

HEN Newsletter

autumn
2021



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Editor's message



Autumn has always been my favourite season when it comes to home education. The crowds and queues of summer quickly dissipate leaving us to enjoy the museums, libraries and swimming pools more or less to ourselves. The summer months tend to be very ad hoc in our family, between going places and hosting visitors, so the autumn recommencement of our activities and regular meetups is comforting. I find it settles me to have a loose routine that means I am not reinventing the wheel every week in terms of what the girls are up to. These form the 'bones' of our week, leaving plenty of room for spontaneity, interest-led studies and, perhaps most importantly, unstructured playtime!

The best part for me are the long days we can still spend outdoors in the woods or on the beach, especially the times in friendly company. Sometimes being a stay-at-home educator can be lonely

and tiresome; juggling everyone's needs and the household is a constant work in progress, so getting out to touch base with some fellow educators can really change a challenging day around for me.

Thank you for all the positive feedback and wonderful contributions coming in each month. If you have any feedback or would like to submit something for publication, please do continue to drop us a line via: newsletterhen@gmail.com.

We are really pleased to welcome Christine, Juliet and Donnacha on board as the new *Chicklit* editorial team. We love what they have done with their first autumn issue! They are keen to hear about what our young members are up to via: chicklit.hen@gmail.com.



Exploring education: the Forest School approach

In the past decade there has been a growing recognition of the negative consequences of a childhood lacking in time spent in nature. In his 2005 book, *Last Child in the Woods*, author Richard Louv coined the term ‘nature deficit disorder’. He argues that although human beings have been urbanising and moving indoors since the introduction of agriculture, social and technological changes in the past three decades have accelerated the human disconnect from the natural world.

Louv suggests that this shift has been caused by the proliferation of

electronic communications, poor urban planning and increasing disappearance of open spaces, increased street traffic, diminished importance of the natural world in public and private education and parental fear magnified by news and entertainment media.

Studies would suggest that a child’s ‘radius of activity’ – the area around their home where they are allowed to roam unsupervised – has declined by almost 90 per cent since the 1970s. Growing up in Ireland in the 1980s, I do not think I was unusual in setting off by myself or with other children and simply





being told to ‘come home before dark’ – a scenario I cannot imagine with my own children just one generation later.

However, by replacing time spent outdoors for an increasing amount of indoor activity, we are also forgoing opportunities to interact with the elements in a way that stimulates our children’s senses and reduces

their body’s production of cortisol in response to stress.

One countermovement to this trend can be seen in the Forest School approach to learning. Its roots reach back to the open-air culture, seen as a way of life in Scandinavia where Forest School began. According to the Forest School Association UK (established in 1993),

Forest School can be described as a child-centred inspirational learning process that offers opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions. It is typically a long-term programme that supports play, exploration and supported risk-taking. It develops confidence and self-esteem through learner-inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural setting.

According to the Forest School Association UK, there are six principles of Forest School:

- **Principle 1: Regular sessions.** Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions rather than a one-off or infrequent visits. The cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.
- **Principle 2: Woodland setting.** Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- **Principle 3: Community.** Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.
- **Principle 4: Holistic development.** Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- **Principle 5: Opportunity to take risks.** Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- **Principle 6: Qualified practitioners.** Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

The Irish Forest School Association was formed in 2016, and home-educating groups can avail of trained practitioners at a subsidised rate through the Heritage in Schools scheme. Forest School Ireland describe themselves as a community of learners, which includes group agreements that are co-created, building trust is valued, and learning is encouraged through play. They believe that our connection to nature is developed by spending enough time in it.

Skills such as how to handle and assess risks and, most importantly, how to use our own initiative to solve problems and cooperate with others are developed. Aims include teaching learners how to use tools safely, providing the opportunity for creativity, immersive play, encouraging self-motivation and curiosity, experimenting with trial and error, establishing and growth in confidence, self-esteem, critical thinking and learning both physical and behavioural boundaries.

It is typical for Forest School programmes to run throughout the year. Going out in all weather is encouraged (except for high winds), and they often strive to have a positive impact on the woodlands and green spaces they use, including picking up litter and woodland management.

