

Celebrating Holidays at Weekday

One of the many things I love about Weekday is its thoughtful approach to religious and cultural holidays. As a nondenominational preschool composed of families from various religious and cultural backgrounds, it is a rich place for children to discover traditions different from those their family practices.

This fall in their classrooms the children learned about Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Columbus Day, and Thanksgiving. On December 2 in room 630, the school as a whole celebrated Hanukkah. Led by Patty Nasey and David Goldberg, parents of Mara Goldberg (room 615) and Lily Goldberg (room 730), we lit the menorah, spun the dreidel, and heard the story of Hanukkah. Some special guests—the girls' grandparents—joined other Weekday families in observing this important and joyous holiday.

On December 20, the school recognizes the Christmas season with its annual Christmas Tableau, a pageant of the Christmas story performed by the children and presented in room 630. As with the school's Hanukkah celebration, all parents are invited to attend.

When the children return next year, they will recognize Kwanzaa, Martin Luther King Junior's birthday, and the Lunar New Year. Spring will bring Passover and Easter and perhaps other cultural celebrations, depending upon the interest and involvement of individual families.

Says assistant director Amita Gupta, "It's an honor to recognize the holidays and distinct cultural traditions of our families. In past years, the school has also observed

the Indian holiday Diwali and Japanese Children's Day with special celebrations conceived and carried out by parents working alongside their children's teachers."

Many holidays lend themselves particularly well to cooking and art projects. In the process of creating with their own hands, the children absorb the sights, smells, tastes, and sounds of each particular holiday. My son Nicky's classroom, room 615, observed the fall Jewish holidays by eating challah bread and apples dipped in honey for Rosh Hashanah (as did Elyse Everett's class in room 717) and by making a sukkah in honor of Sukkot.

The children also learn through singing. The school has published a songbook that all teachers use in their classrooms. Some of you may have heard "O Jack-o-Lantern," a sweet little ditty sung to the tune "My Darling Clementine" just before Halloween. As I write this, my son's favorite song is "The Chanukiah," with the repetitive refrain, "One, one, one, one, one, one, one candle burning, one candle burning the first Hanukkah night." (This is repeated for two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight Hanukkah nights.)

On Thanksgiving, the school does something a bit different. All the children in the school gather with their teachers and the school's staff in the sixth floor chapel to hear Jan Miller tell the story of the first Thanksgiving, with everyone joining together to sing songs of the season: "All Things Bright and Beautiful," "Tree Song," "Earth Chant,"



and "The Whole World is in God's Hands." Then everyone moves into room 630 (the movement and rainy day room) to eat a Thanksgiving lunch or feast together. The children bring a special bread or tea loaf that they made in their classrooms to share with everyone at the feast. The children all sit around a large open rectangle of green construction paper. Every child has their own placemat—usually a collage of their own creation. The children sit with their classmates on both sides of the "table." Cups, napkins and forks are all neatly laid out at each child's place. Before they eat, the children sing a grace song, one of several they choose among daily before eating lunch in their classrooms. It might be "Amen," the Hebrew song "Dayenu (Sufficient)," "Rejoice," or "Johnny Appleseed."

Although at first I was startled to learn that Nicky was singing grace before lunch at school, I've come to appreciate it. Since starting at Weekday, he asks to sing grace before dinner at home. It's lovely to pause for a moment when we're worn out from the day and its demands, and I find myself silently giving thanks too.

—Erica Keirstead

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Nurturing Our Diversity

In October, I spent three days in Atlanta at the 32nd Annual National Black Child Development Institute Conference, entitled "Collective Will and Imagination," along with approximately 1,000 other educators, administrators, and community leaders. The conference offered workshops and plenary sessions concerning projects and programs that have demonstrated ongoing success in providing Black children with models of excellence and achievement. Riverside Church's own Senior Minister, the Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., was the inspirational speaker at the final banquet, and I was proud to be there as a representative of Riverside's Weekday School.

This conference reinforced my belief that working with young children is the most fundamental—indeed, radical—work we can do to bring about an increase in peace and social justice in the world. All children should feel valued and be taught to value others. It is in these earliest years when children learn whether or not the world is a place they can trust; whether or not they will be encouraged to grow to their fullest potential; and whether or not they effectively can find for themselves — and offer others — a fair shake. From another perspective, in a recent publication called "Parenting Exchange," in her column entitled "Help Kids By Role Modeling Respect For Diversity," author Karen Stephens

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

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—Jan Miller—

comments (in part):

“...There’s absolutely no doubt that today’s children will live a long life in a diverse world and a global economy. In school, at work, and in marriages, cultural and racial blending will continue, and most likely will increase.

“If parents teach children bias—even hatred—children will be handicapped. Their ability to competently engage in diverse social interactions will be stunted. They’ll be short-changed, both personally and economically. Cultural differences, as well as similarities, contribute to the quality of everyone’s life. To prepare children with the social skills they’ll need, parents must model responding to diversity with grace, respect, acceptance, and

appreciation. We must do far more than teach mere tolerance.”

