
Pax by Sara Pennypacker and Jon Klassen
My Life With the Chimpanzees by Jane Goodall



The Wild Robot by Peter Brown

Rachel Carson and Her Book That Changed the World by Laurie Lawlor

Hoot," by Carl Hiaasen

We're Sailing to the Galapagos: A Week in the Pacific by Laurie Krebs and Grazia Restelli

Barefoot Books World Atlas by Nick Crane and David Dean

Enough Water? A Guide to What We Have and How We Use It

Flotsam by David Wiesner

How to Save the Whole Stinkin' Planet: a Garbological Adventure by Lee Constable

Plastic: Past, Present and Future by Eun Ju Kim

I am Farmer: Growing an Environmental Movement in Cameroon by Baptiste Paul

Documentaries 8+

Tomorrow (2015) Director: Cyril Dion and Mélanie Laurent

12+

Whittled Away by Pádraic Fogarty

The Natural Way Of Farming - The Theory and Practice of Green Philosophy by Masanobu Fukuoka, translator Frederic P. Metreaud

The Road Back to Nature - Regaining the Paradise Lost by Masanobu Fukuoka, translator Frederic P. Metreaud

The Ultimatum of God Nature The One-Straw Revolution A Recapitulation by Masanobu Fukuoka

Sowing Seeds in the Desert: Natural Farming, Global Restoration, and Ultimate Food Security, edited by Larry Korn

The Uninhabitable Earth by David Wallace-Wells

Losing Earth by Nathaniel Rich

Storming the Wall by Todd Miller

Generation Green: The Ultimate Teen Guide to Living an Eco-Friendly Life by Linda Sivertsen, Tosh Sivertsen

Plastic Pollution by Geof Knight - by Tim Flannery, Sally M. Walker (Adapted by)

Eyes Wide Open: Going Behind the Environmental Headlines by Paul Fleischman

It's Getting Hot in Here: The Past, Present, and Future of Climate Change by Bridget Heos

Trashing the Planet: Examining Our Global Garbage Glut by Stuart A. Kallen

Don Conroy's books! <https://donconroy.com/books/>

And why not consider reading together with your old-

er children Deep Adaptation by Jem Bendell?

<https://jembendell.com/2019/05/15/deep-adaptation-versions/>

Movies/Documentaries 12+

The 11th Hour (2007) directed by Nadia Connors, Leila Connors

Meat The Truth (2008) directed by Karen Soeters, Gertjan Zwanikken

Tapped (2009) directed by Stephanie Soechtig and Jason Lindsey

Chasing Ice (2012) directed by Jeff Orlowski

More Than Honey (2013) directed by Markus Imhoof

Cowspiracy (2014) directed by Kip Andersen, Keegan Kuhn

Before The Flood (2016) directed by Fisher Stevens

An inconvenient truth (2006) directed by Davis Guggenheim

RiverBlue (2017) directed by David McIlvride and Roger Williams

Artifishal (2019) directed by Josh Murphy

Ice on Fire (2019) directed by Leila Connors

Anthropocene: The Human Epoch (2018) directed by Edward Burtynsky, Jennifer Baichwal, and Nicholas de Pencier

Chasing Coral (2017) directed by Jeff Orlowski

How To Change the World (2015) directed by Jerry Rothwell

Thrashed (2012) directed by Candida Brady

The Green Planet (fiction) - Visitors from another Planet (1996) directed by Coline Serreau

Planet of Humans (2020) directed by Jeff Gibbs

Useful websites

<https://filmsfortheearth.org/en/films/>

https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/all-resources/?category=0&resource_type=0&pg=1

https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/edu/teaching_about_climate_change.pdf

<https://climatekids.nasa.gov/menu/teach/>

<http://climatechangeconnection.org/resources/climate-friendly-schools/resources-for-schools/>

<https://www.scoilnet.ie/primary/theme-pages/geography/caring-for-the-world/>

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/get-involved/schools/resources/climate-change-resources>

<http://wearetheark.org/>

<http://zerowasteireland.com/>

<http://gozero.ie/>



We are One - DIY Experiments

WORDS MADE VISIBLE

This is a practical experiment to undertake. It is easy and shows the effect expression of thoughts, words, emotions have on living tissue, on plants, on our environment and basically on everything that lives.

Steps:

1. Take two equal dishes, like saucers for instance.
2. Place a few layers of tissue paper on one saucer and wet them.
3. Sprinkle mustard seeds onto this wet tissue, cover with another dish overnight.
4. Do the above (step 2 and 3) for the other saucers.
5. Place the saucers 1 meter apart, at the same time making sure that they have equal growing conditions: light, moisture and warmth.
6. Mark the saucers A and B.
7. Once a day, speak angry, grumpy words to A; for instance: you look bad, you are awful, you are no good, warzone, shooting, violence etc. Once a day, speak loving words to B: oh you are soooo good, you look beautiful, oh well done, you look fabulous, look how well you're doing, etc

Over time, notice the difference between how the little mustard seeds develop in saucer A and saucer B.

Record your observations and thoughts on the experiment and if you want, share them with us sending an email to the editor newsletterhen@gmail



ONE WITH PLANTS

This experiments helps you to connect with plants and the vegetal kingdom in general.

Steps:

1. Place your hands around a plant, a tree, a bush.
2. Close your eyes, slow your breath.
3. Concentrate on the plant between your hands. Create a picture of the plant in your mind.
4. Concentrate on your palms. Try to "feel" the plant without touching it. Visualise the bark or the stem, the buds, the leaves and the flowers.
5. Greet silently the plant and thank h** for all the oxygen and the nourishment the plant provides.
6. Be silent and receptive and wait for the answer. It might surprise you!
7. Record afterwards your impressions, any colour and shape that you might have seen in your mind.

The magic is that when we make contact this way with one plant, other plants often chime in as well with a big sigh as in "We are SEEN!".

Both experiments show us a whole different world opens up to us; a world where we are ALL connected, and we are a part of a net, that links us with everything else, precisely as quantic scientists have been telling us for a little while now.

Experiments submitted by Nelleke McGrath





Chairperson's Letter

Hi All, and greetings from a very much quieter than usual NCB. I hope you're doing well in this strange era when home education has gone from being "weird" to being compulsory.

In our home we never realised just how much of our time is normally spent away from home and how many activities we take part in.

I hope that those of you with good phone and internet service are managing to stay in contact and keep each other inspired, encouraged and supported as we all face the challenges of Covid-19. For everyone else living with communications gaps in the rural digital backwaters, you're not alone.

The work of HEN has been continued by Michael and Lorna keeping up progress with the website and membership database. The rest of us have been keeping communication going as best we can. We're all looking forward to and planning for "normality" when and where we're allowed.