The mind jar

Lindsey Crean

My name is Lindsey. I am based in Kerry, and I am planning to homeschool my son Jude, who is four years old. I recently qualified as a creative mindfulness practitioner and would like to share a simple mindful activity that you can do with your family. It is called the mind jar and is from Louise Shanagher's Creative Mindfulness for Kids course. You will need:

- a glass jar or a bottle with a lid
- different coloured glitter
- different coloured beads
- water

The water represents our minds. The glitter is all the feelings we have throughout the day. And the beads are all the memories and different types of thoughts we have.

Starting with the glitter, you can encourage your children to pick a colour for each feeling. Neuroscientists like Dan Siegel have recommended naming each feeling in order to befriend them – and in this way we can tame them! Anger is an emotion that can sometimes cause problems for us. Let's call our anger Andy or Angelina. Often the corresponding colour we choose for this is red.

You can go through all the different feelings with your children, giving each one a name and a colour before adding it to the mind jar. In the same way, you can use the beads to talk about the different kinds of thoughts and memories we have.

After adding all the glitter and beads, make sure the lid is on tightly and shake your mind jar. Just like the mind storm in our jars, our minds can also be





very busy with different thoughts and feelings. At this point, you can encourage your children to close their eyes or lower their gaze, whichever they are most comfortable with, and put their hands on their tummies. You can ask them to focus on their tummy moving up and down as they breathe in and out. After five breathing cycles, you can ask them to open their eyes and to check the mind jar. Is there still a storm in the mind jar? Is it peaceful and calm? Are all the feelings, thoughts and memories still there?

You can use the mind jar to practise your breathing every day so that when you do have a storm in your mind, your own practice can be used to help you find peace, regardless of the feeling coming to

visit. It is important to remember that we are not trying to get rid of our feelings or thoughts and instead can see them as clouds, passing through the sky of our minds. I hope you enjoy doing this mindful activity with your family and that you cultivate your own mindfulness practice together, even if it is only for one minute daily!



THE POETRY OF
DICKINSON
FAMILY OF

Poetry Tea Time

Catherine Monaghan

I can't remember where I first came across the idea of Poetry Tea Time. It was several years ago on one of the many blogs I like to read. And then, as is often the way, it was popping up all over the place. The idea is to bring a few people together to share poetry over tea and cakes. Oh, so civilised! As a lover of poetry, not to mention tea and cake, Poetry Tea Time sounded to me like a delightful way to spend an afternoon.

So I got a friend on board. She, also a lover of poetry, tea, and cake, was keen. Our boys were delighted at the prospect of an afternoon of cake, poetry, and, of course, play (not necessarily in that order). We kept it simple, meeting once a month and alternating our homes as venue. The host would provide the food; the guests would bring themselves and a selection of poetry to share.

Personally, I think the preparation is half the fun. Baking treats to share, decorating the table with flowers or foliage from the garden, setting out the 'fancy' crockery, and then we would always dress ourselves up a little just for fun.

Our Poetry Tea Times began in Australia with some very dear friends. Those afternoons were delightful and enriching in ways I hadn't anticipated. The poetry nourished our minds and

hearts, and the sharing of it enhanced our friendships. The boys laughed at silly limericks and Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes* and listened, rapt, while my friend read long poems like stories. They were encouraging and respectful of each other when sometimes reading difficult pieces. There were all kinds of inadvertent lessons in public speaking, supporting one's peers, and giving positive feedback in addition to what we got from the actual poetry.

And now we have resumed the tradition here in Ireland with our new friends (who feel like old friends). So today we spent the afternoon at their house – my boy and me, my friend and her son and daughter, and her dad. We ranged in age from eleven up to seventy-something. There were dainty sandwiches, home-made cake with plenty of cream, crackers, and cheese. We drank countless cups of tea from fancy cups (with saucers, naturally) poured from a seemingly bottomless fancy teapot.