Children lead us with their open and innocent questions about differences. In answering their questions in justice-affirming and informative ways, we encourage them (and ourselves) to keep the dialogue alive and vibrant, though it may be challenging for us at times. One workshop leader at the NBCDI conference talked about “tennis ball” conversations and “slippery egg” conversations. “Tennis ball” conversations are ones in which the participants toss a topic back and forth in an easy and anxiety-free manner; “slippery egg” conversations challenge us to persevere in the face of the fear that we might lose control, or make a mistake that will shatter the act of trusting communication. This imagery reminded me that it takes courage and conviction to remain open to sensitive topics, which include (but are not limited to) issues of race, gender, class, and culture. May we teach our children courage and conviction in such exchanges, and perseverance in the face of discomfort, anxiety, and, occasionally, failure. Just as we can use lemons to make lemonade, broken eggs can be the foundation for many a nourishing dish! All it takes is our collective will and imagination.



Meet the Children’s Teachers, Part II

Continued from the October issue

Sally Caslon, the lead teacher of the old twos in room 614, is originally from Philadelphia, PA. She received a bachelor’s degree from the University of the Arts and a master’s degree in education from Chestnut Hill College. Every summer as a child she took classes in seashore ecology, oceanography, and birds taught by scientists from the Marine Biological Laboratories and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute on Cape Cod. Mrs. Caslon served in the Peace Corps in Turkey for two years after college, working in rural community development. When she returned to the U.S., she worked in the Head Start program in Philadelphia for two years. After that, she ran (and taught in) a nursery school in the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia. This is her fifth year at the Weekday School.

Mrs. Caslon travels to England with her husband, Denis, in the summer. She has two daughters, Amory, a doctor; and Perry, a film editor-artist. She loves teaching, nurturing the children’s interests and love of learning. She particularly enjoys the diversity of the children at the Weekday School. Her hobbies include painting, hiking, and gardening.



Fay Lee is the associate teacher in room 614. She grew up in Southbury, CT but has also lived in the cities of Milford, New Haven, and New Milford, Connecticut. She holds dual bachelor’s degrees from Albertus Magnus College in New Haven (psychology and art) and a master’s degree in clinical psychology from Teachers College.

This is her first year with the old twos in Sally Caslon’s class. In addition to her responsibilities in the classroom, Ms. Lee provides administrative assistance to the school by working in the school office three afternoons a week. Last year, she assisted the toddler program. Prior to coming to Weekday, she worked with toddlers and preschool-age children in the Rita Gold Early Childhood Center at Teachers College.

Hobbies include eastern philosophy and spirituality, the arts, and outdoor sports.

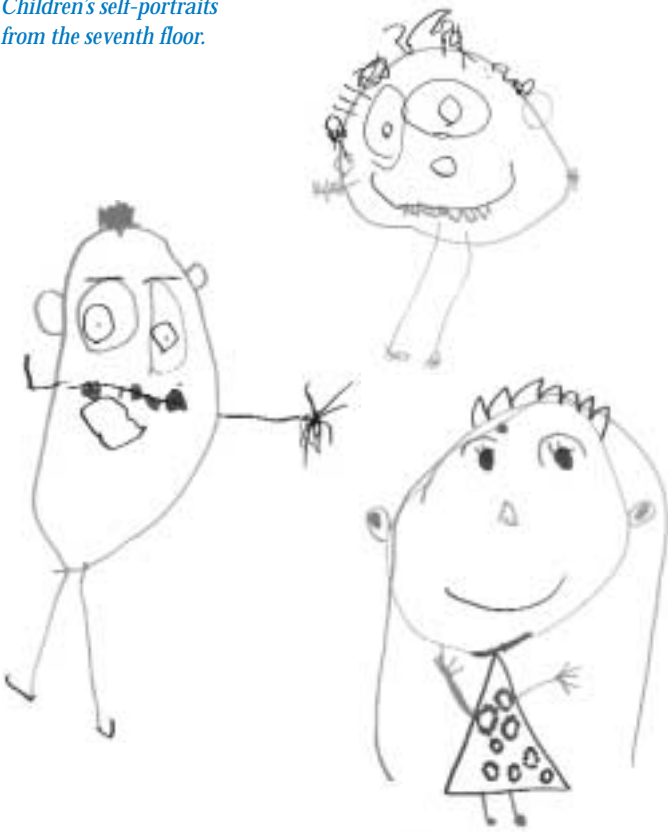
Cheryl Sharpe, one of our two floating teachers, along with Jeesun Jung, primarily covers the seventh floor. This is her fifth year at Weekday. After obtaining degrees from Fordham University and NYU, she worked for the NY League for Early Learning with special needs children for two years before coming here. Ms. Sharpe is a lifetime member of the Riverside Church.

