

MIGHTY ROOTS ACADEMY



THE TREASURE OF FALL

VOL. 6 | FALL 2024



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Welcome!

The vibrant colors of fall are beginning to paint the landscape around us. This time of year offers a unique opportunity to connect with nature, embrace new learning experiences, and enjoy the outdoors in all its autumnal glory.

In this issue, we're diving deep into the season with articles that will ignite curiosity in young minds and cozy up your family's learning time.

Nature offers endless opportunities for exploration, and we encourage our families to embrace the outdoors—whether through climbing trees, identifying plants, or simply using all five senses to experience the wonders of fall in a mindful and sensory-rich way.

We hope this issue inspires you to get outside, embrace the season, and explore all the incredible learning opportunities that fall has to offer. Let's celebrate the magic of nature, the joy of learning, and the spirit of togetherness that autumn brings!

A Message from our Director

As a country girl growing up, I always found such joy in the fall harvest. That time of year, when I would see the rewards of spring and summer being reaped, I couldn't help but feel happy. The apples that bloomed in spring and grew through the summer heat are now perfectly ripe and ready to enjoy, savor, and store away for the winter. Wagons full of golden corn sit at the edge of the field, while the combine is at work, sparkling like treasure found at the end of summer's journey. Pumpkins and squash are being plucked from the garden, filled with the excitement of what they will become later in the fall.

My hope is that this fall, you find your own moments of harvest in your family's educational and personal journey. Sometimes those harvests are big, but often, they are small: the frustrating concept that finally clicks, the completed project, the new skill learned, or the connection made. I hope you will drink in the joy of your harvest.

To inspire you along the way, I welcome you to our fall edition of the Mighty Roots Magazine, where the beauty of nature, the magic of autumn, the bounty of the harvest, and the joy of learning come together!



~ Tracy Schroeder



"And thus began the transition, as the warmth of summer faded and the quiet song of rustling leaves signaled the season's gentle shift."