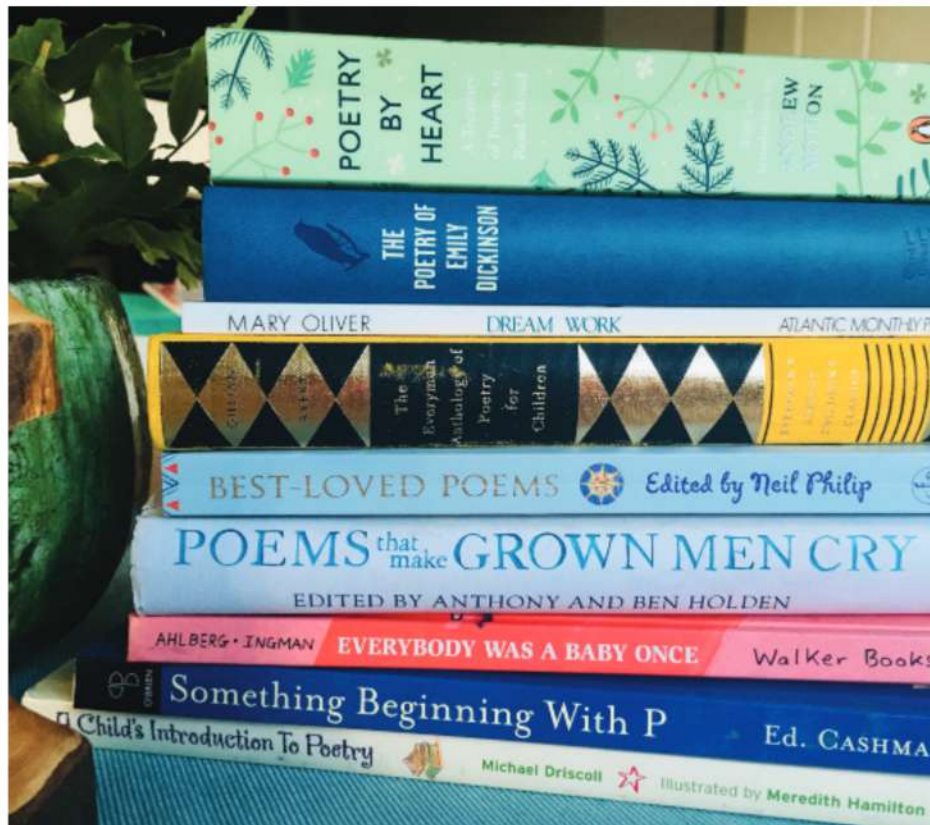
Many poems were shared, some prepared earlier, others chosen from the selection of books we had between us. We laughed over 'The Owl and the Pussy-Cat' by Edward Lear and were moved by Mary Oliver's 'Wild Geese'. We were given food for thought in some

locally published poetry, which led to a conversation about a sad and shameful part of Ireland's history – the Magdalene Laundries. These tangents are every bit as valuable as the poetry itself, and the rich diversity of perspective and experience present, thanks to our intergenerational group, made for some lively discussion.

Poetry has long been a love of mine. My grandmother was a poet so I flatter myself that I have poetry in my bones – not that this translates into writing good poetry unfortunately. It has been a part of our reading aloud for as long as we have read aloud, and then part of our home education in the form of story, memory work, history, literature. Poetry Tea Time is a great opportunity to share

this love with our friends and family, to practise reading poetry aloud, and to hear poetry spoken aloud. It's a space where we can simply enjoy a poem for the sound of it, or we can delve deep into its meaning and context.

There are no strict rules. For us, it's about fostering a love of poetry and an ease with it. Our years of reading and Poetry Tea Time have also meant that the more in-depth study of poetry that we've recently embarked upon has simply felt like a natural progression, a small step rather than a leap into something often perceived as difficult or challenging. All of that, and cake too!



