



# HomeschoolNYC Newsletter

***Celebrating Child-led Learning***

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*Summer is the season when I miss my students. It's when I take the time to travel to conferences and seek out new educational experiences. I will be at the AERO Conference in June, and studying improv and theater in July. If you have questions or topics to suggest for future issues, please send them to me at [Laurie@homeschoolNYC.com](mailto:Laurie@homeschoolNYC.com). Meanwhile, I wish you all an adventure of happy summer learning!*

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*Laurie Block Spigel*

## Summer Travel Issue

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## **Are We Obsessed with Assessment?**

This time of year many parents and teachers panic over testing and assessments. When administrations tie salaries and promotions to a single test score, it is all too easy to panic. We are not standardized people, and true learning cannot occur when a test is the ultimate goal. Teachers and students are being asked to do the impossible! Such an obsession with testing, or with any form of assessment, will ruin any attempt at creating a great education. The learning environment will have an absence of critical thought instead of being vibrant with inquiry. The goal will be short-term memorization instead of a personal sense of discovery.

My mother used to give her entering college freshmen students, all education majors, a standard sixth

grade test. Routinely, they failed. My mother's obvious point was to question not only the merit of these tests, but also the merit of the standardized sixth grade curriculum. We all had to learn it and pass those tests in sixth grade. But if we all forgot it, what was its value?

Homeschooling parents who are writing a narrative assessment worry too. Is my child at grade level? Has she fallen behind or advanced? Should I promote my child, or skip him a grade? This shows a preoccupation with standardized curriculum. Most of us were raised on such a curriculum, with subjects formatted to be dosed out in pinnacles, one grade's worth at a time. When true learning occurs, we function at many different levels and rates of speed. We may slow down and even move backwards, to relax and regroup our thoughts, or to remind ourselves, and then we may spurt ahead, becoming experts in a subject at a young age, or suddenly motivated to take on a greater goal than originally planned.

In my book, [\*Education Uncensored\*](#), I suggest that children write their own assessments. In my opinion, we are the harshest judges of ourselves, and the only ones who understand the importance of our personal goals. Lynn Stoddard's wonderful book, [\*Educating For Human Greatness\*](#), has a sample Student Self-Assessment, one created for the early grades and another for older students (Appendix B, Parts 1 and 2). Mr. Stoddard's elegant and concise book lists seven I's as the ultimate goals of education: Identity, Inquiry, Interaction, Initiative, Imagination, Intuition and Integrity. Curriculum is simply a means to these goals, and not an end to itself. I am deeply impressed with this book, which provides a simple overview and a concise plan that any school or classroom could adopt, given the freedom to do so. I highly recommend this book. It is full of practical, straightforward ideas that will empower students, teachers and parents. Mr. Stoddard's words help us to focus on the true goals, the ones worth assessing. *Educating For Human Greatness* is a blueprint for change.

## Summer Shakespeare in NYC

In the summer NYC explodes with free [outdoor theater and film festivals](#), several devoted to Shakespeare. The Drilling Company, also known as Shakespeare On the Run performs inside of Central Park or Battery Park, no tickets or reservations required. Just show up! Audience members follow the company from one scene to another throughout the park. This year they are doing [Richard III and Much Ado About Nothing](#). The world-famous Shakespeare in the Park (in Central Park) will perform [The Winter's Tale and The Merchant of Venice](#) (with Al Pacino as Shylock). Folks stand in line long and early for these free tickets, so bring a book and a picnic to help pass the time. The Inwood Shakespeare Festival will perform [The Comedy of Errors](#), as well as other plays and children's concerts. No tickets or reservations required. Bring a blanket to sit on. The Boomerang Theatre will put on [The Tempest](#) in Central Park, no tickets or reservations necessary. The Hudson Warehouse Theater Company performs on the upper west side in Riverside Park at the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument (89th St. and RSD). This year you can see [Romeo and Juliet](#) (as well as Cyrano and The Trojan Women). Just show up and choose a seat on the monument steps. Shakespeare in the Parking Lot (located at Broome and Ludlow Streets) is doing [Love's Labour's Lost and Julius Caesar](#). Bring a chair (metered parking available). The Hip to Hip Theatre Company performs in parks throughout Queens, with [Taming of the Shrew and Macbeth](#) this season.