LIVING INTENTIONALY

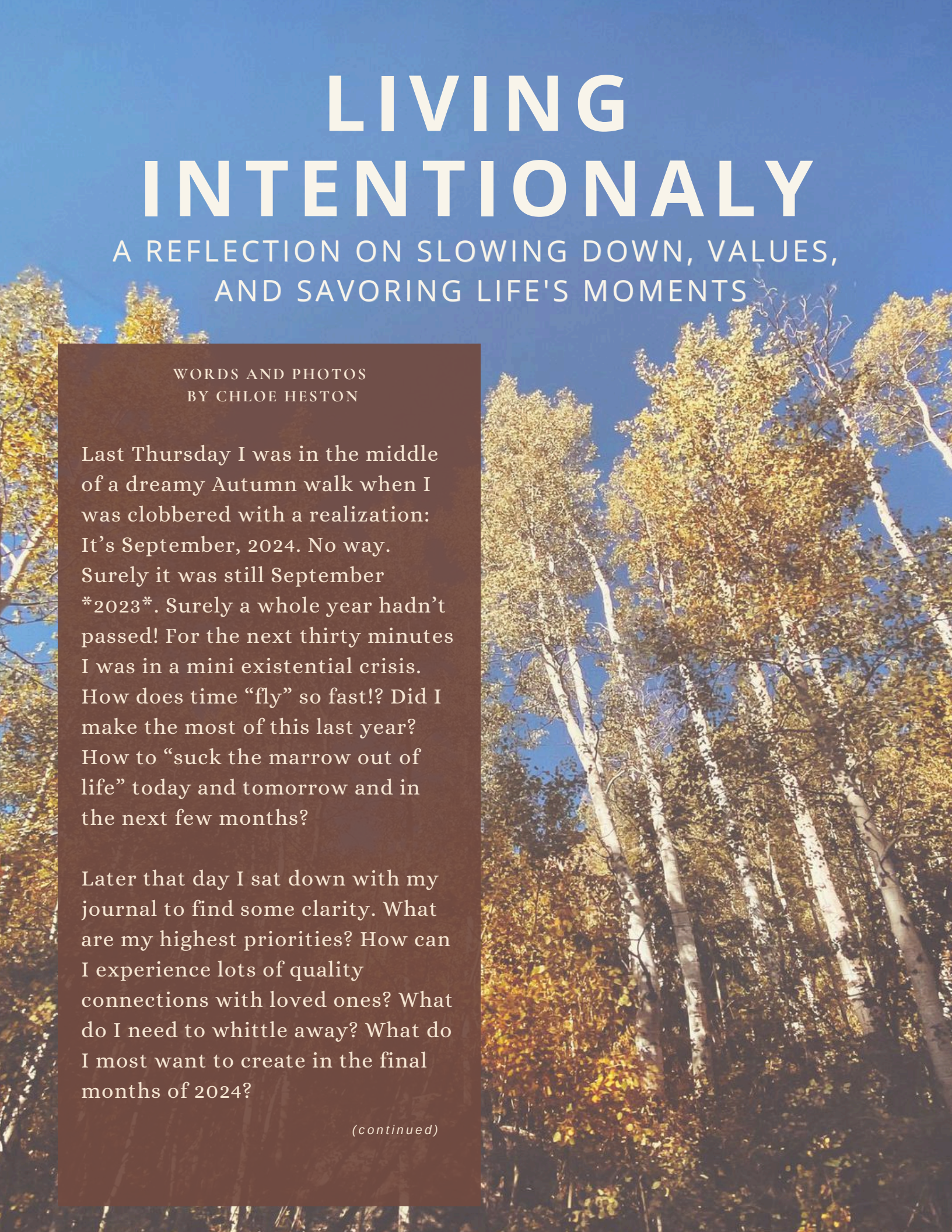
A REFLECTION ON SLOWING DOWN, VALUES,
AND SAVORING LIFE'S MOMENTS

WORDS AND PHOTOS
BY CHLOE HESTON

Last Thursday I was in the middle of a dreamy Autumn walk when I was clobbered with a realization: It's September, 2024. No way. Surely it was still September *2023*. Surely a whole year hadn't passed! For the next thirty minutes I was in a mini existential crisis. How does time "fly" so fast!? Did I make the most of this last year? How to "suck the marrow out of life" today and tomorrow and in the next few months?

Later that day I sat down with my journal to find some clarity. What are my highest priorities? How can I experience lots of quality connections with loved ones? What do I need to whittle away? What do I most want to create in the final months of 2024?

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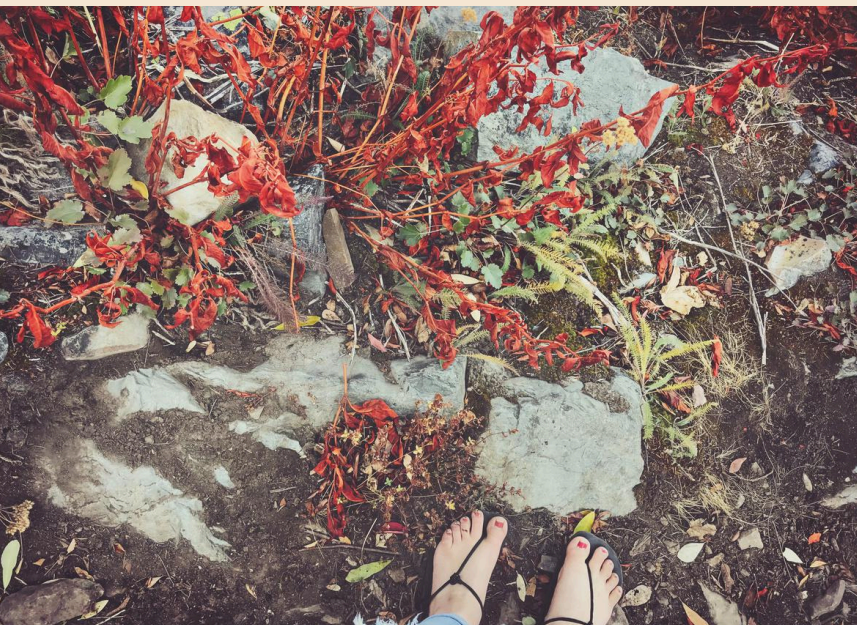
Alan Cohen says, “When your intention is clear, so is the way.”