Melissa Sann is in her third year of lead teaching the old threes in room 615. A native of Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, she holds a bachelor’s degree in English from Franklin and Marshall College. Upon graduation, Ms. Sann worked in book publishing at Random House on the production side for a few years. She returned to school to earn a master’s degree in education from Bank Street, then taught at Children First, Inc. as a corporate day care center teacher for various companies including Goldman Sachs, Pfizer, and Conde Nast. Ms. Sann recently received her per-



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Children's self-portraits
from the seventh floor.



2002 BLACKBOARD AWARDS

Weekday Named Runner-Up to Best West Side Preschool

Recently, the Weekday School was declared a runner up to the best preschool on the West Side in Manhattan Media's first annual Blackboard Awards. Also receiving runner-up honors were Mandell, Columbia Greenhouse, and West End Collegiate Church preschools.

Manhattan Media, which publishes *Avenue* magazine and the *Our Town* and *West Side Spirit* neighborhood newspapers, evaluated the borough's public, private, and parochial pre-K, elementary, middle, and high schools. Top honors among the West Side and Downtown preschools went to West Side Montessori, Bank Street, and First Presbyterian.

The project began last spring when the newspaper publisher assembled an advisory board of educators, concerned parents, education writers, educational consultants, and school and college administrators. The criteria used for comparison were: high academic standards; excellent teachers; a commitment to teacher training and development; administrators who know their students; a diverse student body; a feeling of community within the school; clear and frequent communication with parents; innovative relationships with museums, businesses, and the government; solid test scores (and a healthy attitude toward testing); an intelligent and integrated use of technology; and parents and students who express satisfaction with their academic and social experiences at the school.

Manhattan Media then sent summer interns into the streets to interview parents and students at area schools and to obtain school literature. On its Web site, Manhattan Media asked visitors to evaluate the academic and social environments of a list of schools vetted by the advisory board. This "Web voting" led to the finalists in the awards. The project culminated with an awards presentation and cocktail party at the National Arts Club in Gramercy Park on November 6 to which Jan Miller was invited.

Online evaluations for the 2003 Blackboard Awards will begin in January 2003. Log on to www.blackboardawards.org for more information.

Parent Forums Resume

About fifteen Weekday moms and dads (and a much-welcomed teacher) gathered for the school year's first parent forum, "Setting Limits with Love: Discipline without Punishment," on Friday, November 7. After offering a few thoughts and reading recommendations, Jan Miller let the group's concerns guide the discussion. It was an opportunity to share questions, ideas, parenting experiences, and a few bottles of wine. The discussion was far-reaching and honest, dealing with our own moments of anger as well as our children's. Jan moderated the discussion, but was also very much part of the group, offering her own experiences both as a mother and a grandmother, as well as her insight as an educator. The evening's discussion was a wonderful reminder of the support we can give each another by sharing our experiences as parents.

Jan Miller, the parent forum committee, and class parents have contributed ideas for future discussions. Below is a schedule of the year's remaining discussion topics. Each parent forum will begin at 7 o'clock in the seventh-floor library, and refreshments will be served.

Friday, January 10

All Kinds of Families: *Adoption and family constellations, sibling relationships, one-child families, and dual-culture homes*

Friday, February 7

Violence in Children's Play: *Where does it come from, and how is it fed?*

Friday, April 11

Life's Great Mysteries: *Talking with children about birth, sex, aging, and death*

Thursday, May 8

Boys and Girls: *Superheroes in the doll corner: Gender differences and children's relationships*

Thursday, June 5

Weathering the Storm: *How parents and children can survive testing and the ongoing-schools application process*

If you have questions or suggestions, please contact Rebecca Stead, coordinator of the parent forum committee, at Apert3A@aol.com.



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This newsletter is for you, the parents of children attending the Weekday School. To submit articles or announcements, or to suggest story ideas, please contact Erica Keirstead, Patty Nasey, Mark Broadie, or Robin Grunder. Contributions and suggestions for articles are encouraged!

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MEET THE CHILDREN'S TEACHERS

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manent teaching certificate from the State Department of Education in Albany.

She lives on the East Side of Manhattan and enjoys reading, traveling, jogging, and baking. A member of the New York Road Runners Club, she recently finished her first NYC marathon. Ms. Sann is also a board member of the New York Rangers fan club.

Jeesun Jung is one of two floating teachers at Weekday. She assists the classrooms on the sixth floor. Ms. Jung was born in the United States but grew up in Korea. At Seoul Women's University, she began as a child studies major, but turned to developmental psychology, returning to early childhood only after graduation. She holds M.A. and Ed.M. degrees in early childhood education from Teachers College.



Her own formative experiences included parents who expected their girls to be strong and smart and a third grade teacher who respected the students and encouraged initiative. Travel in Europe made her appreciate different cultures and the influence of environment on psychology.

She writes: "I want our students to be always positive but also to have critical thinking ability. And also I want to encourage them to fulfill their hopes in their lives."