### Suggested Books:

[Shakespeare On Toast, by Ben Crystal](#)

[Shakespeare for Kids, His Life and Times, 21 Activities, by Colleen Aagesen and Margie Blumberg](#)

[Shakespeare Can be Fun \(many titles in this series\), by Lois Burdett](#)

## Teaching Fairytales in the Park

Teaching fairytales to a group of eight girls in a park setting was a sublime experience for me this year! Here is a photo of our last class, which was also Crazy Hair and Sock Day. The girls are showing off their publication, filled with original fairytales, poems, recipes, and more. For more photos, check out the [photo gallery](#).



Laurie with her students, May 2010

## Suggested Summer Road Trip: Corning, New York

Glass blowing, airplanes, and cowboys & Indians are three great reasons to visit Corning, a 4 1/2 hour drive (255 miles) from NYC. This small town, just south of the Fingerlakes region, makes for a perfect long weekend for the family. And there are waterfalls nearby!

Corning is the home of the Corning and Steuben Glass Factories. Today it boasts the largest glass museum in the world. [Read more...](#)

Every road trip is an opportunity to record your own geography, scrapbook your vacation, and diary your thoughts. [Here](#) are some ways of including every subject with your journey.

[Related Books and Resources](#), for all ages, on glassblowing, cowboys & Indians, flight, and waterfalls in New York State.

## Travel Tips for Kids

My husband and I spent a month or two on the road every year, with our growing kids in tow, traveling to Indian Reservations as part of our work. I developed many ways of keeping the kids comfortable, healthy, and occupied. I kept magazines and informative pictures, "bits" of learning, in the pocket of my door, ready to pull out in moments of boredom. On hand for the stereo, we had funny music, sing-along tunes, and music to dance to. We called it seat-dancing, gesticulating wildly while in our seat belts, which was lots of fun! But my best technique was to put choices into the hands of my children.

To prepare our car for travel... [Read More...](#)

## Quote by Eleanor Roosevelt

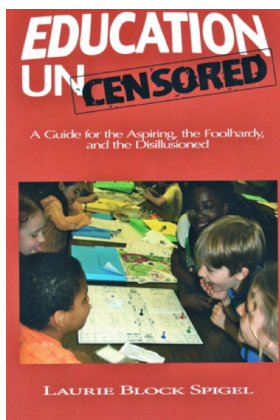
"Life was meant to be lived, and curiosity must be kept alive."

~Eleanor Roosevelt, 1884-1962, First Lady, author, speaker, politician, she drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## [AERO CONFERENCE](#)

Don't miss the [7th annual AERO Conference on Learner-Centered Alternatives](#), June 24-27, 2010, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Albany, NY. This is the international crossroads of alternative education movements and philosophies. Keynote speakers include John Taylor Gatto and Herbert Kohl. Workshop presenters include Don "Four Arrows" Jacobs, Kirsten Olson, Chris Mercogliano, Laurie Spigel, and many others.

## *Education Uncensored*



Laurie Spigel is a leading educator in the New York City homeschooling community, teaching popular group classes and inspiring parents to create their own curriculum. Her approach is informal, creative, and child-led. Here she shares her innovative ideas and original techniques for every subject. She explains why our current educational system has it all backwards and shows how exciting learning can truly be. A real source of inspiration as well as a practical guide, this is an eye-opening book for every parent and teacher.

Available now at [HomeschoolNYC.com](http://HomeschoolNYC.com)

Price: \$12.95 plus shipping & handling

[Read an excerpt.](#)

*E-mail comments and suggestions to [Laurie@HomeschoolNYC.com](mailto:Laurie@HomeschoolNYC.com).*

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