Recently, in The Science of Happiness class, we discussed Values. From a long list of options, each student identified a few values that were most important to them. They chose words like adventure, self-discipline, generosity, hard work, authenticity, fun, independence and peace. It was so fun to see their lightbulb moments! By getting clear on their deepest desires they were also clarifying their intentions moving forward. And, possibly without realizing it, they’d begin making choices and taking steps to live more aligned with their values.

That sounds lovely, doesn’t it? Living aligned. Mmmmm...yes, please. How about you join me in a mini brainstorm shesh right here, right now? I’ve listed some questions for you to ponder below. Give yourself the gift of pausing for just a few minutes, or come back later with a journal and cup of tea if you have more time.

Take a minute between each question to close your eyes and ponder an answer before moving on. These five minutes can be so incredibly rewarding!

(continued)



“ALL WE HAVE TO
DECIDE IS WHAT TO
DO WITH THE TIME
THAT IS GIVEN US.”

-J. R. R. Tolkien

Ask yourself...

- What's one of my favorite experiences from this summer?
- What value does this experience most embody? (Family connectedness? Accomplishment? Creativity? Nature? Solitude? etc.)
- What is one experience I can incorporate into each week this Autumn that embodies this value?
- Is there a specific day or time I can schedule this into each week?

Now take a minute later today to jot some reminders into your calendar. Easy-peasy, right?

Enjoy this season as you live intentionally and aligned. May you relish each moment of your beautiful life!



photo: cari schawo

Chloe is a Learning Guide at Mighty Roots Academy. She lives in Olathe, KS, with her husband, two kids, and their Miniature Australian Shepherd.

Homeschooling with the Seasons

Building Lasting Connections with Nature Through Each Season

words and photos
by tracy schroeder



As we settle into Fall, we hope you are finding your new homeschool rhythm for the year. Day to day routines or rhythms are starting to fall into place, but have you ever considered adding a seasonal rhythm as well?

These are things that you do in your homeschooling each season. One seasonal rhythm that our family has enjoyed over the years is visiting the same nature spot at least once each season.



How It Works:

Pick a place you would like to visit. It can be a park, trail, a family favorite or a new location.

Here are some our local favorites:

- Cave Springs
- Blue River Trails at Minor Park
- Jerry Smith Park
- Overland Park Arboretum – *(Paid entry but free on the first Tuesday of the month)*
- Lakeside Nature Center
- Ewing and Muriel Kauffman Memorial Garden

(continued)



Decide if you want to do a “sit spot” or “walking observation”
A sit spot is where you choose a location that you sit at each time you visit. While sitting you observe what you see, hear, and feel, noticing weather, plants and wildlife. Those who enjoy art or photography may enjoy drawing, sketching, or taking photographs of their observations.

Take notes of observations just from that location. Of course, after or before you can always do more exploring, but this is a great option for those who need help slowing down or may feel overwhelmed by doing a walking observation. We used this a lot when I had a toddler along for the adventure.

A walking observation is really what it sound like. Choose a short trail or path that you can walk slowly and stop and make observations along the way. If the walk you plan on taking is longer than a mile, I recommend that you choose a shorter section for your official observations.

This helps one be able to investigate in more detail without getting overwhelmed or younger children getting tired. Make sure to note your section of trail for observations so that you use the same section each season. Of course, note other awesome finds along the way but this section of trail is where you will do your most detailed observations.

(continued)

We have used this more as my kids have gotten older. We use trails that we are all familiar with so that as we get separated while noting our observations, I know we will all make it back to the same location.