Juliennne Pollitt is the assistant teacher in room 717. She, along with lead teacher Elyse Everett, guides a classroom of "middle" fours. Ms. Pollitt grew up in Chappaqua, New York and now calls Brooklyn home. She writes: "I studied Dance, French, and Comparative Literature at Hamilton College. My first career was as a modern dancer here in New York. My 30th birthday sent me into the Swedish Institute to study massage. That led me to embark on a second career, to complement the first, as a massage therapist. Then, a few years back, as I

was approaching 40, it seemed time to take another plunge. So I entered Hunter College to study elementary education, launching a third career, teaching. I just received (finally) my master's degree. Who knows what the 50th will bring?"

She continues, "Teaching is a creative and nurturing endeavor for me. I continually learn and grow from my relationships with the children, their parents, and my colleagues. The challenges are as great as the rewards."

Ruth Gonzalez (Assistant Teacher, room 617) has worked at The Weekday School since 1989. Before that, she worked at the Children's Day Care Center on West 48th Street for seven years. Recently, Ms. Gonzalez completed a course of study at New York University's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, gaining a certificate in Child Care. Ms. Gonzalez has worked with all ages at the Weekday School, and her long tenure here has given her a broad perspective on the school's history and program. She is deeply interested in the project approach, and actively searches the Internet for teaching ideas; she also has set up room 617's Web site for the parents to visit.



Merama Mshelia grew up in Northern Nigeria. She earned Nigeria's highest teaching certificate (English system) before coming to this country and she has a master's degree from Teachers College, and hopes to start work soon on her doctorate. She writes: "My interest in the history and structure of human society and its institutions also led me to earn a B.A. in Sociology.



I have three children. The oldest holds a law degree from the University of London and an L.L.M. law degree from NYU, the second has graduated from law school, and the third has finished a B.A. in Economics and Italian. My hobbies include collecting beads from all over the world, designing ethnic jewelry, and visiting museum exhibitions and art gallery shows.

"My other passion is teaching, especially watching children learn through play. Play allows children to express what they cannot put into words. It teaches, without their being aware of it, the habits needed for intellectual growth, such as cooperating, helping, negotiating, and problem solving. I thank you parents for trusting us with your valuable children."

Apryl Grasty, room 716, is a native of Washington, DC. She began her dance training at the Washington School of Ballet and continued at Maryland Youth Ballet before entering the Kirov Academy of the Kirov Ballet in Russia. She performed in a workshop series for the Dance Theater of Harlem and was selected by Arthur Mitchell, director of DTOH, to perform with the company in a special gala.

Moving away from ballet in college, Ms. Grasty studied modern dance and received a BFA in Dance Education from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. She then went on to complete a master's degree in dance education from Teachers College. Along the way, she took an interest in early childhood education, which brought her to the Weekday School. Currently balancing working as an assistant to Ms. Krumland with her life as a performer in New York City, Ms. Grasty looks forward to learning from the children, parents, and staff of the Weekday School.



Amy Bodnick, assistant teacher to Laura Sweeney in room 616, graduated from Wesleyan University with a bachelor's degree in psychology and has held assistant and lead teaching positions in therapeutic nurseries as well as more typical preschool settings. This is her third year at the Weekday School.

Ms. Bodnick delights in witnessing children's creative expression, and enjoys working with the children on arts and crafts projects, puppet shows, storytelling, and cooking projects. Her hobbies include drawing, painting, sewing, and baking "beyond the Bundt."

Lisa Zaretsky, a co-lead teacher of the young twos in room 730, grew up in Pittsburgh, PA. She has a master's degree in education from Bank Street and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Rochester.

She writes: "The bulk of my teaching experience has been in early childhood classroom settings, with children under six. I've also worked as a preschool programmer and done outreach programs at the Staten Island Children's Museum. And I have spent time in various settings (Mt. Sinai Hospital, Jewish Guild for the Blind) working with special-needs children. This is my first year at the Weekday School. For seven years, I was lucky enough to be home full time with my children."

She considers her children, seven-year-old Celia and four-year-old Eli, her special interests and hobbies. She writes: "I'm thrilled to be a part of this staff. I live in this neighborhood and my kids go to school in the neighborhood. I love this community and feel a real connection to the Weekday School."



MATERIAL SIMPLICITY: LESS REALLY IS MORE

As parents, we're inundated by advertisements for new toys, especially at this time of year. Certain toys—such as plastic guns or violent Playstation games—are obviously inappropriate for preschoolers, but increasingly, more and more toys for preschool-aged children are promoted as being educational and developmentally appropriate. They're aimed at encouraging early skills in reading readiness, counting, spatial recognition, and small muscle coordination. So aren't those a good idea? Not necessarily, according to an article published a few years ago in *Young Children*, a trade publication for early childhood educators produced by the National Association for the Education of Young Children or NAEYC. (The Weekday staff attended their annual conference on November 21-22.)

