

Burkholder Homeschooling News

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Burkholder Homeschooling News

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Inside.....

Math 2

Noah's Viola2

Independent Reading2

Fiona.....3

Garden club....3

Great Books....3

Bats...4

Needle felting4

Musette Moose Is Home

We've been writing about this project since its inception 17 months ago and it has finally come to a triumphant close. In May 2003, when Fiona was still just a little bitty baby, we put a poseable stuffed moose, dubbed Musette after the title of a piece from the Suzuki repertoire, in a box. We had sewed her a fetching polarfleece vest with a maple leaf on it. We gave her a tiny violin and case, a Canadian lapel pin, a suitcase, a journal and a cassette tape. We added some photos and descriptions of our area to her journal, and a couple of recordings of the kids playing their instruments to the cassette tape, and mailed her off to the first in a series of 12 Suzuki families around the world.



We've followed her progress from family to family via e-mail reports and photos. In September she arrived at her last stop, Tauranga, New Zealand, and we knew it wouldn't be long before she came home, having successfully circumnavigated the globe. There was great excitement the day she arrived back. Her box simply exploded with souvenirs, photos and wardrobe additions. Her journal was so thick with hundreds of photos and descriptions that it scarcely closed. The project has far exceeded all our expectations. The kids now have personal connections with families around the world, and have vicariously experienced visits to rural Australia, Iceland, Rome, London, San Salvador, Edinburgh castle, the picturesque beaches of western New Zealand, and various farflung corners of North America.

Harvest Festival

Somebody gave us a beautiful hand-sewn "Harvest Festival" banner, so we decided we ought to have a homeschoolers' harvest festival. It was basically five families getting together for a co-operative Harvest Soup and a scavenger hunt and social time. It was a lot of fun ... nice people we enjoy being with, and the weather was great. We brought carrots, beans and jerusalem artichoke to contribute to the soup, and apples and our favourite home-made caramel dip for dessert. The kids chopped the vegetables and added them to the soup pots and even the pickiest eaters ate everything.

I made buns from my wheat. Sophie and I had harvested it (with scissors!). Then I threshed it by hand and winnowed it by putting grains into a cup and gently jiggling the cup while blowing into it (close your eyes and do this outdoors!). Very neat. I ground the wheat in the coffee grinder. When I added warm water to start the buns, the aroma from the fresh-ground wheat hit me in the face — it actually smelled like a food... sweet and warm and homey. The scavenger hunt was a blast. The kids came back with some very unique contributions. Noah and his sidekick Bob brought deer scat back as their "something smelly" sample. Erin managed to cover two or three entries with a single large smelly purple mushroom. Sophie suggested putting a blue shirt on Barry, one of the dads, to get credit for the "blue berry" item on the list. We'll definitely have another harvest festival next year. It was very fun and something we all want to build on.

Math

Sophie is moving very quickly through her math program. Miquon Math is usually used at a pace that stretches it out from Grades 1 to 4. She is almost halfway through it and is barely a young Grade 1'er (not yet six). In that light, when she asked to also work through the Singaporean curriculum Noah has been using, I acquiesced, hoping it would keep her interested but slow her forward progress down a bit. She's blasting through the first grade 2 book this week. We shall see whether it slows her down or not; perhaps it's only whetting her appetite for more!

Noah has continued to progress well through the Singaporean Primary Math curriculum. He is finishing up the first part of their Grade 3 curriculum which includes two-step word problems integrating the four basic operations and the first stages of multi-digit multiplication.

Erin's long break from formal math has continued, though she now has a high school program waiting for her on her desk (Singapore's "New Math Counts 1"). She's started browsing through the supplementary software program for this, and figures she'll start back at bookwork after her next birthday.

