

# HEN Newsletter

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2021



The Steiner-Waldorf approach | Note to self | Preserving food | Eleven sure-fire ways to  
show your children that you care | Creative writing activity | Blarney bars  
Clay bead making | Our day | Book review

# Contents

04



'Exploring education: the Steiner-Waldorf approach' by Gráinne McMenamin

07



'Note to self' by Catherine Monaghan

10



Science activity:  
'Preserving food' by Sean Donegan

12



'Eleven sure-fire ways to show your children that you care' by Lorna Fowkes

15



Creative writing activity  
by Anna Marie Maher

16



Recipe: 'Blarney bars' by  
Cortney Westhoff-O'Farrell

18



'Clay bead making' by  
Claire Butler-Hastings

20



'Our day' by  
Grainne Zannis

22



Book review by  
Kirstie Jones

# Editor's message



My children and I joined some other home-ed families for an outdoor gathering recently. It was one of the first larger get-togethers we have attended in a while. I was reminded of the value of simply being among others who, although diverse in our motivations, share the choice to home educate. I felt acutely grateful for those couple of hours sharing this common ground.

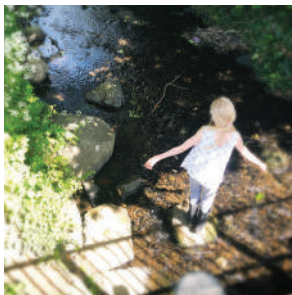
I hope that this summer issue of our magazine can offer you a bit of connection with other members. Thank you for all the positive feedback we received following the launch of our new-look magazine. Please keep up the fantastic contributions. We are already compiling our autumn and winter issues so if you have something to share, in words or images,

drop us a line via: [newsletterhen@gmail.com](mailto:newsletterhen@gmail.com).

Perhaps you have a talented young person in mind who would like to learn more about design and publishing? Liz Hudson of Little Red Pen Publishing Services has kindly offered her mentoring and training for the future editor or editorial team of the *Chicklit* magazine. The role would involve a commitment of four or five hours on a quarterly basis. We would like to extend our thanks to the outgoing editor Theo, who has very generously produced the summer issue of *Chicklit*.

Enjoy!

Gráinne McMenamin



## Exploring education: the Steiner-Waldorf approach

Waldorf education reflects the spiritual philosophy of anthroposophy, which was mainly developed by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. In 1919, Steiner, whose credits ranged from editing the works of Goethe to founding the fields of biodynamic gardening and anthroposophical medicine, was asked by his many followers to design an educational system based upon his unique vision.

The backbone of Steiner's Waldorf education system is the recognition of three major stages in a child's development,

which are divided into seven-year cycles and can be described as follows. From birth to seven years old, the child is learning through imitation and movement, known as the development of will. At about seven years of age (or around when the child loses their milk teeth), they are said to enter a stage of feeling and they learn through imagination and artistic expression. By the age of fourteen, the child has entered the thinking stage, and now learning mainly takes place through abstract concepts and intelligent thought.

A Waldorf-inspired setting can be created for our youngest children through the provision of opportunities





‘The heart of the Waldorf method is that education is an art – it must speak to the child’s experience. To educate the whole child, his heart and his will must be reached, as well as the mind.’

(Rudolf Steiner)

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for imitation and imaginative play. Simple toys made of natural materials, including dolls, puppets, building blocks, and bits of colourful fabric for costumes and cloaks, can spur their imagination. Special songs and games that introduce children to rhythm and repetition can inspire imitation and movement. Fairy tales and storytelling (rather than reading) help children to become immersed deeply in fantasy. The period up to the age of seven is considered sacred, and this type of fantasy play is valued as fundamental to the later development of language skills. Therefore, reading, writing and arithmetic are not introduced until the second stage, which allows children to enjoy the magical state of childhood.

As the child progresses through the second stage, imitation and movement are gradually replaced by activities that focus on feelings. Subjects are taught using images and stories in relation to the human being. Significantly, intellectual work is still not pushed on the child. Academic subjects are introduced in study 'blocks'. An example of such a block could be your children creating a project about ancient Rome which includes history interwoven with legends and myths, painted scenes from the myths, and perhaps making models of the city of Pompeii or Mount Vesuvius. The children might even put together a short enactment of a particular event.

Arts, crafts, and music are viewed as integral elements of learning. Children are provided with coloured beeswax and watercolours to follow a specific sequence of creative activities based on a curriculum. Skills such as knitting, crocheting, woodcarving, and metalwork

are introduced (in that order). All children have the opportunity to sing and play an instrument, beginning with the recorder and progressing to string instruments as they get older.