The article, *Buying More Can Give Children Less*, by Carol Benson Holst, argues that instead of encouraging learning based on a child's actual efforts, many of these new toys provide entertainment and distraction without deeply involving a child, and can even lead to short concentration and attention spans.

USING CARDBOARD, STICKS, AND FABRIC IN THE CLASSROOM

We have a supply of cardboard boxes. As the children come up with ideas, we cut the boxes to make almost everything they want. We never worry about keeping the constructions we make for very long, because novelty and invention are more important than permanence.

At first, the boxes became space suits. When we heard a girl had gone sailing with her daddy, we made a sailboat. The boat had a cloth sail and a tiller and a rudder. Three children played inside as the boat was four inches high and was wide and long. We used a box on its side to make a jungle panorama for a stuffed monkey. The box had a swing, a hammock, and a tree.

In other project, we built sandcastles. We painted cardboard strips and boxes with glue and put them in sand so it would stick to the cardboard to make walls, towers, turrets, and bridges, .

We made a study of construction machines. Our favorite vehicle is a backhoe with a bucket on one end and a scoop on the other. We put cardboard boxes, one inside the other, to add strength so the children can sit to operate it. The parts are held together with string threaded through holes in the cardboard.

We don't paint the cardboard and we throw away most of the things we make after a week or two to make way for new projects. We keep large open spaces for building.

We made a map of Manhattan out of a large, rectangular box. Out of one side we cut the island and out of the other side we made the roads in long, curvy shapes. We cut the grid for streets, then made the children's apartment buildings out of wooden blocks, with pegs to press them into the cardboard. Using the Brio train set we added bridges and tracks. The parks are made from green felt. As the map is large, many children can play around it using cars and trains. It's nice to use the map for an hour and then put it away. When the children use it again, we talk about where they live in relation to the Riverside Church, the parks, the rivers, and the bridges. It's like a bas relief sculpture but you can move and change all the parts of it.

Sticks from the woods become all kinds of things. Sticks make squirrel nests, tree trunks, and teepees. Fabric can be used to make tents and private nooks for children who need peace and quiet. With a few pillows, children nestle inside to read.

—Sally Caslon, lead teacher, room 614

A newer trend among toy manufacturers is electronic learning aids. In "Toy Story: Looking for Lessons," an article published in the January 3, 2002 Technology section of the New York Times, journalist Lisa Guernsey reports that LeapFrog Enterprises, whose bestselling product is the LeapPad, an electronic talking book, has become one of the fastest-growing toy makers in the nation—in just the last six years.

Leapfrog, along with companies Educational Insights (MathShark and LaunchPad) and Vtech, market their products to technology-savvy parents using the label "educational." With the LeapPad, a child touches the word "cat" with a stylus and the toy says the word. Other words and buttons trigger stories or word games. The idea is that by hearing a word while touching or seeing it, children will learn to read faster.

Although the company, founded in part by former junk-bond trader Michael Milken, lists some education experts in its promotional materials who praise the product's benefits, more than a few educators are skeptical. Guernsey writes: "For some child development experts, the toys' effectiveness is a side issue. They wonder instead whether the electronic learning aids are part of a larger trend in which parents are pushing small children into structured lessons at the expense of imaginative play time—time that may seem unimportant to adults but that researchers consider critically important to a child's future capacity to learn."

But perhaps the greatest area of concern for Holst is the sheer number of toys children possess. Holst is the founder and director of Seeds of Simplicity, a Los Angeles-based program of Cornell University's Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy. The organization develops learning materials that help children and adults find more happiness with fewer purchases. Previously, Ms. Holst was the founder and director of a preschool in the Los Angeles area.

It's no secret that the advertising industry targets children directly. It's been going on for more than fifty years. What's changing is the amount of money that young children are spending, with their parents' help. I came across the following statistic and accompanying analysis on line in the 2001-2002 U.S. Toy Industry Fact Book. "In the year 2000, kids 12 and under spent close to \$30 billion of their own money and influenced \$248.7 billion of their parents." And marketing consultant James McNeal says this number is expected to grow by 5-20 percent in the next ten years."

In her *Young Children* article, Holst quotes the work of psychologist David Walsh, who reports that not only do too many toys overload children's senses but "for them, it becomes a matter of finding something to do after they feel like they've done it all." Walsh connects this widespread trend to the increasing likelihood of eventual drug and alcohol use, warning, "It can be tempting for us to want kids to have and to do the best. However, we may unwittingly be creating an appetite for stimulation that renders normal life dull."

Children need toys—Holst and others are not asserting otherwise—but rather than the entire preschool catalog of West Side Kids or Zany Brainy, just a few open-ended or even child-made toys are sufficient for healthy growth and development. The important thing is that they foster creative imaginative play.