Some Observation Tips:

Take along resources to help you be successful. I have everyone carry their own supplies in a backpack for a walking observation. For a sit spot, I usually bring a picnic blanket and supplies to spread out for us all to use together.

A phone can be a great resource. Apps like Seek or PlantNet, even google lens, can help identify unknown nature finds and help

look up facts right then when the observation and interest are fresh. I also recommend noting them down so that you and your kids will be able to refer to them later to help store the information in long term memory.

If you plan to take photos, set a limit. In our digital age we can get a little photo happy but not really end up with the greatest pictures. Take pictures intentionally, focusing on capturing the features of your observations. By choosing 5-10 photos then you can easily and affordably print them to add to observation pages or journals. Printing allows for a seasonal comparison of the location.

(continued)



photo:
cari schawo





photo:
cari schawo

Bring along a journal, notebook, or observation page. This helps in being intentional about your observations. Add sketches, written descriptions, observations of how many, what colors, number of varieties, exc. It can be great to observe the same tree, bush, or creek in each of the four seasons. This also allows you look back at your notes from other seasons for comparing and contrasting.

Keep your supplies simple. Simple colored pencils, notebook, and markers are great for your first few times out. If you become interested in long sit spots, then it can be fun to add watercolors and books for comparing. An observation page with specific things to look for can be helpful if you are new to seasonal observations.

Don't forget the snacks and water! Nothing will cut the best of plans short as a thirsty or hungry kid! Prepare in advance by bringing water and a snack.

Have a plan and set the expectation, but be flexible. This is supposed to be a fun learning experience to connect as a family. Take time to enjoy, but set clear expectations of how long you plan to spend observing, number of observations, information you want your child to note down, exc. This will keep everyone on the same page with clear expectations. But be flexible when you thought you would try to find birds but none seem to be around.

Enjoy the rhythms of seasonal observations!

Observation Ideas

Use the following observation list to help get you started on noting the changes of the seasons.

1

LOCATION: _____

2

DATE: _____

3

SEASON: _____

4

Something I have never seen before: _____

5

A favorite thing I found: _____

6

What colors, plants, or animals are in abundance?: _____

7

Pick something & count how many you see in the area: _____

8

Sketch, take a photo, or describe a specific spot that you will make note of each season. Write a description to compare with the other seasons.



TURNING PAGES

words by
chloe heston

READING, REFLECTING,
AND RELISHING THE SEASON

September has rolled in, to the delight of Mighty Root's students and learning guides. This particular learning guide is so, so ready. Am I perhaps over-eager for such a season? Is that even possible?

These days, it's hard to keep from grinning as Autumn unfurls its velvet grays into the sky, and blusters in with chilly winds that blow the dust off our tea kettles and coffee mugs. As if on cue, Maples blush red, and wild, thorny branches droop heavy with rosehips.