It is a highly structured approach, and very teacher-led. Steiner believed that children up to the age of fourteen required an authority figure with whom they could learn from and form a deep bond. For this reason, Waldorf teachers stay with the same class for their entire primary education. As mentioned, a curriculum is followed, and usually the only textbooks are those that the pupils write and draw themselves from the daily lessons.

A typical day also has a definite pattern, beginning with morning lessons followed by music, foreign languages (taught through recitation of poems and stories) and eurythmics – movement based on speech or music, developed by Steiner. The afternoon is usually centred around physical activities such as cooperative sports or crafts.

In the third stage, pupils are taught by subject specialists and will work on in-depth projects across the humanities and sciences. Arts, crafts, and music remain very important. An inclusive orchestra and choir for all students is the norm, and age-specific tasks such as weaving a shawl and working with copper to make a candlestick feature in the curriculum.

The strong non-denominational spiritual element spans all stages, the idea being that when the soul is nurtured, academic learning will occur naturally and spontaneously.



## Note to self

Catherine Monaghan

These days it's hard to keep up with the changes in my boy. The old cliché about growing up so fast is true. Every time I feel like I've got a handle on this stage of life and parenting he takes another leap forward and I'm running to catch up with him again.

The early years were a very different kettle of fish. Sure it was exhausting at times, and it was a steep learning curve, but life was less complicated. Cuddles and closeness, a story or a song, and maybe a little chocolate here and there could solve many a problem. His world was small, and I could manage most variables. Now and then I pore over the

baby photographs. I remember with an ache in my chest the feeling of chubby little arms around my neck, a small hand playing with my hair, and how he used to think I shared his dreams at night.

With every passing year, as is only natural, the boy's horizons have expanded. He has become less and less dependent, and I remind myself daily that this is how it should be. It is the natural order of things. But I am someone who likes to understand things, pull them apart, get to grips with the whys and the wherefores. Motherhood, with all of its intensity and beauty and fierce feelings, is an endless source of satisfaction and







consternation. Daily, hourly, it delights me and confounds me. Like all mothers, I want to get it right.

And yet I know that I can't get it all right. None of us can. Anyone who thinks otherwise is probably fooling themselves. I don't know a single person who doesn't have any complaints about their childhood. We're human, and we can only do our best. Tomorrow is a new day, a chance to try again. Fortunately, children tend to have a great capacity for forgiveness.

So I try to understand how my boy is growing, where he's going, what's happening for him, and what he needs at this point in his life. Sometimes I'm baffled, and I fret about past mistakes and those yet to be made. And then I stop, take a deep breath and remind myself that I don't have to chase him. I don't have to understand it all. It's *his* journey. I give myself the pep talk, which is this: *He* is doing it. He's growing up, changing, getting taller, stronger, becoming his own man. He's going to do all of this whether I have it all figured out or not.

What *I* need to do is be here for him, be really present. I can facilitate,

empower, and model. I can be a sounding board, a late-night listener, a shoulder to cry on, and a keeper of confidences. I can be a minder and reminder of memories and the stories that root him to this world – about his family, his early years, how loved he is and how respected, how he belongs. I can hold a space for him while he finds his way, and I can have his back. I can allow him his mistakes, his awkwardness, and his angst because these are his right. And I can give him role models, freedom, and chances to fail, to try again, and to succeed. My job is to be a good parent. Hopefully it will follow that he grows into a well-adjusted, mostly happy, capable, and independent adult.

We're all trying to shape our children into what we think they should be when actually it's ourselves we need to be working on. If we are good enough parents, our adolescents will be able to safely, confidently, freely grow up. I'm not saying we need never correct or guide or intervene, just that we must start with ourselves. We must walk the walk and not just talk the talk to our young people.

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# Science activity: preserving food

Sean Donegan

## Object

Compare different ways of stopping bread going mouldy.

## Materials

- Slice of bread cut into four pieces
- Four jars with lids
- Water
- 1 tbsp vinegar
- 1 tbsp salt
- 1 tsp sugar

## Method

1. Place a piece of bread into each jar.
2. Add water to one jar so it just covers the bread.
3. Add vinegar to the next jar, topped up with water so it just covers the bread.
4. Dissolve a tablespoon of salt in some water. Add this to a jar, just covering the bread.
5. Leave the fourth piece of bread untouched. This is called your 'control' sample.
6. Leave the jars for several days. Each day, check if any mould has grown.