Thank you all, NCB and members for all your efforts in helping each other to provide the best education we can for our children at this challenging and

stressful time.

Isn't it interesting that it seems that it's often the children who can lead us through these uncharted events. For them so much is new anyway, that this is just one more adventure for many of them. They're naturally better at just staying in the moment, adapting to unfamiliar circumstances and finding creative solutions to boredom. Taking a leaf from their book and remembering to Play just might be the most important strategy for us now too.

Wishing you, and especially those whose children have additional needs and can be more of a handful right now, all the very best. I hope that you find deep joy living in your homes and that you and your children keep growing into the most wonderful beings that you can be.

With lots of love,

Kevin





News from Local Meet Ups



County Mayo Home Ed Meetup

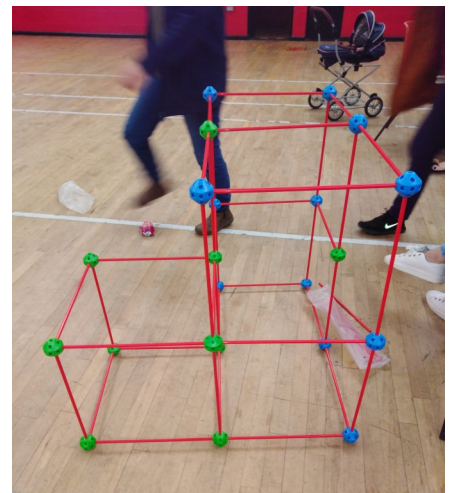
The above one was at Ballyhaunis park in February with sleds in the snow!

The black and white image was in January, we had a day here in Ballyhaunis where we worked renovating an old orchard.

The second image was taken at a walkabout in February at Clare Lake in Claremorris, with the super granite sculptures.

Submitted by Claire Butler-Hastings

A tower built in Athy Home Ed meet up on Wednesday 19/2/20 by Gill, James, Anna and Grace
Submitted by Genie Foley



Galway Meetup



Crafty Homeschoolers getting ready for St. Patrick's



Playground fun



Visit to Galway Museum



Sligo/Leitrim Group



History Heritage Sessions November–December 2019



**Arts and Crafts Meetup
November 2019**

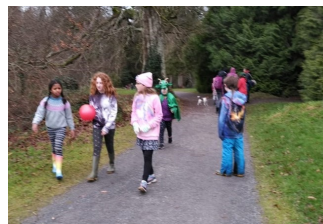
**Creative Writing Workshop
December 2019**



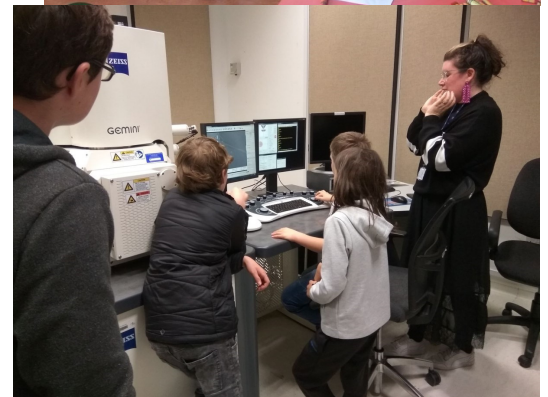
**Bingo and Drumming Meetup
December 2019**



**Outdoor
Meetup
January
2020**



**Visit to Trinity
Advanced
Microscopy
Lab. October
2019**



Share with us what you have been up to lately! You don't fancy sharing pics of the children? That is fine, too; simply write a caption and send a pic of the place you have been at.



News from the Camping Group

Here is a little selection of what we have been up to
the last couple of months we have been learning, exploring, achieving most importantly living.
Irene Doran



The children from the Longford Westmeath Community
received their Little Heroes First Aid Cert



Squashing eggshells is almost as satisfying
as bursting bubble wrap!



We learned all about
Knights, Conquests and
how they trained their
hawks with our local scout
group



Following a frog



In the woods





Seeing Numbers in Nature

If you could speak the same language as the natural world, what would you say? Seeing Numbers in Nature.

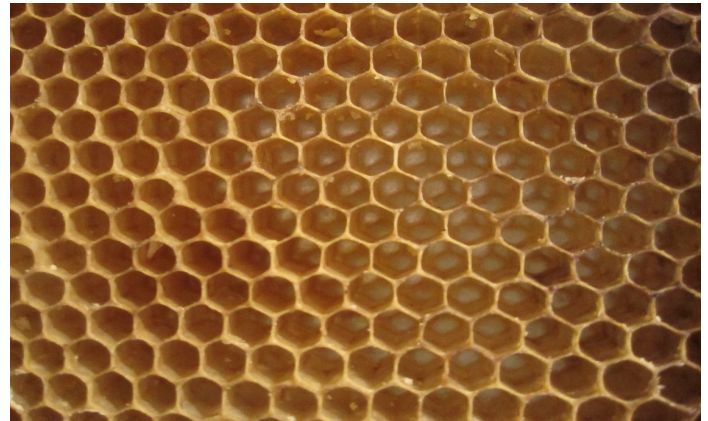
I often see patterns in lots of things. And no it's not a visual impairment pattern in 2D, pattern in 3D and pattern in time and space.

Patterns are where numbers present themselves in their purest form. It's how numbers fit together. And what we have come to call 'geometry' is the manner by which we move these numbers around to transform them into another one. Through a series of rotations, translations or reflections and... ta dah! we have another number in front of us.



Patterns are how numbers relate to each other, it's how they talk, how they interact. So being good at patterns makes us good at seeing how a number presents itself within another. We can call this symmetry; whether there are groups of points, lines or planes (for the geometers) or groups of seeds, branches or leaves (for the botanists) if they are arranged around a central point in any arrangement there will be a symmetry present that dominates the pattern.