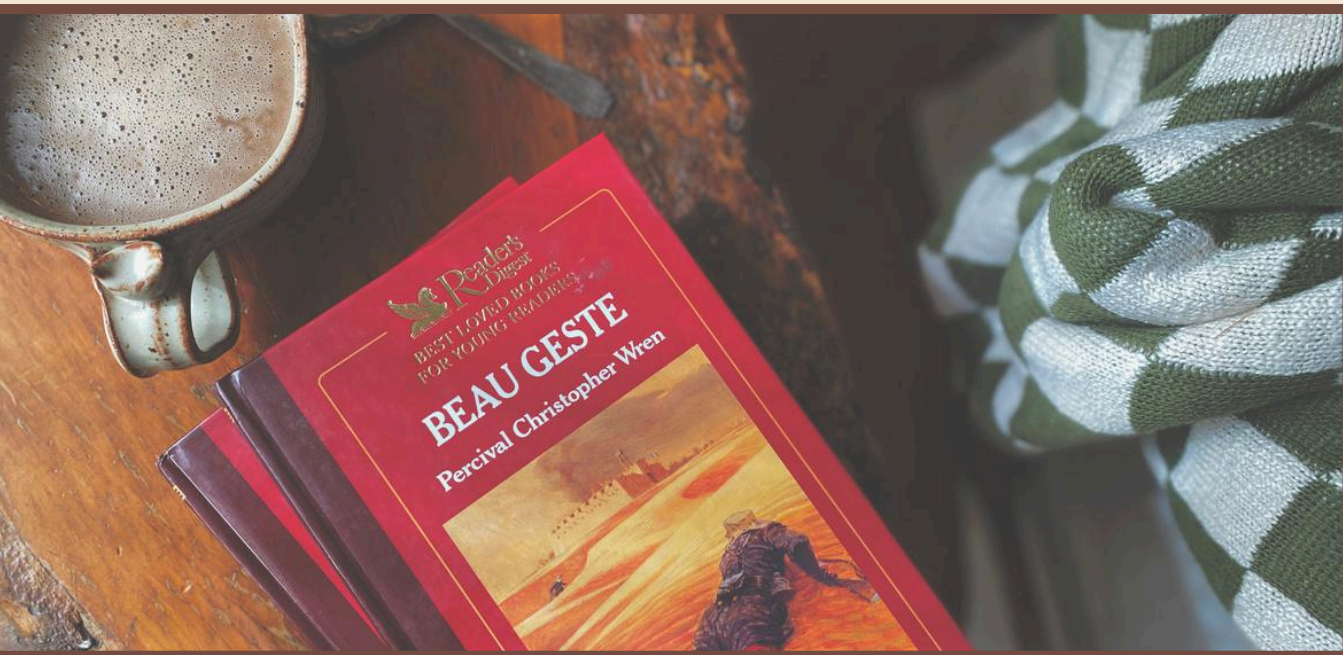
I excitedly plow through my to-do list...

- Pull out the tub of scarves and Sperrys. Check.
- Put “Canned Pumpkin, Chuck Roast, Earl Grey Tea” on the grocery list. Check.
- Scour the bookshelves for our family's favorite read alouds. Check.

Every free surface in our tiny living room disappears under stacks of books. Now I just get to be extra intentional to create free spaces in our days to read said books.

The kids settle down with their coloring books and I start with my old favorites... McCloskey's *Time of Wonder*, Muller's *A Year in Our New Garden*, the Devlin's Cranberry series. At nine and thirteen years old, my kiddos have perhaps outgrown these books. But I have not, so that's that.

(continued)



We amble into biographies, the bulk of these based in WWII Europe. My most loved of these will always be *The Hiding Place*. As I read, we are swept into Corrie ten Boom's idyllic childhood in the Netherlands, and then into her family's selfless love and courage in the face of Nazi brutality. We cry happy and sad tears, and wonder if we would have the same moral grit if we lived through such difficult circumstances.

We move along to reading abridged classics. From the Reader's Digest Best Loved Books for Young Readers series, we read *Kidnapped* and *Beau Geste*. Stevenson's *Kidnapped* is the perfect cozy read with its adventures set on the Scottish seas and dreary moors. The abridged *Beau Geste* is a sweeping tale of three brother's mysterious involvement in a stolen jewel, and their exploits in the Foreign Legion. The story brims with suspense, but at its core is an ode to brotherly love and courage.

As we read, one of the kiddos will end up snuggled next to me, usually sneaking sips of my (now cold) coffee. Each year we're served this generous slice of cozy connection. I savor the rhythm of these slow moments at home, woven through the bustle of our days at Mighty Roots.

Autumn is a feast for the eyes and heart, and I happily gobble it up. It seems an appropriate time to celebrate the holiday of gratitude. It seems fitting to gather weekly with fellow students-turned friends on the Mighty Roots property just as the air is cooling. And it feels so very right to get lost in books for hours, perched in a favorite climbing tree, or sprawled on a picnic blanket amongst the fallen acorns.