Creative-writing activity

A favourite writing activity in our family involves creating a drawing and story inspired by the seasons. At this time of year, you could try the following prompts:

Today I noticed an animal getting ready for winter. ...

or

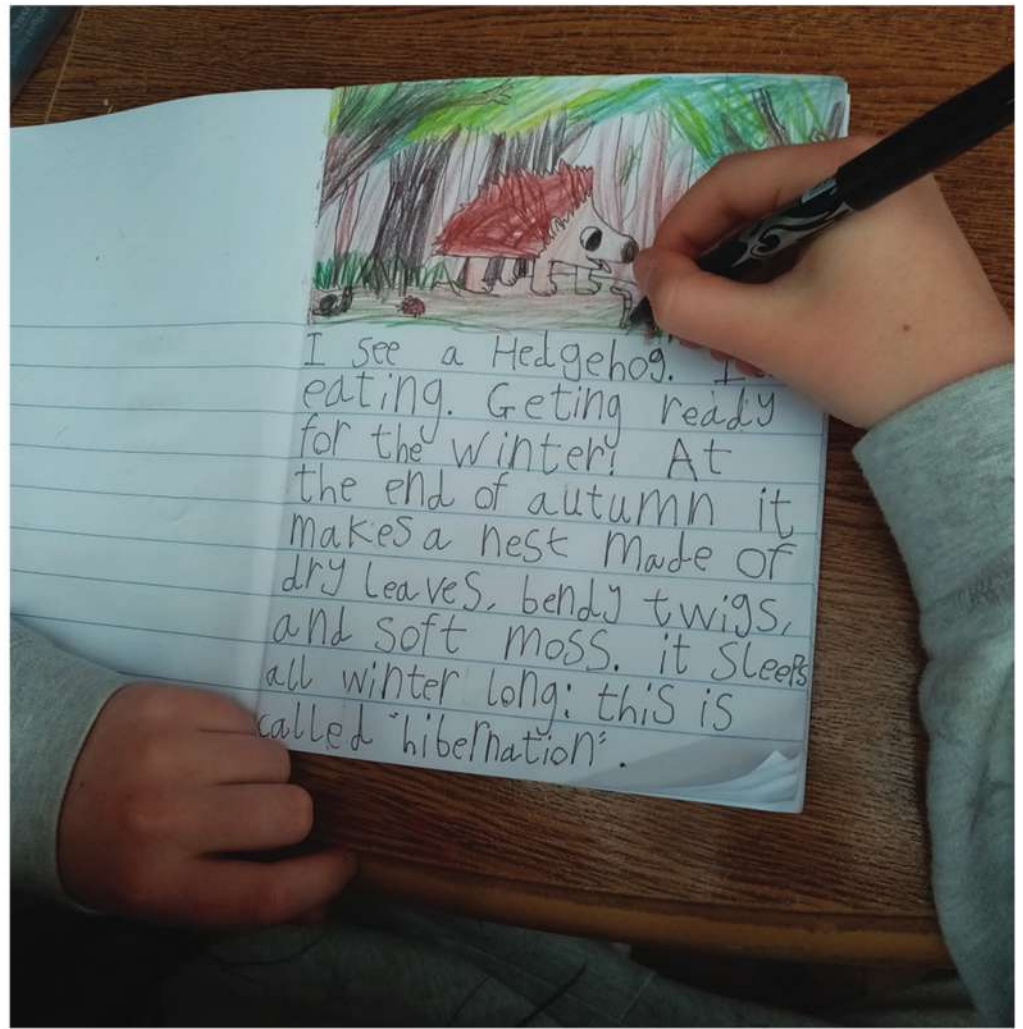
My favourite thing about autumn time is ...

You could encourage your children to consider their five senses before they start their story:

- How things look
- How things feel
- How things sound
- How things taste
- How things smell

If you want to try a non-fiction writing activity, perhaps you could create a short illustrated manual that describes how to eat an apple from a tree or how to build a scarecrow. Try to include the following words:

- First
- Next
- Then
- Last





Science activity: classifying living things into groups

Materials

- old magazines
- scissors

Steps

1. Cut out all the pictures of animals you can find in the magazines. (You can do this activity with plants or bugs too.)
2. Decide how you are going to classify these animals. You can choose to sort them by:
 - the number of legs they have
 - where they live
 - what country they are from
 - whether they are carnivores or herbivores
 - whether they are fast or slow
 - whether they are land or sea animals
 - whether they are active in the daytime or the night-time

And so on. There are hundreds of ways you could sort these animals.

3. Play this game with a friend: sort the animals and ask your friend to guess how you classified them. Switch roles. See if you can trick your friend with something like a marsupial or a monotreme.

Did you know?

Animals can be classed into six groups.