The materials found in a good preschool program, such as those at Weekday, provide all the stimulation a child needs. Blocks, clay, water, pieces of fabric, and cardboard boxes are all open-ended materials that enable children to stretch their imaginations, engage their creativity, and learn to play cooperatively with each other. There are very simple ways that we as families can resist the urge to overbuy and get creative instead. Remember when your child was a toddler and the large cardboard box a toy came in was more fun to play with than the toy itself? You can recapture that feeling again by collecting boxes for crafts projects. We've now devoted an area of our hall

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Staying Sane during the Kindergarten Search

Parents of New York City elementary schoolchildren delight in regaling one another with horror stories about the kindergarten search process. There was the time when little Maggie bit a much bigger girl during her Dalton interview, relegating her to the waiting list. And the Collegiate interview where the mother, father, and child with nanny all arrived independently by limousine (the boy didn't make the cut). One parent spent more than \$100 per hour to prepare her daughter for the Hunter test, only to have her daughter emerge from the test saying, "the lady asked me lots of questions, but I fooled her—I gave her all the wrong answers!"

What these parents don't tell you is that every child they know got into kindergarten somewhere—and that most of them are very happy. This city has a wealth of educational options, many of which put the average American school to shame. Adding stress to the equation doesn't help the search process and can actually get in your way. So how, given all the hype, do you navigate the system with your sanity intact?

First of all, take stock of your own priorities. Realize that someone else's options may not be right for your family. Factors like budget, school location, and the special needs or talents of your child may prompt you to conduct a totally different search than your best friend. And what's great about New York City is that, regardless of your circumstances, there are probably a number of options that could work for your child.

It's helpful to remember that you are the customer in this process. There are schools that you will rule out along the way. Others will make your short list. Use school tours and interviews as opportunities to learn as much as you can about the culture and educational approach of different schools. It is ultimately you who will decide where your child attends elementary school.

Cast a wide net. Once you've defined your needs, apply to a number of schools. Don't limit your search to the most selective schools or to those with a single educational approach. It's often difficult for parents to know what learning style will be best for their four-year-old five years down the road. Your child's teacher at the Weekday School can be a great resource.

Admissions staff members also have a better sense of this from having seen hundreds of children, and their perspective is valuable.

Be realistic in your expectations. When I applied to college back in the 70's (gasp!), I had a fairly good sense of which schools would accept me. I applied to three and ended up with three choices. The New York City kindergarten search process just doesn't work that way. So don't define success by the number of schools your child gets into or even by acceptance into one particular school. Figure out which schools (plural) would be good for your child and define success as acceptance into any one of them. If you have a clear first choice, by all means make it known to that school. But don't feel compelled to define a first choice if you are unsure or if several options could work equally well for your child.

Be kind to yourself and to the rest of your family. The kindergarten search process is, quite frankly, a pain. You need to pay close attention to deadlines and find ways to accommodate time-consuming appointments into your work or child care schedule. So keep in mind some basic tactics to make the search as painless as possible:

- Reward yourself and your family along the way with fun outings on weekends or with a treat after completing an important test or milestone.
- Forgive "mistakes" that you or your child may make. So what if your beautiful child whacks the kid who kicked her under the table at the Trinity interview? Be glad you live in a city with multiple options.
- Avoid crazed or competitive parents. Find a buddy with a sense of humor and swap stories regularly.
- Remember that the process doesn't last forever.

With the right attitude, you will emerge from this with a school for September, a greater understanding of elementary education, and a new appreciation of your child.

And then again, you could always move to New Jersey.

—Nancy Morgan

MATERIAL SIMPLICITY

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closet to storage for household items that could be made into toys: paper towel and toilet paper rolls, the plastic caps on soda and seltzer water bottles, large and small cardboard boxes, plastic yogurt containers. Instead of tossing these items into the recycling bin, they stay in our apartment a while longer. When we have time, we pull out a few items and make something together. After reading *The Magic School Bus: Inside the Solar System* by Joanna Cole and Bruce Degen, my son and I decided to make a space suit out of two cardboard boxes, some old plastic bottle caps (for knobs on the control panel of the spaceship), and tinfoil (for that Apollo 12 look) and we turned a living-room chair into the spaceship. We pretended to blast off into space and visit various planets.

Heidi Seroy, mother of four-year-old Raoul (room 615), does a number of crafts and science projects with her two children. (Her older daughter is a Weekday School alumnae.) Because of her son's interest in dinosaurs and the prehistoric era, Heidi made an authentic and fully operable volcano from papier mache, with a plastic jar in the middle and a Styrofoam meat tray as a base. After pouring one teaspoon of baking soda, several drops each of yellow and red food coloring (to simulate the lava), and some vinegar into the volcano cone, it began "erupting." Says Heidi, "This project is easy to make and can withstand many eruptions without falling apart."

Another recent project sprang from Raoul's burgeoning interest in dragons and knights. Heidi and Raoul constructed a castle from cardboard toilet paper and paper towel rolls painted with glue and rolled in sand to imitate

the castle's stone. They used construction paper shaped into cones for the turret, colored paper for flags, and Q-tips to depict the coat of arms. A drawbridge was made from cardboard and pipe cleaners.