This season nourishes each of us in different ways. I hope that you and your family find those sweet spots of connection doing your favorite Autumn activities as well!

Finger Knitting

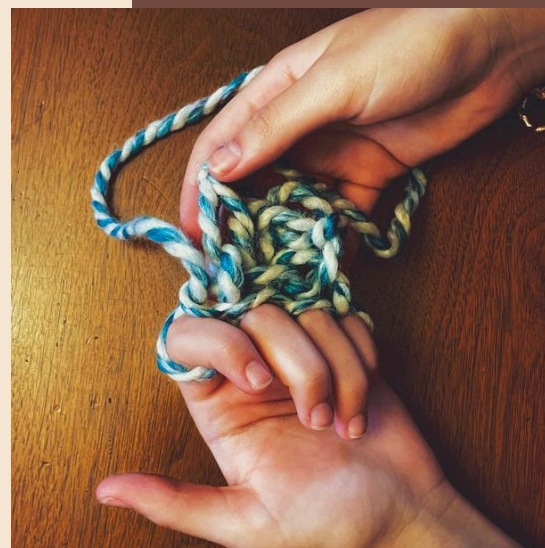
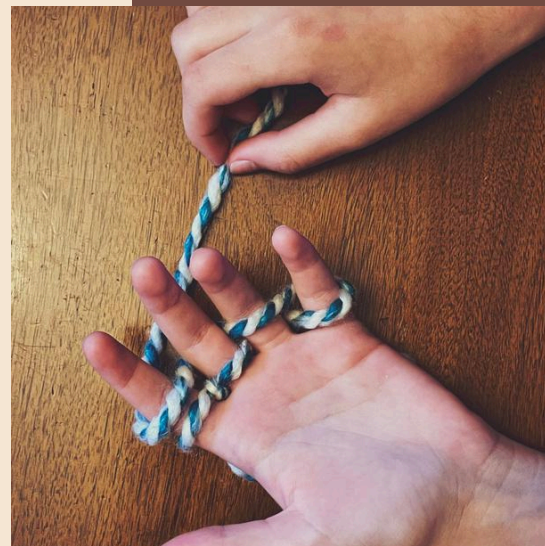
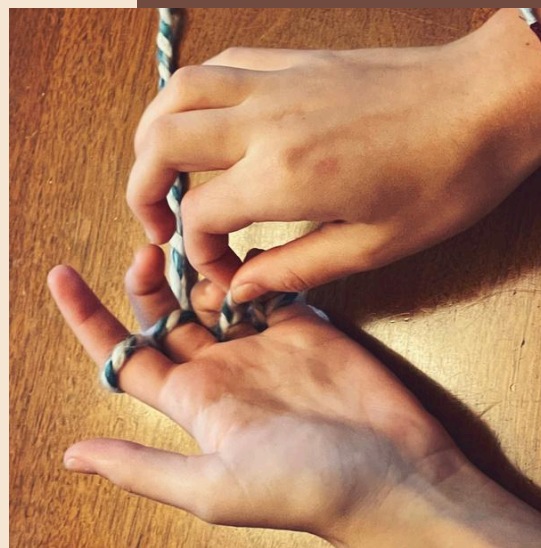
A BRAIN BOOSTING ACTIVITY FOR CHILDREN

words and photos
by carmelle armstrong

As children grow, they move their bodies in super BIG and very tiny ways that help them develop coordination, balance, and spatial awareness. They use two fingers to grasp a thin blade of grass, with a ladybug crawling on it, to hold it closer to their face. They swing their legs up and around tree branches to climb higher and higher. Children are learning and growing every second of the day in thousands of ways! These physical movements equal great cognitive gains as well.