Yes, I know in Nature it will never be perfect - the imperfections are why we love nature so much. In nature there are many factors that determine whether the flower reaches its full symmetry fulfilling potential for example;



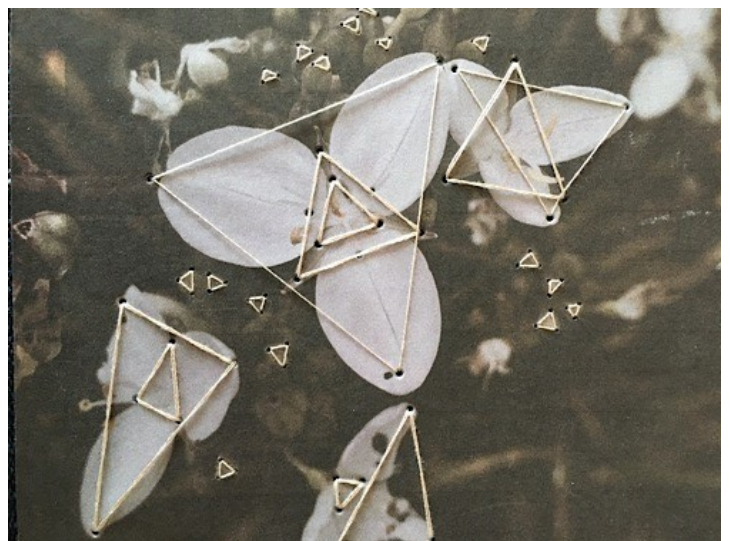
the main ones being light, water and nutrients. The pattern will rarely be exact - exactness we leave for the mathematicians. But the pattern will be visible if we learn what to look for.

This natural display of patterns are the ones that I am interested in. The display of a dominant symmetry is the expression of what can be called archetype number.

This does not mean numbers as values or numbers as measurements. This is numbers as shapes and patterns.

"The pattern that we see in a shell is a clue to the animal's rules of growth" Ian Stewart: The Beauty of Numbers in Nature

www.thesmarthappyproject.com/the-beauty-of-numbers-in-nature





Seeing the pattern means we begin to understand the laws that brought it into existence. It is an insight into how and why we are here. It prompts us to question our very existence and to see how we fit into the natural world as part of a whole.



We can begin on a journey to spot these expressions of number in flowers, leaves, seed pods and indeed all types of living organisms.

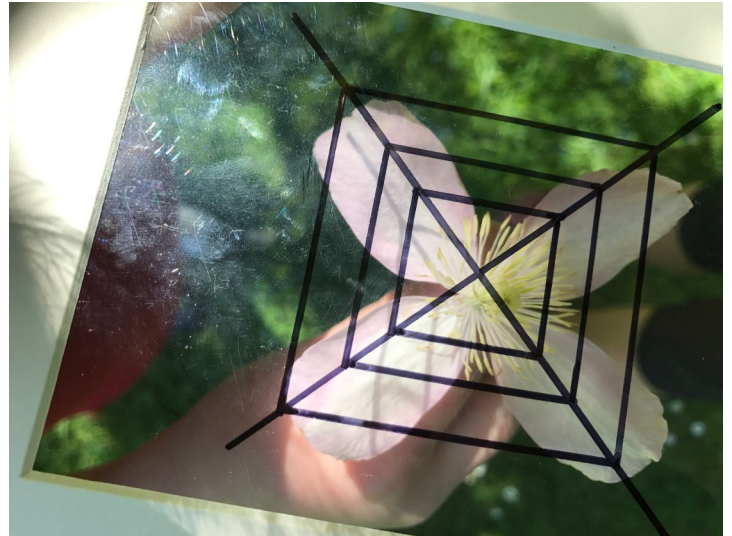
Using a transparent viewing window with a shape marked on it can prove to be a great way for children to experience outside the shapes associated with the numbers they are learning in lessons by simply overlaying it onto the flower they are looking at. I've put some of these together for you to use at home, to download these templates go to www.thesmarthappyproject.com/hen-ireland



Seeing Numbers in Nature by Lisa Lillywhite

The life cycle of a lily will take a journey that evolves from 3 into 6 then back to 3 again, for example. Numbers 3 and 6 are connected and we can actually 'see' this in a flower.

A snowflake will always have sixfold symmetry. Bees instinctively know how to use sixfold symmetry to its highest achieving potential in the hive.



Why aren't we learning number through the medium of nature? It would provide us with an understanding of number archetypes as they appear in the natural world rather than as abstract numeric value. It is about seeing a number's expression, and how it relates to those around it.

If you want to converse to the natural world, this is the language: the language of shape through numbers and patterns.

Lisa Lillywhite

During the lockdown, Lisa has been also doing live broadcast on The Smart Happy project Facebook Page:

https://www.facebook.com/pg/thesmarthappyproject/videos/?ref=page_internal

If you have a blog and you want to be featured in our newsletter, get in touch at newsletterhen@gmail.com



A Journey into Home Education

My name is Jennifer Poussin and I have two children, they are 6 and 3 years old. Our journey into home education started when we put my eldest in preschool at the age of 3 and a half years old. He suffered from severe anxiety linked to the separation, but, also linked to the school structure, I believe. There were 15 children in a small class, and a few of the children were very upset. I remember there was one adult with them who played a bit but kept her distance with the children emotionally. We left our son for an hour the first day and, upon picking him up, found him crying very strongly. He had been crying this way for 40 minutes while we were outside the school.

Photos by Gautam Arora on Unsplash



The second day we stayed for 20 minutes in the school while he was in the class and then left. The third day, I stayed with him as he had asked me too. He stayed close to me the entire time and played on the side of the room on his own. I was trying not to interfere. The Director asked me to leave after 30 min, so we went out of the class. As we were leaving, the Director talked to me as if my son had issues; he didn't take into consideration what I had seen in the class: a couple of children crying hysterically and the teacher not doing anything, one child had stayed in the toilets the whole time, the noise and chaos in the room, the indirect praise of

children who could ignore the distress of the others.

We didn't go back to this school and I looked for a playschool instead. My son went for 3 days in a Montessori structure and I stayed with him in the room. On the fourth day the woman Director asked me to leave. I did, and found my son crying glued to the gates of the playschool less than an hour later. That weekend he had a nightmare: he was trying to get home but got lost.



My husband was putting pressure for us to try again so we went back on Monday. After 15 min in the room without us, he cried to leave. He didn't go back and I started looking for alternatives. I tried to organise a playschool with parents in a rented room, but couldn't find enough interest to get it started. I heard of a forest meetup and we went. It was an eye opener for me, I watched him play and talked with the mums there. I bought books on homeschooling/edding, John Holt, Pam Laricchia, read online, talked with other parents at meetups, found HEN. We gradually moved from a very structured way of learning to unschooling as I deschooled actively.

Choosing to home educate was a terrifying decision, a jump in the unknown. Although we did think our son was going to go to school the following year, my husband and I discussed a lot about it. We still had



our son registered for a Montessori school in our neighbourhood; we had to pay a deposit of €150 to secure and in the end we didn't. We decided to homeschool/home-ed instead. I started writing a journal about our activities and got more active in the home-educating community to organise meetups.