Independent Reading

Sophie is now reading more challenging fare for her own entertainment, books nominally at a Grade 4 or 5 reading level. Noah is now capable of reading pretty much anything. He

Music Update

Noah's new Sabatier viola gave him a huge boost last summer. It is the most amazing instrument, and I he really took to the tonal quality. He began working with enthusiasm on the alto clef, and has insisted on taking all his instruction on the viola, making a challenge for his grandmother-teacher who has never taught some of this repertoire. He is working in the middle of Book 3. He also won himself a convert, his 14-year-old friend Paul, who has taken up viola as well. Together the boys make up the heart of the viola section of the Community Orchestra which Noah has joined for the first time this fall. Noah is sometimes ambivalent about piano lately, mostly because he gets overwhelmed by new-note learning. He's playing with incredible musicality for his level and I hope his perfectionism will soften a little so that he is able to work happily at new pieces.

Sophie decided she was happy being just a violinist for at least another year. It was a good decision not to add piano, I think, because she's put a lot of thoughtful energy into her violin work and is suddenly progressing really quickly. She's sorted out her bow-hold and bow-arm in the last month or so and her tone is beautiful all of a sudden. She's working on Gossec Gavotte and handling it very well.

Erin's piano playing has taken off in a big way in the past three months. She's now doing a combination of Grade 7 and Grade 8 conservatory repertoire and having no difficulty with it. She's playing more musically and with more sensitivity to phrasing and tone. She's got less energy going into violin lately, but is really enjoying orchestra and is slowly working her way through the weighty repertoire in Suzuki Book seven.



is beginning to enjoy repeatedly re-reading books, as I remember Erin doing at this stage. Better repeated reading of great literature than lousy kids' formula fiction, I guess! Erin has probably read almost everything we have in our house, which is saying a lot: we own hundreds upon hundreds of novels.

Fiona Updates

It's language explosion time! Two, three and four-word phrases are spilling out. She'll imitate the last word in almost any sentence you say. She's also taken a huge interest in books and has appointed her dad her readaloud slave.

Great Books

Here are some more great books we've enjoyed lately:

Silverwing and its two sequels by Kenneth Oppel. Fantasy set in the natural world, with little bats as protagonists. Great suspense, in a world populated by owls, rats, cannibal bats and humans engaged in bizarre military experiments.

The Amulet of Samarkand by Jonathan Stroud. Fantasy in the same vein as Harry Potter but with more complex characters and two protagonists interweaving their stories.

The Lantern Bearers by Rosemary Sutcliff. Long but gripping and evocative, this historical fiction is set in post-Roman Britain. The protagonist Aquila is a young Roman ex-cavalry officer who deserted in order to stay and fight the Saxon hordes in his adopted country.

Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O'Dell. A real departure from the sorts of things we've been reading lately, this is a story of self-reliance and survival on a Pacific Island.

GRUBS in the Garden

Together with two other parents and a collection of a dozen enthusiastic kids, I'm planning a children's club which will begin meeting early next spring. The club will focus on organic gardening, environmental education and community service. Named GRUBS (Garden Rangers United in Bio-Sustainability), the anagram is an homage to the long-standing local adult group SLUGS (Slocan Lake Garden Society) which maintains the community reflection garden on a volunteer basis. Erin, Noah and Sophie have really enjoyed the volunteer work we've done with SLUGS and are looking forward to the having a club dedicated to children.



I've secured a wonderful 2000 sq. ft. site on the shores of the lake with a pristine view southwards of mountains and forests. The beach is adjacent, with all its educational and play possibilities. Throughout the winter we'll meet periodically to plan and play and learn a bit about plants, cultivation and the environment. I've submitted some grant applications, so with luck we'll be able to fence the area and buy some nice tools, as well as garnering donations from the community at large.



Erin, Noah, Sophie and friends decorate paving stones with mosaics made from bits of broken ceramic tile to create the first useable art for the GRUBS garden. The pavers will grace the entry walkway, welcoming people to the garden.