The Harlem, Morningside Heights, and St. Agnes branches of the New York Public Library have a number of good children's crafts books that are wonderful sources for inspiration. Some titles I particularly like are: *Build It with Boxes* (Beech Tree Books, 1993) and *Child's Play: 200 Instant Crafts and Activities for Preschoolers* by Leslie Hamilton (Three Rivers Press, 1989). *Creative Crafts from Cardboard Boxes* by Nikki Connor (Cooper Beech Books, 1996) has particularly easy to follow pictures and very little text.

If you'd like to invest in a book of your own, Barnes & Noble carries the *Anti-Boredom Book: 133 Completely Unboring Things to Do!* (Maple Tree Press: 2000, \$22.95, hardcover). Written by the editors of the award-winning Owl & Chickadee magazines, it shows you how to make a dinosaur out of chicken bones, among other fun and creative crafts, puzzles, games, and science projects (make your own erupting volcano!). *The Little Hands Big Fun Craft Book: Creative Fun for 2- to 6-Year-Olds* by Judy Press (Williamson Publishing Co.: 1995, \$12.95, paperback) features 75 arts-and-crafts projects, many of which can be made from recycled materials. My favorite part is a section called "Big Fun in Special Places," which suggests fun pre- and post-field trip projects relating to the zoo, circus, museum, library, and aquarium. Black-and-white cartoon-style illustrations make the directions easy to understand. With books like these in hand, it's a lot easier to resist a trip to Zany Brainy. I've found that my son plays with his handmade toys for far longer and in more imaginative ways—it makes the extra effort all worthwhile!

—Erica Keirstead

Holiday-Related Books

A BRIEF ROUNDUP

As a writer and mom of two Week-day School girls (Mara, room 615 and Lily, room 730), I'm a bit of a children's book junkie. I love surprising the kids with new books and generally prefer to give books as gifts. So with the holiday season approaching,

I popped into Bank Street Bookstore recently to peruse the newest releases.

Here are the highlights, reviewed and road-tested by my almost-four-year-old and two-and-a-half-year old daughters. The last book mentioned, a work of fiction for adults, is available at Barnes & Noble and the independent bookstore Ivy's Books located on Broadway between W. 92nd and W. 93rd streets.

***Christmas City: A Look Again Book* by Michael Garland, \$15.99**

This gorgeously illustrated, wonderfully interactive hide-and-seek book amuses and challenges young readers and their parents. Readers help Tommy find his aunt who is hiding in a magical metropolis called Christmas City. Clues on every page invite readers to solve puzzles, navigate a maze, count hidden objects like reindeer, snowmen and candy canes, and find all of the people and animals featured in the Twelve Days of Christmas song. My daughter and I had a great time with the book and spent a lot of time on each page (especially the one with the ballerina ice sculptures). And I found myself having fun trying to find all of the hidden items—at press time, I still hadn't figured out how to get through the maze. Tommy finally finds his aunt sitting on Santa's lap at the end with a big present for Tommy and a Merry Christmas wish to all. Ages 3 - 8.

***Pinocchio the Boy*, written and illustrated by Lane Smith, \$16.99**

This tall tale follows Pinocchio through snowy Collodi City on the very first day after his wish to be a real boy comes true. But since Pinocchio was asleep when the Blue Fairy granted his wish, he doesn't realize he's a boy. He meets a girl who helps him discover the boy he has become and helps lead him back to Gepetto. The graphics and the words are equally witty and Smith's rich color palette evokes a wacky winter wonderland. My girls have never read or seen Pinocchio so they weren't as interested in the book as they would have been if they were more familiar with the story. But for fans of Pinocchio, the book is a delight. Ages 4 - 8.

***Micawber* by John Lithgow, illustrated by C.F. Payne, \$17.95**

In John Lithgow's third picture book (*who knew?!*), a creative squirrel named Micawber has created a live/work studio on top of the Central Park Carousel where he makes paintings inspired by the Monets, Van Dycks, and Miros he has spied through the skylights on top of the Met. Lithgow truly has a gift for rhyming verse: "Through the windows he'd gaze at Van Dyck and van Gogh / Appraise every Rembrandt and Titian. / He would scrutinize Rubens, peruse each Rousseau, / Inspect each Lautrec and Cassat and Miro. / He would find a new favorite each time he would go, / And nobody charged him admission." My girls enjoy any books with New York City landmarks in them, especially those that we frequent like the carousel and the Met. So this book should be a favorite for all those city kids on your present list. And the book includes a CD of Lithgow reading the text. Ages 4 - 8.