We are currently in Donabate, North County Dublin. I think it is a good area to be home-educating, there are many families in North Dublin and North County Dublin. I haven't come across strongly negative comments, normally people are surprised and they usually leave it at that. Also, we are only starting to get comments now as my son has just turned 6 and people are starting to notice that he is not in school. Sadly my in-laws are struggling with our choice and



the indirect consequences it had, such as the boys' long hair - I couldn't cut it when they absolutely hate the process and our eldest asked us specifically not to cut it. My own parents are more silent, not completely accepting or understanding but leaving us to decide. "As long as you agree" with my husband is something that comes back very often in conversations.

I am the primary "teacher"/carer/speaker in the house. My husband participates in the evening and weekends, playing, cooking, gardening. The biggest surprise, so far, has probably been how difficult it can be to be on all the time: finding ways to keep myself interested in their activities, the driving, the differences between theories and practice, from the books to daily life.

We have discovered ourselves as unschoolers, even



radical unschoolers with regards to screen time (I do not impose a limit as I consider that if they feel like watching something, they are learning from it). I follow the children's interest. My 3 years old is starting to have opinions too, though it is still mostly around my eldest's interests.

I stay aware of what they do, what they like doing, the questions my eldest asks, what he says he would like to do. From there, I propose books, videos, activities, outings that are financially feasible, not too far (if it is far I explain how far it is) with always the freedom to say no, to discuss and compromise between what the boys want and even what I would prefer to do that day. We have days at home with drawings, paintings, legos, board games, card games, questions, book reading, TV watching, and days out for meetups, playdates, museums, pet farms, beach time or forest walks... I keep lists of possible outings, ideas of things to organise, games and books and toys I could buy. Everyday, there is a fair amount of discussions, compromise, and decision making. Some free time to play on their own, games all of us together or just the two of them. And a lot of eating! They eat when they are hungry and I propose a bigger snack around lunchtime, then dinner when my husband comes home. Days fly by!

My eldest is very enthusiastic about learning freely, he is only starting to understand that most children don't live the same way as us which seems to be ok for him. We are happy we have made this decision.

Jennifer Poussin



Reviews



The Great Irish Science Book by Professor Luke O'Neill, illustrated by Linda Fährlin. Publisher: Gill Books

My 11 years old son and I use a wide variety of supports and reading material in our homeschooling adventures and at the minute we are enjoying The Great Irish Science Book. It's a large format book, attractively illustrated, and written in an engaging and light-hearted manner with plenty of jokes and puns which in no way undermines the depth of information given. It is divided into four sections (The Universe, Planet Earth, The Human Body and The Very Small) which bring the reader on a journey from the enormity of the Big Bang to the minute atom. Throughout the book we are accompanied by Irish scientists, past and present, who have contributed to their fields of exploration – for example Maude Delap, a marine biologist from Co. Donegal who was the first person to breed jellyfish in captivity or Helen Megaw, a chemist from Dublin who figured out the structure of ice and who has an island in Antarctica named after her. Míde and I have enjoyed finding out more facts about the scientists mentioned in the book and at the end of each section Professor O'Neill suggests ways in which the readers themselves can become scientists through experiments that can be done at home. We have used the information given in The Great Irish Science Book as a springboard to look at certain facts in more detail. For example reading about Genes on page 54 lead us to looking at cells and DNA more closely which lead us to natural selection, Darwin and evolution and to finding out about LUCA (Last Common Universal Ancestor). Which ties in neatly with what Professor O'Neill mentions in the introduction – science is more than knowledge, it is a way of thinking. It's about curiosity, recognising the inter-connectedness of the world and our place in it and The Great Irish Science Book certainly helps us with this.

Claire Mulligan



Lavender's Blue Kindergarten curriculum—<https://www.lavendersbluehomeschool.com>

Having read Rudolf Steiner's work on Theosophy during my 20ies, it was maybe inevitable that I fell in love with the Waldorf approach. So when we originally decided to home educate (our little one was 2 y.o.), I referred back to it because that's the atmosphere that I wanted for my child: a fairy like realm, full of natural materials, few toys to let her explore her creativity and plenty of art and crafts - and, of course, a lot of outdoor.

Point is that finding inspiration and gathering supplies, following the Wheel of the Year, was rather a time consuming activity and the little one basically stopped napping during the day when she turned 3. That is when the Lavender's Blue curriculum came in. It is a collection of crafts, arts, stories, finger plays, songs, felt works etc all based on what happens in a Waldorf kindergarten; plus of course, the list of the materials you need.

It helps to give your days a rhythm that suits your family, yet it is not prescriptive in any way. And it is strongly rooted in attachment/natural parenting, so it stresses the importance of the relationship with the child(ren) - something that was (and is) very important for us as a family.

To be honest, we did not follow most of it, but I found it very useful to have so many activities ready. And we did love almost all of them! From watercolours to felting, from finger plays to sewing and storytelling... It is even something we have built upon; so right now, with the little one just turned 8 (!), we are looking into basic wood carving and more advance sewing for example.



If you are interested in Waldorf pedagogy, this curriculum is beautifully designed and it is a bargain; you buy it once and you use it till school's years - and possibly beyond for inspiration. There is also a very tight community of users you can refer to to share your successes and struggles. Right now you find the curriculum (right now) till 3 Grade. Can't review school's years' curriculum since we are unschooling now, but, based on our experience with the kindergarten one, I think they are definitely worth a look.

Marta Dorigo Salamon



KIWICO BOXES - TINKER—<https://www.kiwico.com/tinker>

I know, I know. For most of our friends Kiwico boxes are a shining 5 stars, but let me explain. We got them for 4 or 5 months for our daughter. She loves building things and we thought the engineer series (Tinker) would suit her. Each month, she would go through the construction bits in a breeze and she would understand basically at glance the mechanism behind it. BUT she did not seem the least bit interested in the further activities that were proposed. She is not into screens much, so even watching videos was a no go. Basically we found ourselves with a rather expensive building activity that got us let's say an hour, maybe an hour and a half at max. I have also to say that it looked as if the ones we got were fairly basic. Most of all, however, we were really at odds with the huge amount of waste - really far too much plastic wrapping, and on top of that not recyclable at all. SO here we go: 3 stars. We could of course try other boxes in the series, but once again... we are committed to a zero waste path, so we will forgo them.

Marta Dorigo Salamon

Have you found a resource you loved? Or a book you totally thought was great and it turned out to be a big mistake? Share your opinion with other home edders and help them along in their journey. Come on, you know how hard it is to choose an app, a new audio book or a curriculum! Send us an email!





Gingerbread Men



Ingredients:

- 200g plain flour
- 100g caster sugar
- 100g butter, very soft
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 egg, organic and free range if possible
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- Smarties or jellies to decorate
- Icing sugar to decorate

Steps:

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4 and line a couple of baking trays with baking paper.
2. In a medium sized mixing bowl cream together the soft butter and the sugar until light and fluffy.
3. Sift in the flour, baking powder and the spices. Mix this in.