1. **Mammals** are warm-blooded, and most give birth to live young.
2. **Birds** are warm-blooded and have feathers and lay eggs.
3. **Reptiles** are cold-blooded and lay eggs.
4. **Amphibians** are cold-blooded and can live in water or on land.
5. **Fish** are cold-blooded and use gills to breathe because they live in water.
6. **Invertebrates** are animals that do not have backbones.

Every animal is unique in some way, just like people. And, just like people, there are some things that are the same, such as their likes and dislikes and the number of legs they have.

Recipe: scones

Diana Folan Joyce

This is a recipe for gluten-free and lactose-free scones made by Diana, aged thirteen, who has been home educated since May 2021.

Ingredients

250 g gluten-free self-raising flour
½ tsp fine salt
1 tsp xanthan gum
1 tsp gluten-free baking powder
50 g caster sugar
40 g cold butter, cut into small cubes
75 ml lactose-free milk
1 large egg
50 g sultanas (optional)

Method

1. Preheat your oven to 220°C (200°C fan/Gas mark 7).
2. Mix the flour, salt, xanthan gum, baking powder and sugar together in a bowl.
3. Rub in the butter with your fingertips until you have a fine texture like breadcrumbs. You can also do this by gradually pulsing the mixture in a food processor until it resembles breadcrumbs.
4. Whisk together the milk and the egg. Hold back some to brush on the scones later, and gradually mix the rest into the flour mixture until you have a smooth dough.
5. Mix in the sultanas, if using.
6. Knead briefly to come together into a ball.
7. Gently roll out the scone dough until 2 cm thick.
8. Transfer to a baking tray lined with parchment paper and chill for 30 minutes to firm up the dough. This makes them easier to cut out.
9. Remove the dough from the fridge, and, using a 5-cm cutter, cut out 6–8 scones. Press the pieces of dough together and re-roll when you need to.
10. Put the scones upside down (this means you will get a neater top when baked), spread 2 cm apart.
11. Evenly brush the tops of the scones with the remains of the milk and egg mixture, making sure that the egg wash doesn't run down the sides of the scones, which will make them rise unevenly.
12. Bake for 12–15 minutes until golden brown.
13. Eat warm or cold, generously topped with jam and cream, if you like.





A week of days

Lorna Fowkes

I know what you're thinking, and you're right of course: every week has days – seven if we want to be precise about it. But sometimes I think it's easy to forget that each new day can be a fresh start and we can do or be whatever we want each and every day.

I know that as adults it is harder to start afresh every day. There are things that need to happen. There are consequences of the previous day to deal with. There are plans to be made for the following day. But children don't see the world like us. They live for the moment.

They forget about the argument you had yesterday. They don't worry about what's happening in the next hour (as long as they've been fed recently!) let alone the next day.

For the past week, I've been trying to get into a child's mindset and just enjoy each day as it comes. And do you know what? I've enjoyed our days all the more for it. I'm not worrying about trying to link our learning activities. Instead, I am going totally with the flow of what the girls want to know. We've had a day of designing and making bridges inspired



by looking at local examples and videos on YouTube.

This was followed by a Roald Dahl day designing chocolate bars (which the girls are now keen to make!) and learning about Fairtrade after my youngest daughter asked what the symbol on the packet meant. We've managed to practise times tables in fun ways linked to the things we've been finding out about – bricks for bridges and sharing

out chocolates. Can you guess which one we enjoyed the most?!

One of my daughters has been the most inspired to learn I've seen her in a long time, and the other told me today that having special days at home was a lot more fun than going out to groups. (I hope her enthusiasm continues!)