***Adelita: A Mexican Cinderella Story* by Tomie de Paola, \$16.99**

My two girls love Cinderella. They read it. They watch it. They even pore over the Disney catalogue looking at her picture. So I was eager to see how

they would react to *Cenicienta*, the Mexican Cinderella and star of this beautiful book. Painted in bright Mexican colors and peppered with Spanish words and phrases, Adelita takes Cencienta to a fiesta on a ranch instead of a ball and she wears her mother's traditional rebozo (shawl) instead of glass slippers. Her Prince is not some rich, handsome stranger, but a fellow named Senor Javier whom she knew as a child, and her fairy godmother is Esperanza, the loving nanny and cook who the stepmother fired when Adelita's dad died. But the kids didn't care, as long as Cinderella gets married at the end which, *surprise!*, she does and everyone lives *muy felices por simper*. They were thrilled. And the fact that Adelita actually invites the mean stepmother and the cruel stepsisters to her wedding at the end provides a nice opportunity to teach your kids about kindness and forgiveness. Ages 4 - 8.

***Babar's Yoga for Elephants* by Laurent de Brunhoff, \$16.95**

Eager to do something—anything!—else in my house besides ballet, I decided to introduce the kids to *Babar's Yoga for Elephants*, a book I've noticed around the classrooms of the Weekday School.

With easy-to-follow illustrations and instructions (and a tongue-in-cheek history of elephant yoga), the book guided us through 15 poses, taught us how to practice our breathing, and let us take turns being the instructor "master Sri Mahesh." At the end of the book, Babar and his friend Cornelius "connect to the world around them" by practicing various yoga positions in famous places like Central Park, the rooftop of the Met, the Eiffel Tower, and the Golden Gate Bridge—

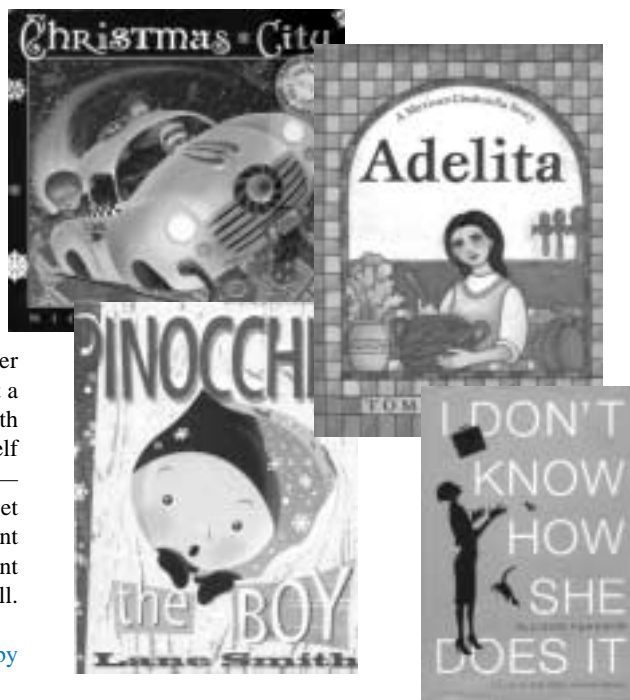
all landmarks the kids delighted in recognizing. Needless to say, the book was a hit in our house and I was thrilled one day during circle time when my 2 1/2 year old announced she was sitting in the lotus position. Babar would be proud. All ages.

***I Don't Know How She Does It*, by Allison Pearson, \$23.00**

One for the moms on your gift list (or yourself, of course), *I Don't Know How She Does It* starts out as a sort of *Bridget Jones' Diary* for those of us who now make playdates instead of going out on dates and then gets dark, fast.

Ultimately, it's a compelling read that manages to touch on virtually everything a mother today grapples with—whether working or stay-at-home or somewhere in between. Author Allison Pearson gives us the diary of Kate Reddy, a high-flying British hedge fund manager who's juggling a fulltime career as her family's primary breadwinner with her duties as the mother of a 5- and 1-year old. Reddy feels unfairly judged by the non-working moms, whom she dubs the "Muffia," for not being involved enough in her daughter's activities, while at the same time she's under pressure at her male-dominated office to downplay the joys of motherhood. While there are lots of laugh-out-loud moments and a happy ending, where all the loose ends are—miraculously—tied up, some of Reddy's exploits just served as painful reminders of my own experiences as a working mom. But without giving too much away, Kate ultimately gets her balance and has a few laughs along the way—and you will too.

—Patty Nasey



Calendar of Upcoming Events

Christmas Tableau & Reception

*Friday, December 20
approximately 10:30am in room 630*

Winter Break

*December 23, 2002—January 3, 2003
School reopens Monday, January 6, 2003*

Kwanzaa Celebration & Reception

Wednesday, January 8

Children's Concert

*Saturday, January 11
11am in the Assembly Hall*

Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration

*Friday, January 17
10:30am in room 630
12:30pm dismissal
School closed Mon., January 20*



Lunar New Year Celebration

Friday, January 31

Class Picture Day

Friday, February 7

Children's Concert

Saturday, February 8

President's Day Holiday

*Monday, February 17
& Tuesday, February 18*

*12:30pm dismissal
Friday, February 14*

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