4. Add the egg and mix in again - it should turn into a smooth dough.

5. Flour the work surface where you are going to roll out the dough and flour the rolling pin too. Roll out the spicy dough to about 5mm thick, rolling in one direction only then use your gingerbread men cutters to cut 'people' out of the dough.

6. Put the gingerbread men onto the baking tray and re-shape the dough that's left and roll it out again cutting more shapes out until it is all used up.

7. Put on your oven gloves and carefully put the baking trays into the oven and bake for about 10-12 minutes until lightly coloured.

8. Let the gingerbread men cool on the tray before moving them onto a wire rack to cool completely. Then you can have fun decorating them any way you please. You can use icing sugar mixed with a splash of water to make the 'glue' with which you can stick on sweets or you can ice the gingerbread men with different coloured icing.



Claire Mulligan

Photos by Jill Wellington from Pexels

If you have a recipe you want to share, get in touch at newsletterhen@gmail.com



Growing up homeschooler: Megan Dring

In this section you will find interviews to grown ups that have been home educated. They share how home education has prepared them for adulthood and their life; their like and dislike. They share their wisdom and their stories help to put our occasional fears at rest.

Name and Age

Megan Dring, 43 years old.

Your home education journey

I was homeschooled 5 years, from 9 years old to 14 years old. We were unschooled, with very little 'structured' learning. For example, I loved to bake so that provided maths and science, I had pen pals which provided writing and composition practice, our family hosted travellers through the Servas organisation which provided opportunities to chat about geography and culture from other countries, I



liked to design and make doll clothes etc.

Your favourite thing about homeschooling

The freedom to do what activities we wanted when we wanted to and not having to get up early in the morning!

What was difficult about being homeschooled?

Nothing really. I suppose homeschooling at a time in Ireland when there really were not many home educating families and also before Social media, I felt a little out of touch with mainstream teenage girls when I started secondary school, but it didn't take long to figure it all out.



A favourite homeschooling memory

I've always loved baking, and I remember really enjoying experimenting with my own cake recipes in order to write my own cookbook.

The worst homeschooling memory

I don't have a bad homeschooling memory!



Growing up Homeschooler: Megan Dring

Did you think you would homeschool your own children?

I did always have it mind that we would home educate. When my first child was born we did put his name down for a local school 'just in case' but we decided to definitely home educate by the time he was 3, with the next two children we did not bother registering with any schools.

Any regrets directly related to being homeschooled?

I have no regrets about being homeschooled, in fact it was a great experience and I'm very glad that I had that opportunity.

I have never really had any problems aside from people just not being aware that it is a legitimate option, and possibly thinking I was a little different or odd, but I think that is because home educating gave me the opportunity to be myself instead of being pressured into fitting in with crowd.

How do you think being homeschooled prepared you for further education?

I think it helped a lot. It made me a more independent learner (which is particularly useful when doing your PhD!) as well as someone who didn't just accept something as fact just because a teacher (or anyone) said it.

What do you feel is the worst misnomer about homeschoolers?

Megan Dring





Homeschooling in Italy

Freedom in education is an Italian constitutional right, protected also by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, so home education is legal in Italy. Each year more and more Italian families choose not to send their kids to school, but they still remain a minority against the vast majority of the population who believes home education is wrong and in some cases against the law. Albeit all this, the general academical views are changing quickly, becoming more open to experimentation and personalization of curricula.

Requirements

Despite the fact that there exists a fairly clear legislation on this subject, state schools – which hardly ever have to deal with Home edders – sometimes tend to judge this choice negatively and don't support the students.

In Italy, home educating parents have to annually

“economic” capacity to teach their children at home. “Technical capacity” doesn't translate in a specific level of schooling, while “Economic capacity” simply refers to financial means. Neither of these statements must be justified by legal papers (tax declaration, school diplomas, etc) and there is no guideline or specification: homeschool families simply self-substantiate that they meet these criteria.



Photo by Ivan Aleksic on Unsplash



notify the appropriate school authorities of their intent to homeschool. Parents or guardians must provide a self-certification to the school district in which they state that they have the “technical” and

Testing

The Italian Parliament has approved on May 16th 2017 a Decree-law n.62, art.23 (School Reform called “Buona Scuola”) stating that the fulfillment of the duty of Education by the parents must be proved through annual school exams. Up until that day our regulation protected the freedom of teaching and families that chose this path simply had to notify the school officials on a yearly basis. The examination used to take place only when the child wanted to return to school or when the parents wanted to legitimate their child's educational path.

Homeschooling families will now have to produce a personal curriculum (in Italian) and a written request for the exam. This paperwork needs to be presented to the school for approval in the months of March/April. Once all is approved, the school informs the families about the exam procedures and dates. These exams usually take place in the month of June. If you are a foreign family who will reside in Italy only for a few years you most likely



won't be bothered by the exam, indeed it's better to keep a "tourist profile".

This recent law change has created great discontentment among the Homeschooling community. Many parents believe that this form of monitoring is putting their educational freedom in jeopardy, as unschooling isn't deemed as acceptable by most schools. Mandatory testing often puts the children under unnecessary stressful circumstances, which hinder the joy of learning, yet, thanks to family networking we have been able to establish positive collaborations with some schools which will offer support and value each personalized path.

Unschooling is actually a taboo subject when it comes to confronting the institutions, yet the minimum academical requirements to pass the exams (especially for primary school) are usually achievable with a couple of months of preparation. The homeschooling community in Italy believe that the State's duty to supervise the children's education should be based on a positive and direct dialogue between principals and families, with respect for different curricula and personal learning methods.

Community

The blog www.controscuola.it defends and expands educational freedom; articles are published regularly - also in response to change in legislation to help homeschooling families in the transition.

The website www.edupar.it remains the main point of contact for most of the home educating community. There is a members-only area with a network and social aspect to it, where members can share local events and info as well as helping each other. On the website, there is a social forum reserved to the children of the homeschooling Italian community and there are several activities for homeschooling families, both in-person and online, as well as e-learning material tailored for homeschoolers.

Projects

A few months ago, a group of Italian children has

Homeschooling in Italy by Erika Di Martino

come together to create and publish the "Gazzetta dell'Homeschooler", a print and online magazine.