One key way that humans develop physically, which also promotes brain growth, is through a process called "crossing the midline". The midline is an imaginary vertical line running down the middle of our body. Crossing the midline is the way in which we use one side of our body to perform a task in the space on the opposite side of our body. During this process, the right and left sides of our brain are learning to work together. The whole brain functions better as a team. For example, writing a story requires logical structure and grammar (left brain) alongside imaginative storytelling and character development (right brain). Crossing the midline influences everything, from gross and fine motor skills, to higher level academic skills such as reading. So practicing this crucial skill is beneficial to the growth of children in countless ways. Children and adults practice crossing the midline every day. We reach down to put on our shoes and socks with both hands or we hold a book in one hand and turn the page with the other.

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Some ways that we can encourage children to cross the midline include: cutting with scissors, tying laces, beating a drum, throwing or kicking a ball, clapping games...the possibilities are endless - and usually fun!

As autumn blows in and the days get shorter, children start to naturally focus on cozier indoor activities and creative projects, like finger knitting. Finger knitting is an especially rewarding, crafty and fun way to practice crossing the midline and to boost brain and body coordination. Finger knitting involves both hands, manipulating the yarn together and separately, and often traveling across the midline of the body. It is also an easy project to carry in the car, around the house or even outside, and helps focus fidgety fingers and minds.

To get started, all you need is some yarn! The bulky kinds are more satisfying because they lead to quicker (and fluffier) results, but any yarn will do. You can search online for a simple video, or a step-by-step tutorial - there are loads out there. You might be surprised that you will want to do it along with your child! The end results can range from simple, like bracelets or scarves, to more complex, like a coaster, a hat, or even a basket.

Next time you are searching for a fun activity, grab some yarn, gather your little one, and start finger knitting! Embrace the cozy season ahead by diving into this delightful craft together, and watch as your child's skills - and physical and cognitive development - grow with every stitch! You will be amazed at how quickly they catch on. Not only will you create a charming little scarf together, but your child's coordination and cognitive skills will develop along the way.



Carmelle is a Learning Guide at Mighty Roots Academy. She lives in Kansas City, MO, with her husband Matt, daughter Olive, and favorite cat, Pippi.





Taste of Fall

words and photos
by aaron dutton

ROASTED BLACK PLUMS: SWEET COMFORT IN EVERY BITE

Have you started to notice the subtleties of the transition into Autumn? Saunter through the woods, down your neighborhood sidewalk or even just sit in your yard and you might notice that the light is becoming more ambient as it shines through the leaves of trees, the scent of wood and earth is more pronounced, early mornings are soft and cool and the days are fading into darkness sooner. This is the time of year we begin to surround ourselves with totems of the Harvest and its bounty.

Comfort is a word that, for me, embodies the essence of Autumn. One of the first comfort dishes I make this time of year is Roasted Black Plums. It has all the elements needed for a perfect early Fall comfort food...warm spices, subtle sweetness and an intoxicating smell while cooking.

This dish is incredibly versatile. You can use any plum, nectarine or peach. It can be added to a bowl of warm steel cut oats, quinoa, corn grits, cream of buckwheat, or granola. Top it with yogurt, creme fraiche, whipped cream, ice cream, whatever your heart desires. It can be served warm or cold, though warm is definitely preferable on cool mornings.