## Did you know?

Foods contain yeasts and bacteria which after some time can grow and make the food go mouldy and unhealthy to eat. Vinegar and salt kill most of these organisms, so pieces of bread soaked in these jars should go mouldy last or not at all. Before refrigerators were invented, using salt and vinegar was an important way to preserve foods.



# Eleven sure-fire ways to show your children that you care ...

Lorna Fowkes

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I recently read a *Psychology Today* article claiming to tell me the eleven ways that my man should show me that he loves me. It told me that I'm very lucky to have my husband as he does all the things (and more, like bringing me wine and chocolate on a Wednesday evening when I'm feeling tired and rubbish). It got me to thinking about how we can show our children how much we love them and care about them as individual human beings, in the same eleven ways:

1. **Want to spend time with them.** OK, so we all have to spend time with our children (especially when we're home-educating them), but it's about finding time and truly enjoying doing an activity with them. For example, at our home-ed group recently, one of the very musical mothers (who already runs band, recorders and drama) decided to start a choir, which my daughter was keen (but nervous) to join. I was happy to go along with her, and we really enjoyed singing a 'Let it Go'/'Happy' mash-up together. (I think I might have enjoyed it slightly more!)
2. **Ask about the time you spend apart.** Well, at the moment, that's rare for us, but the bigger girls do a few sports activities without us there, and

I always make a point of asking how it has gone. Whether or not I receive a coherent response is another matter because it seems as if nearly eight is the new teenager!

3. **Trust them.** My children are not quite at the stage of hiding things from me yet, but I guess when they reach their teens (or eight; see above), they might. I really hope that we are building the kind of relationship where they will trust me enough to share things with me and I'll be able to trust that they will lead a (mostly) safe life.
4. **Help when they need it.** As parents, this is a given really, but sometimes I think it is important to give the help without making a big deal out of it, without expecting any thanks, just because we want to. We are often caught up in ensuring our children grow up to be respectful with pleases and thank-yous, but sometimes a little bit of help, just because we want to, doesn't need a big song and a dance to be made. I watched a lovely home-ed dad helping my daughter learn to finger-knit recently. When it clicked, she was so focused on her knitting that I don't think a thanks passed her lips, but her friend's dad looked so pleased that she was obviously chuffed with herself I think



that was all the thanks he needed. If I had got involved and told her to say thank you, I think the magic of the moment would have disappeared.

5. **Show respect for their views.** As my children get older, they are starting to have more of an opinion about things. It can be all too easy to dismiss a child's views as immature or pointless, but we are really trying to bring our children up to know that they are valued and have interesting points to share in a family discussion and that even grown-ups sometimes have a view that seems silly!
6. **Include them in decisions.** This follows on well from point five. If we respect their views, then we care about what they think of our choices. Sometimes as parents we just need to be able to say what we are doing or where we are going, but to allow our children to help make certain decisions we really show them that we care about what they think. As home educators trying to be as child-led and unschooling as possible, we often ask the girls to help make decisions – the fact that they don't attend school being the main one. But be warned: the results aren't always what you hoped for. (Does a rainy day in the garden making mud pies appeal to anyone?!)
7. **Show affection.** Loving physical contact is so important. In fact, it is crucial for a child's well-being. As children get older, the chances to show affection in this way diminish, but it is so important to continue to give them. Cuddles can also help with behaviour as author of the *Positive Discipline* series, Dr Jane Nelsen explains: 'Children do better when they feel better.' Our girls all love a cuddle, to the point where I often wish I had more arms, but I hope they continue to as they get older.
8. **Look at them.** I think all parents are guilty of not doing this one at times. We can be busy making dinner, washing up or taking time out on Facebook when a little face pops up with something really interesting (to

them!) to share with us. ‘Oh lovely’ or something similar comes out of our mouth, but we don’t take the time to focus on them. I also find that if I don’t actually stop and listen properly, I don’t really take in what they are saying. I’ve been known to agree to things without ever really hearing what I’ve agreed to! All jokes aside though, how does it feel when you are talking to someone who doesn’t engage with you? Horrible, isn’t it? So if we love and respect our little people, we should show them this common courtesy.

9. **Talk about the past.** We often share old photos and talk about what life was like when the children were younger. They love hearing funny stories about themselves, and we enjoy sharing them. ‘Remember the

time when ...’ is a common sentence-starter in this house

10. **Defend them.** I guess this is usually a given with parenting, but it’s important to let our children know that we’re in their corner. OK, we’re not always going to agree with them and the things they do, but we should always have their back.
11. **Make them feel good about themselves.** I’d assume that by doing all of the above we will be going the right way to boosting our children’s self-esteem, making them feel like worthwhile, valued human beings.