Now on its fifth issue, La Gazzetta has published opinion editorials, surveys, literary articles, original artwork, and more. And with over 2000 homeschoolers in the country, La Gazzetta has a sizeable audience. You can read it clicking here. <https://www.controscuola.it/la-gazzetta-dellhomeschooler-2/>

Erika Di Martino

About the author

I am a mother of five homeschooled children ages 4 to 15, who have never been in school. We love visiting new places and learning about different cultures and have spent many years travelschooling. We are now settled in Co. Leitrim, but still enjoy traveling and spending a lot of time in Italy, as our family is half Italian. I pioneered the homeschooling movement in Italy, more than ten years ago and now I remain a home education advocate for Italian and foreign families. I have written books on the subject and now counsel parents who are in need of support and guidance on both practical and bureaucratic matters. You can read more here www.controscuola.it



A Chat with... Michelle Conboy

My name is Michelle Conboy. I have a 20 year old son and a 14 year old daughter.

My son attended school all the way up from Junior Infants to Leaving Cert. My daughter attended school from Junior Infants to 1st year, although both children have asked to be homeschooled from a very young age!

I've always been interested in homeschooling, as my experience of school -especially secondary school, was not the most fulfilling one. As an autistic individual with two autistic children I was always very aware that the mainstream way of education was not one that would meet my children's needs or help them thrive and achieve their full potential. I've also always been much more drawn to the idea of unschooling than enforced 'book learning'.

My son did attend school but I supplemented his education throughout his whole school life as he did not get the support or understanding that he needed to learn in his own way. He also has ADHD and epilepsy so his brain is wired in a completely different way to a group of his peers.

When it came to my daughter the initial decision was made after she had a mental health crisis. She simply couldn't cope with the school environment. She became suicidal and the thought of returning to school was a major contributing factor in some of her suicide attempts. At the time it felt like homeschooling was being forced on me due to her school refusal. Although it was something I was enamoured with as a way of life I wasn't sure how to go about it and how it would reshape our family dynamic. I did some research and decided that this was the only way forward for her to get a full and meaningful education.

Currently, I am the primary 'teacher' in my house. As a former SNA and the one who has studied child development and education, as well as being

possibly much more liberal in my approach than most to education and development and having a very different interpretation to what education actually means puts me in a more comfortable position to be the primary facilitator for my daughter's education. It also helps that I am also autistic so I 'get' her way of 'working'. Also, someone's got to go out and earn the money!!!



Photo by Debby Hudson on Unsplash

Initially I tried to pick up from where my daughter had left in school, using the standard curriculum but with our own time frames for doing things and a choice in which subjects she preferred to concentrate on. Due to her health this worked sporadically so we adjusted our 'timetable' and we went with a mixed approach - semi-structured with a mix of standard curriculum and interest led learning.

Homeschooling is tiring, stressful, liberating and fascinating all at once! At least in my house anyway!

After a short while we decided to go with a complete deschooling approach, for about a year. She needed time to destress and get to a place where she was ready to start her mental health recovery journey.



We are currently still deschooling. Since she has been home schooled I have always let her lead the way on how she needs to be educated and she has the final say on the level of structure, curriculum and support she needs from me. She is an independent learner so thrives in this environment, academically and otherwise.



Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

I use as many tools as I can find, largely from other homeschooling families via social media groups and HEN. I believe education is a life long journey so we are in no rush to follow a curriculum but we do use mainstream school books and exam papers sometimes to get the ball rolling on a topic and go from there. My daughter had considered the possibility of sitting her leaving cert in the future so wants to have a good idea of what they do in school.

Your favourite homeschooling memory so far

Seeing my daughter take control of her own education and the empowerment and relief that has brought her. She is much more comfortable being her true self without having to constantly process a social curriculum and an academic one. Her lust for learning has returned.

In some ways we are still in an adjustment phase with regards to homeschooling. I'm still trying to find the balance between my own interests and commitments and my role as my daughters 'teacher', which is quite challenging some days.

My biggest surprise about homeschooling is probably how popular it is in Ireland. I didn't realise

the number of families homeschooling until I was doing it myself. Surely, financially it's a challenge; for my family anyway. I'm also not sure how wise it is for a teenager and their mother to spend 98% of their time together! For me, I find the concept of being the only person responsible for my daughters education terrifying. Although I have the mindset that she is ultimately responsible for herself and her education and I am just a facilitator, it is still a huge responsibility. Couple that with trying to keep up with other commitments and things I am involved with, I find getting the balance quite difficult.

The thing I like least about homeschooling is the isolation, as in, I don't know many other families in my area who are homeschooling a child of the same age who are also autistic and have similar interests to me or my daughter.

I remember one morning, I was on a bus at 7.30am heading into the city centre. The bus soon became jam packed with children in school uniforms, drenched from the rain, eating things they had grabbed from the shop for breakfast with ridiculously heavy backpacks weighing them down. You could see how tired they were (it was only Tuesday), and the thought of those children dragging around those heavy bags, sitting in a stuffy classroom being preached at and being told exactly what to do all day, trying to be sociable and relevant, then coming home and doing 2/3 hours of homework and whatever else they had scheduled that evening actually broke my heart.



It wasn't that I needed much convincing on the benefits of homeschooling but that moment was really impactful when I thought of my own child and how much better off she was not having to endure



that every day.

My son is incredibly jealous that his sister gets the option of homeschooling. Think he feels hard done by and I don't disagree. Could I go back, I would homeschool both of my children from the start.

My perfect 'school', day would involve travel. To learn through experience.... to touch, see, sense, feel whatever it is we were trying to learn about. No books, just living the experience fully.

My daughter is so much happier. She feels strongly that she now gets a 'proper', education.... not just preparation to pass a test. She can learn life skills and be involved in the community and be active with me when I'm volunteering or doing something in the autistic and mental health communities which helps her to build her skills in self-advocacy and awareness. She also said she can join things now, which on a regular school time table she wouldn't be able to do.... she recently joined the Community Circus! She feels like she's not treated like some "stupid child", but as an intelligent human being. She also likes the fact that, as her sleep cycle can be quite disrupted, she's not forced into getting up and 'performing' to make it through the day at a time that goes against her natural body clock.

We live in Galway. I don't really know if it's an easy place to home school but I've never had any difficulty. It's a great place for anything cultural or arts based which suits our interests.

Within the autistic community and those with lived experience of mental health difficulties I've only ever got positive responses and attitudes to the fact that I am homeschooling. They are usually very supportive and interested in the practicalities of day to day stuff.

However, when it comes to the wider population I usually find the attitudes and comments to be negative. I didn't realise how obsessed most people were with school and how afraid they were of

alternative ways of education. It's both comical and tragic. It may be because my daughter was previously in mainstream education, I'm not quite sure but it can be pretty draining trying to 'justify' homeschooling. I'm getting better at not feeling the need to defend our choice and trying to explain that education is so much more than 'book learning' and that homeschooling is a very positive thing whom many people have chosen in the best interests of their family.