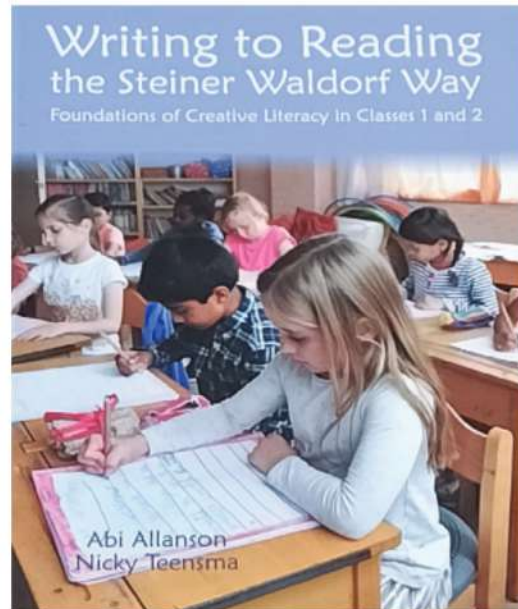
Living for each day is going well for us all.



Book review

Helena Husinec

Writing to Reading the Steiner Waldorf Way: Foundations of Creative Literacy in Classes 1 and 2 by Abi Allanson and Nicky Teensma



We are a home-educating family in south-west Donegal, living on our smallholding surrounded by beautiful nature. We have three very lively boys, aged seven, almost six and four years old. Our journey into home education officially began with the start of lockdown last year – and for us it was liberating!

Having our son in the school system wasn't something we had enjoyed so once he was at home we embraced home education and started our 'official' study. Prior to sending our firstborn to school, we had practised Steiner ways for kindergarten age, so it felt natural for us to continue that approach for home-educating all our children. We immersed ourselves deeper into it, and were happy to do so!

I would love to share my 'go-to' book for the Steiner literacy curriculum which has been our valuable inspiration and resource for reading, writing, form drawing, games, poems and ideas on

how to stimulate creative writing from a young age. I followed the book on how to introduce letters to children in a fun and captivating way to stimulate several of their senses and expression.

The suggested order was to start with consonants B, M, R, T, followed by H, S, N and P. I found it was a good time to introduce vowels after these two groups as we could start forming short words with them, after which we could engage in games that practised literacy without the child realising that they were in fact participating in academic work.

Each letter is given a wonderful inspiration for a blackboard drawing. A story is attached to the letter with a strong moral message to enable children to recognise 'good and evil'. It is very black and white, without any grey areas, for young children to easily recognise traits and deeds that are classified as either one of two polar opposites. The traditional folk stories by the Grimm brothers are the most referred to in



this series. As well as a story, a poem is provided that repeats the consonant in an engaging way for children to orally perceive the letter.

Vowels are described as a special gift from the Infinite Creator introduced as 'angel's gifts' that made communication easy, songful and flowing for humans. There is a wonderful funny story that explains to children how difficult communication would be without vowels. Vowels aren't attached to stories or a poem but more so through etheric perception of sound. This could be the point at which eurythmy could be introduced. (It is not something we practise at this point in time.)

Here is a poem example for the letter R:

Round and round rolls the reel,
Rumpelstiltskin fills the reel,
Fills the reel with golden thread,
But what will Rumpelstiltskin get?

'I'll have your child, I'll have your son
Unless you name me when it's done.'
Rumpelstiltskin ran around,
'My real name cannot be found.'

While we recite the poem, we practise our drama simultaneously and act out the actions and emotions.

The book is filled with a vast number of various games and examples of fun literacy practice that the children are joyful to engage with and happy to follow. You don't need to follow the entire curriculum either. My seven-year-old does most of the curriculum exercises, but the six-year-old is happiest with the oral components of it. He is really enjoying it and happy to follow the form-drawing exercises and the formation of letters. Meanwhile, my four-year-old is happy to explore the oral side of the letters and can recognise them but is not yet ready to engage with them in written form, and for us that is perfectly fine.



We have found that you can apply this book to any level of literacy readiness and adjust it to your child's needs. There are also examples of how to assess your child's progress in a way that is playful and engaging without any grading, just to give you a guide on what you need to work on more, and possibly repeat, or it shows you when to advance the material to another level and engage with it further.

In addition to other books and materials related to literacy, this book has been our very engaging and inspiring

centrepiece, and I must express our gratitude to the authors for sharing it with us and for making teaching literacy easy for me as someone who doesn't come from an educational background or have English language as a mother tongue but who wishes to follow a curriculum in a gentle, fun and engaging manner.

I wish you all the courage and strength, an open loving heart and an abundance of patience for your home-education journey – and don't forget to have fun along the way!

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