I really hope that my children get all of these eleven affirmations from myself and their dad regularly, even on rubbish Wednesdays when all I want is wine and chocolate!





## Creative writing activity by Anna Marie Maher

Write a modern-day version of a well-known fairy tale or write the story from the point of view of one of the minor characters. It can be a poem or a story.

### Examples

- *Snow White*, as written by one of the dwarves.
- *Cinderella*, as written by one of the mice.
- *Little Red Riding Hood*, as written by the wolf.

Here's one of mine, for inspiration.

### The Broken Mirror

Monday @fairoface  
Just broke my magic mirror :((  
#fairestofall #clutz #sevenyearsbadluck

Tuesday @fullofgrace  
Replying to @fairoface  
You don't need a mirror to tell you how beautiful you are.  
#grateful #livingmybestlife #namaste

Wednesday @fullofwoe  
Replying to @fairoface  
I've given up looking in mirrors.  
They break every time I look in one :[  
#FeelingGrim #endlessbadluck

Thursday @fartogo  
Replying to @fairoface  
Sorry can't help!  
I'm on a recovery mission with Dory.  
#FindingNemo #homesick #seasick

Friday @lovingandgiving  
Replying to @fairoface  
So sorry to hear about your mirror.  
You are more than welcome to use mine,  
if you wish.  
#RandomActsOfKindness #BeNice

Saturday @workshardforaliving  
Replying to @fairoface  
No problemo!  
I'll make you a new mirror when I'm finished my chores.  
#norestforthewicked

Sunday @bonnyandblithe  
Replying to @fairoface  
I don't need a mirror to tell me how amazing I am. Neither should you.  
#girlpower #legendarywomen #Strong

Monday @fairoface  
Replying to @fullofgrace @fullofwoe  
@fartogo @lovingandgiving @workshardforaliving @bonnyandblithe  
Thanks girls but I'm sorted. I've just met a lovely witch in the forest. She told me she will mend my mirror, for FREE!  
All I have to do is taste-test one of her apples :))  
#nobrainer #lifeisgood #bffs



# Recipe: Blarney bars

Cortney Westhoff-O'Farrell

We're Cortney, Patrick, Niamh (10), and Ciaran (8), a homeschooling family in West Clare, who turned gluten-free as a result of a coeliac diagnosis. I was able to spend lockdown altering all our favourite recipes into gluten-free counterparts and published 300+ gluten-free recipes in *Our Next Food Adventure*.

This is a recipe from my maternal grandmother. I've searched high and low and never found anything similar. To have it in gluten-free form is a gift as it's a firm favourite in our home and of anyone who tastes it.

## Ingredients

5 egg whites  
⅛ tsp cream of tartar  
4 egg yolks – reserve 1 egg yolk for the topping  
1 cup sugar  
1 cup all-purpose gluten-free flour  
1½ tsp baking powder  
1 tsp vanilla  
½ cup hot water with orange juice

## Topping

2 cups shredded or desiccated coconut  
1 egg yolk  
½ cup butter  
2 cups icing sugar

## Method

1. Preheat oven to 180°C. While the oven heats, toast the coconut in the baking tray you'll use to bake the bar. This takes about the same amount of time as it takes to mix the batter. Be sure to check every few minutes to ensure the coconut doesn't burn. When the coconut is toasted, remove from baking tray to cool on a plate.

2. Line the baking tray with a sheet of greased parchment paper. The size of the baking tray should be a minimum of 12 × 15 inches or thereabouts. The larger the pan, the thinner the bar and the faster it will bake.
3. In a clean dry bowl beat five egg whites stiff with the cream of tartar.
4. In another bowl, mix until smooth four egg yolks with the sugar, flour, vanilla and hot water/orange juice mixture.
5. Fold the egg whites into the batter.
6. Pour and smooth the batter in the tray.
7. Bake until the surface is golden and springs back when lightly touched, about 12 minutes. Leave to cool.
8. For the topping, mix the last egg yolk and the butter till light and smooth.
9. Add the icing sugar a little at a time, incorporating a bit of hot water, until a spreadable consistency is achieved.
10. When the bar is cool, ice and sprinkle with the toasted coconut.





# Clay bead making

Claire Butler-Hastings

**F**ancy getting your hands dirty? If you live in an area with clay soil you can make your own modelling clay by scooping up handfuls and plopping it into a bucket with enough water to swoosh it around to make a sloppy mix. Leave it for a few days to dry out a bit until it is the right consistency to push through a sieve. This removes all grit, leaving you with a super-smooth air-drying clay to get creative with! You can even fire it in a cool oven.