After all, no matter what diagnosis, personality type or challenge a child may have, each one is full of infinite potential. You know your child best. There is never anything 'wrong' with a child's capacity to learn, the way they are taught or presented

What inspires you during difficult times?

That fact that my child's life is worth more than subscribing to the 'norm'. That she is much more likely to be safe and well and reach her full potential, at her own pace, as a homeschooled child than in mainstream education.

information is the key.

Homeschooling is not easy, there are many factors to take into account. Work, finances, health etc., are all important and there are many things we as adults have to consider before making any decision. That said, I have huge issues with the current mainstream education system and think that homeschooling is a very positive alternative.

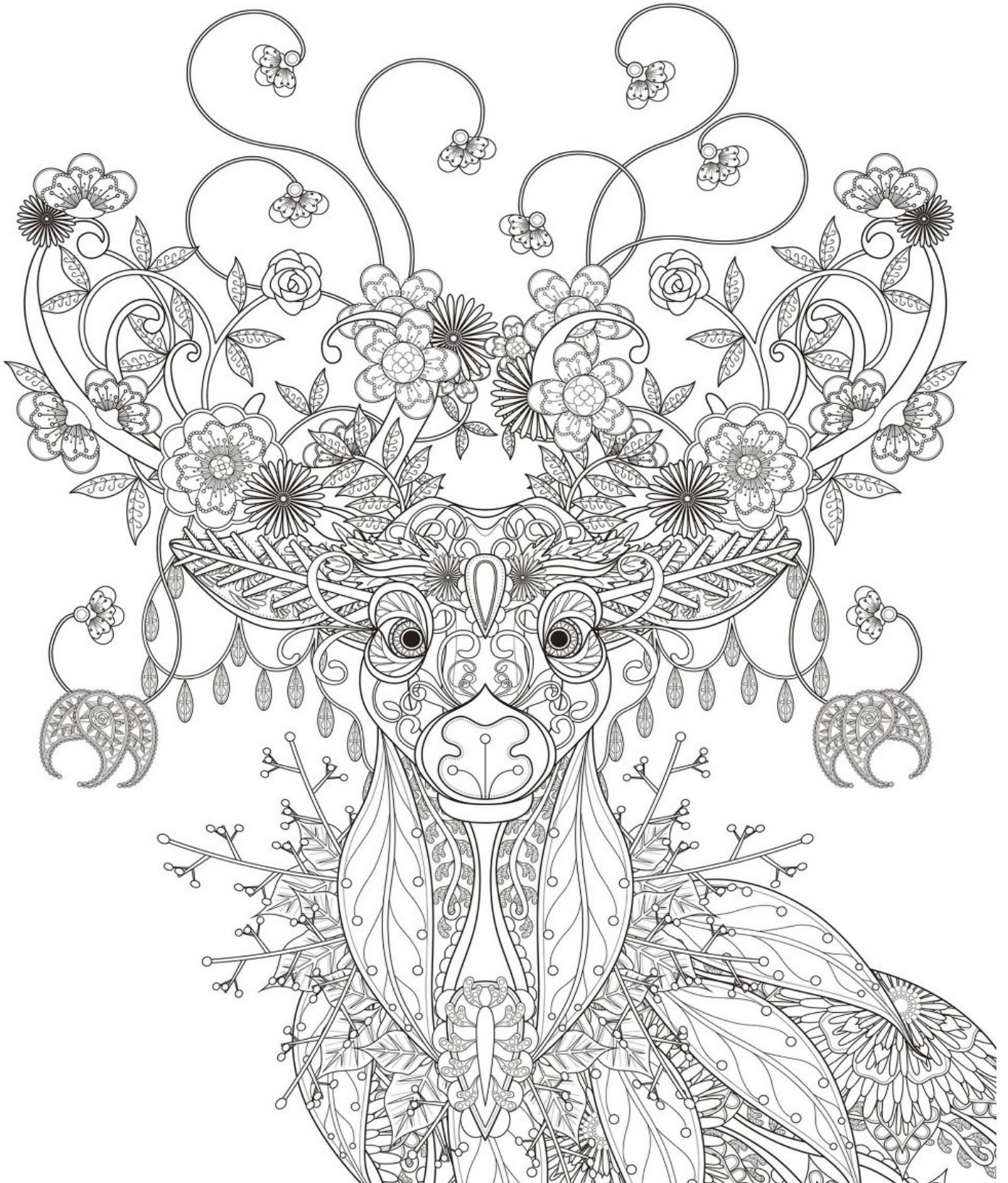
I have tended to be very hard on myself and think I should have everything prepped and planned out.... but please, don't you do that! You'll be burnt out in no time!