Needle Felting

We'd heard of needle-felting and seen some of the crafts made using this technique but had never actually tried it. Out of



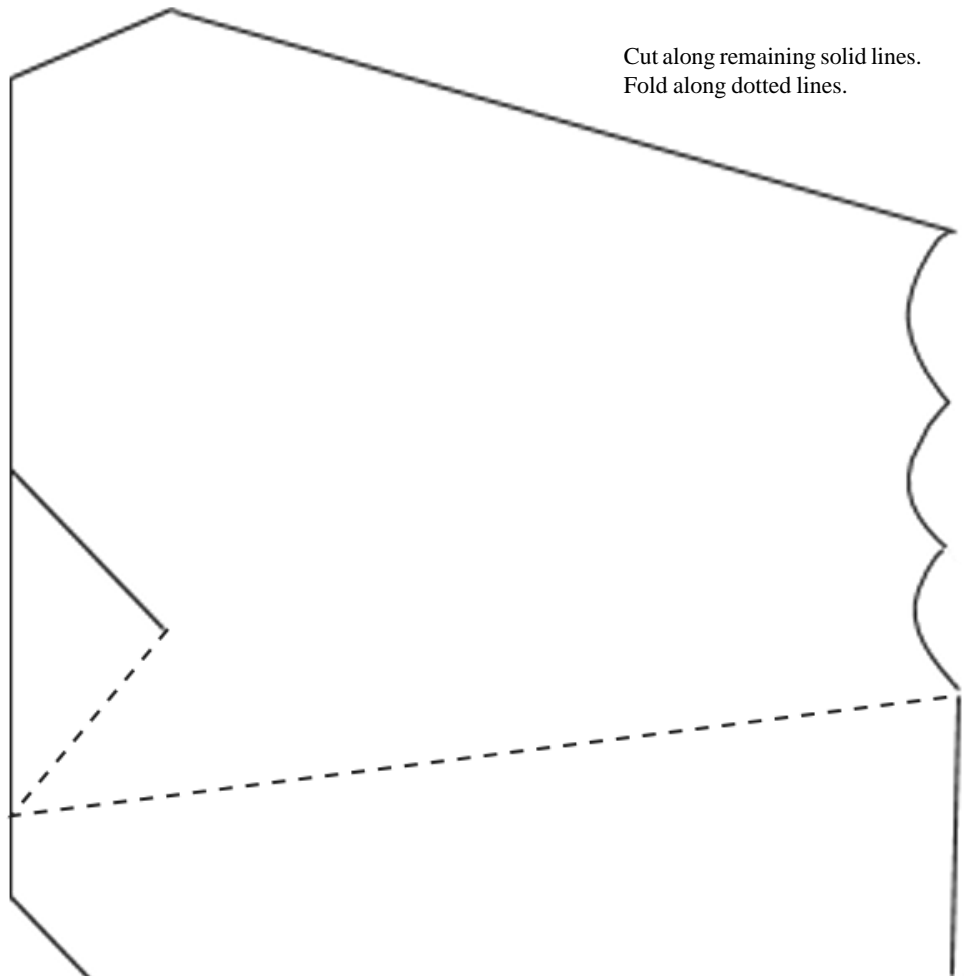
curiosity we bought some coloured wool roving, some of the special barbed needles, and a book for inspiration. We found it to be an enjoyable craft that gives pretty gratifying results even for beginners. Erin made a ladybug, Noah did a fish with moveable fins, and Sophie made a little grey mouse. We were so impressed with the technique that when we couldn't find our first choice of materials for Erin's "Big Bad Wolf As Granny" Halloween mask, we turned to needle felting on a foam rubber base. It turned out very well, we thought!



Bats

Since reading the *Silverwing* books by Kenneth Oppel, the kids have been really interested in bats. Although we're too far from open water to have bats living on our property there are many little brown bats in the area. We have several reference books and have watched some video documentary as well as investigating internet sites, including a bat-cam. Next spring the GRUBS will be building a bat house. In the meantime, Sophie took some paper and designed a folded bat. The older two kids enthusiastically took up the design, embellishing it with handbones, claws and feet. We now have more than a dozen of these decorating our walls and ceilings.

You can make your own little bat by tracing Sophie's original design onto a folded piece of paper and cutting and folding as indicated.



Cut along remaining solid lines.
Fold along dotted lines.

Place this edge along fold in paper