Alternatively, you can pick up a pack of air-drying terracotta clay for a few euro.

Our twelve-year-old son has always enjoyed threading beads to make necklaces since he was tiny, and now he is really into making his own beads. Simply roll a ball of clay in your hands until it is round like a marble, then push a wooden kebab skewer or something similar all the way through. Make sure that the hole is a little larger than you think it should be as the clay will shrink a little as it dries.

Look around your home or garden for things to use to make patterns on your beads: forks, screw heads, leaves and sewing needles are all great! Experiment with different shapes, sizes, and textures. It is a really enjoyable making process and a lovely activity to get the family around the table to create, talk, and play.

Leave your beads overnight, and they will be ready to paint in the morning. We

found some vegan-friendly paints, but you can use any craft paints, and if you want to you can varnish them so they shine.

Now you are ready to thread your beads onto some cord or elastic to make your own necklace or bracelet.

Our son has been making these necklaces over the past couple of months for family and friends, and he had the idea that maybe he could sell them, so he came up with the name merMADE&Mindful and we opened an Etsy shop!

Anyway, get stuck in and happy making!







## Our Day

Grainne Zannis

**A** favourite place of ours is the beach! We are lucky to live on the coast and have three excellent and remarkably different beaches very close by. I would like to show how the beach as a location weaves so beautifully into our unschooling days.

In an attempt to avail of the vast open space of Clonea beach at low tide, we brought the bikes. This proved to be a tough terrain as the sand was still wet and soft. The bikes were readily discarded, and we went for a walk instead. The walk led to the discovery of shark eggs in numerous locations throughout the beach.

At home, the research commenced, with an especially accessible sea-life exploration book. A poster was made documenting the find and the date, and

a plan was made for beachcombing the following day.

The next day's yield of treasures was plentiful to say the least, and our spoils were lovingly laid out in two beautiful display cases. (The coral from the Caribbean was a gift.) More study of the *Sea Life* book ensued, along with the creation of pool goggles for the subsequent trip of rock-pooling. This line of investigation is ongoing. The next ambition is to examine the possibility of creating a small aquarium with creatures from rock pools as its inhabitants.

As usual, all this exploration has not been instigated by me: I'm just going along for the ride and learning lots along the way! The fascinating world of unschooling is sooooo much fun!







## Book review: *Toe by Toe* by Keda Cowling

Kirstie Jones

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I wanted to share my thoughts about a little book we discovered that has literally transformed my daughter's reading. I'm a home-educator of over seven years and none of my children have been in the school system, so over the years I've become very used to the ebb-and-flow way children learn. However, by the age of seven, my daughter wasn't reading in a way I was comfortable with. Something felt 'off'. I know some children are very late readers – and this is quite normal – but that wasn't it with my daughter. She was struggling to decode words, letters would float on the page for her, and she'd jumble or completely misread letters I knew she knew. My hunch (as a UK-trained primary-school teacher) was that she was dyslexic, and this made sense as it does run in the family.

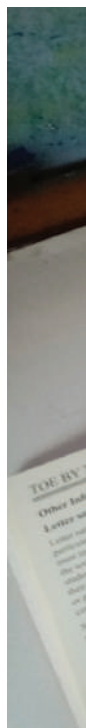
I was at a loss as to how to help her at that stage, so I bought a book recommended by a fellow home-edder, a book she said had transformed the reading of her dyslexic teen daughter. Well, I can honestly say it's been a game-changer for us. The book is a step-by-step reading scheme that takes you from ABC to

fully fledged adult reader in one book. It's the best £25 I've ever spent!

It was developed by a UK-based primary teacher called Keda Cowling, and she used it in schools to support some of the most dyslexic young people. Since then, word of mouth has spread, and this book is still going strong nearly twenty years later. The way the book is broken down into tiny, logical steps felt familiar to me. I'm a driving instructor of eighteen years and have taught countless neurodiverse young people. If I had to put 'how to drive' into book form for my neurodiverse pupils, this is exactly how I'd do it.

Four years later, we are three-quarters of the way through the book, and the improvement is dramatic. My daughter is now reading 'proper books' with small writing and 'no pictures'. She said to me a few weeks back, 'Mummy, I love reading now.' If that doesn't say it all, I don't know what does. But you don't need to take my word for it . . . take a look for yourself: <https://toe-by-toe.co.uk/about-us/>

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