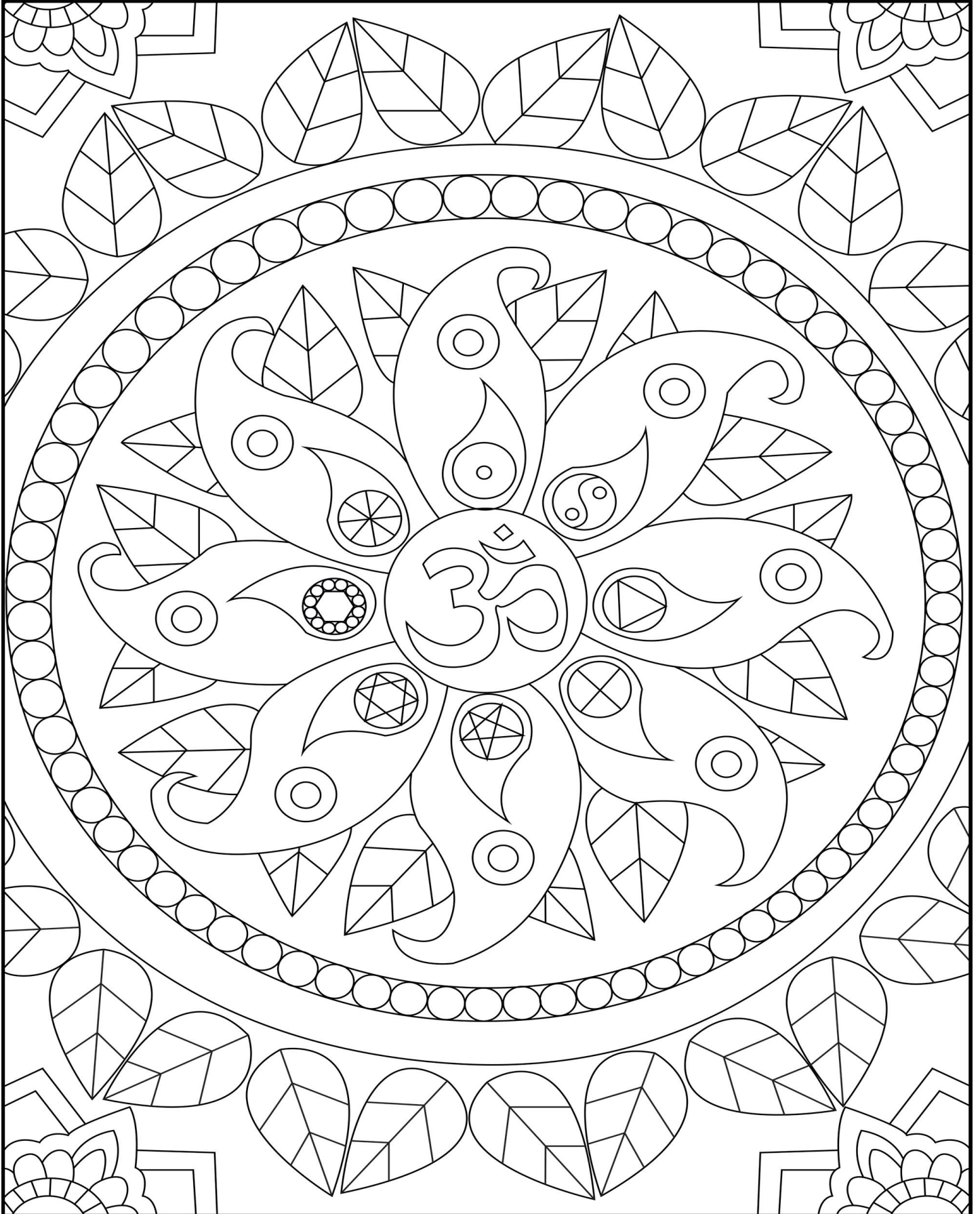
I've learned to trust my child and my gut instinct. To override a lot of my conditioning and see homeschooling as the right thing for my family at this time. Trust that you know what is best for your child, take care of yourself as best as you can and enjoy it!

Michelle Conboy



Almost everybody knows that colouring is NOT only children's business. These pages are for YOU! But you can choose, of course, to turn them into a collaborative work of art.





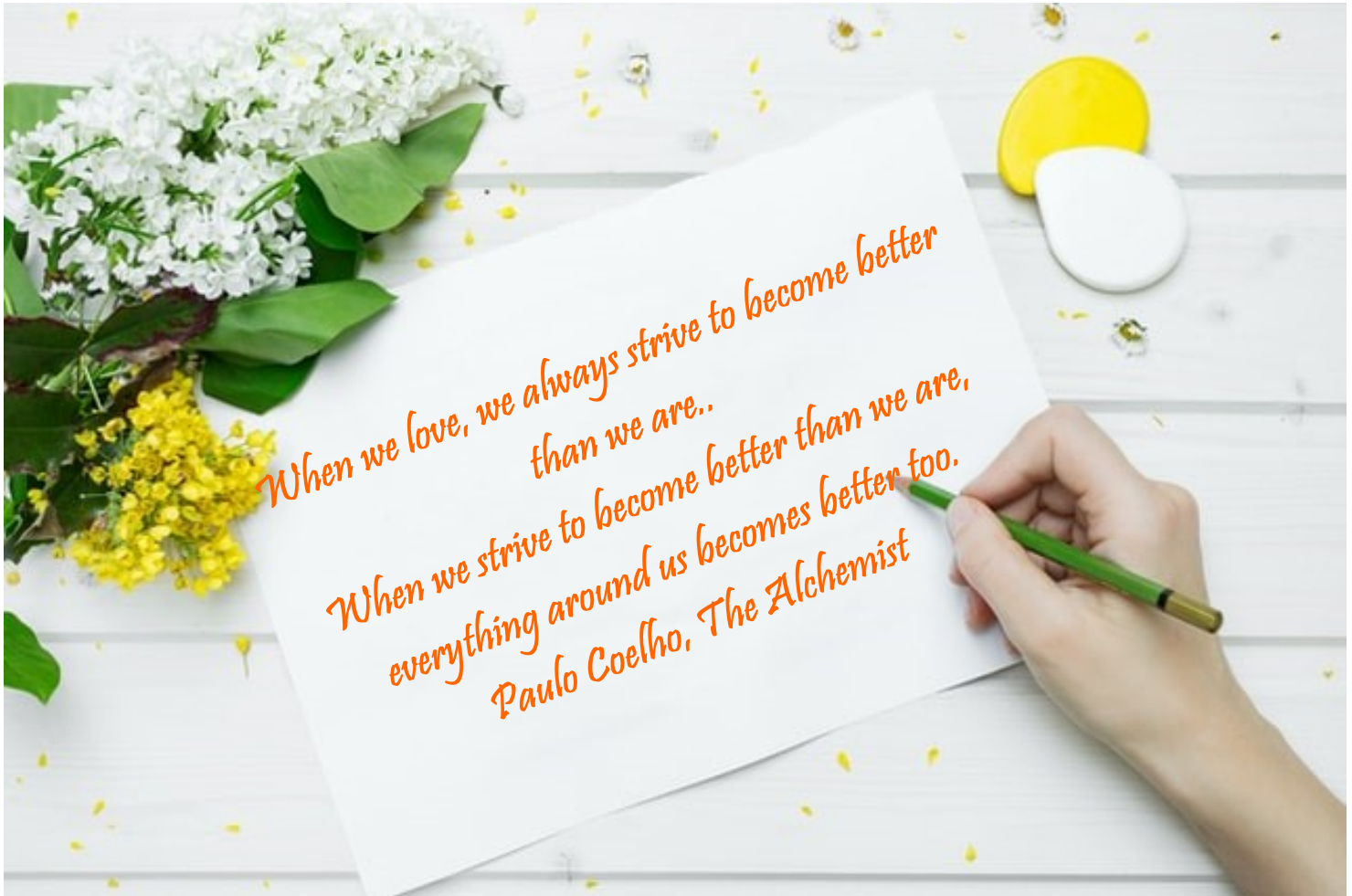


Photo by Neven Krcmarek on Unsplash

Funny sentences you hear in this house...

Yes, it is a play within the play. Shakespeare used them a lot (note: this was said to a 7 years old, who came up with the "play within the play" definition by herself, reading Midsummer Night's Dream.)

Mum: I am allowed to listen to one song you don't like, right? Daughter: Yes, but then I can hear it too, so no.

Do you want to share a few sentences you find yourself saying out loud that seriously surprise you?
Or something your child said that cracked you up? Pop us an email newsletterhen@gmail.com



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