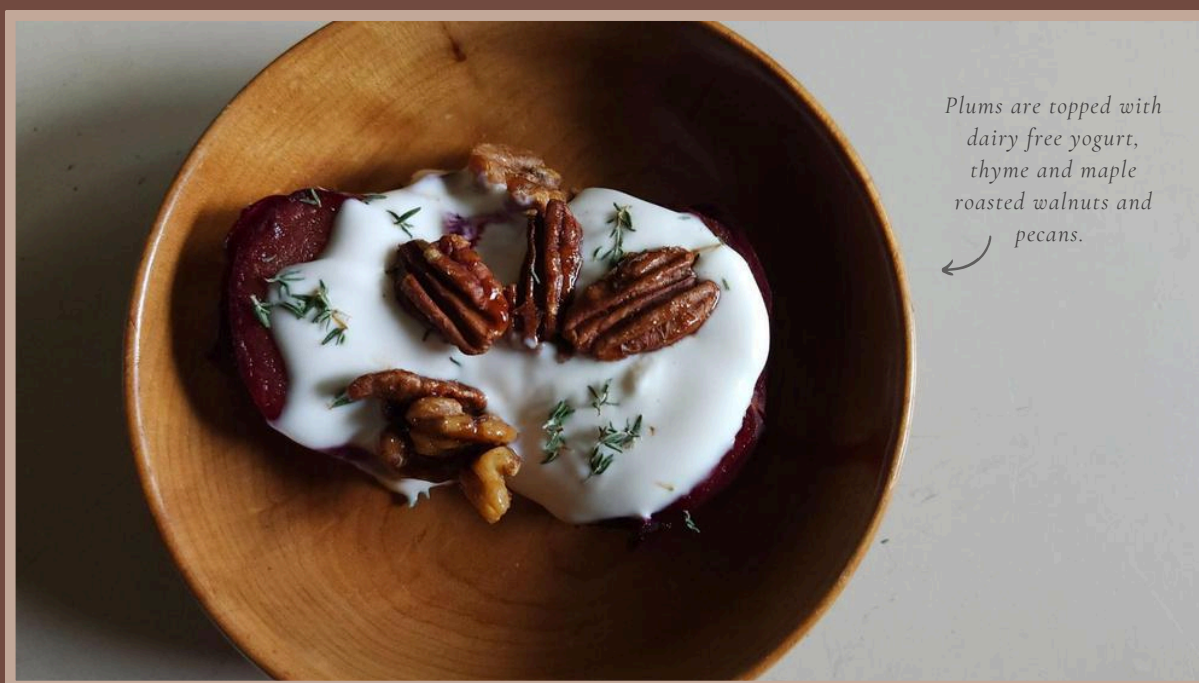
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Roasted Black Plums

- 6 black plums
- Raw Honey (maple syrup, brown sugar, coconut sugar)
- Cinnamon
- Nutmeg, fresh grated
- Toppings of choice



Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Cut each plum in half and remove the pits. Place plums cut side up in a medium-sized casserole dish. Drizzle with honey. Sprinkle the plums with cinnamon and nutmeg. Cover and cook for 20-25. The plums will create a beautiful syrup on the bottom of the dish. Once out of the oven, let cool for about 5 minutes. Baste the tops with their own juices. Serve warm with toppings of choice.



*Plums are topped with
dairy free yogurt,
thyme and maple
roasted walnuts and
pecans.*

Aaron Dutton is a Learning Guide at Mighty Roots Academy. She homeschools her two boys in South KC. She enjoys exploring wild arts such as basketry, clay, broom making, pigments and botanical printing.



NATURE'S HEALER

words and photos
by krystle willmore

Unlocking the Magic of Black Walnut Leaves

The Black Walnut tree is in its last bit of season, so now is the time to make something with it! Black Walnut is most known as an antiparasitic, helping heal the bowels from parasites. Did you know that 65% of the annual harvest of Black Walnut comes from Missouri? We are very lucky to have this amazing herb growing all around us!

Black Walnut also makes a delicious syrup that rivals maple. You may have to try harvesting it during the winter. This season we will specifically be using the black walnut leaves which are antifungal, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, antiviral, astringent, and more.

This makes the herb a good one to use for when you get sick. This tea you will make is great for fighting off parasites and viruses. It can also be used externally as an antiseptic wash.

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photo: carolyn willmore

Black Walnut Leaf Tea

Ingredients:

- 1 teaspoon dried Black Walnut leaves 16 oz hot water*

Tools:

- Muslin bag or tea ball

Place the Walnut leaves in a tea ball or muslin bag and rest in the tea cup. Pour hot water over and let it steep for 15-20 minutes then drink warm.

For adults drink 3-4 cups daily, Children ages 2-6 drink 3-4 1/4 cups daily and ages 7-12 drink 3-4 1/2 cups daily.

*herbal teas should never be placed in boiling water, this destroys the medicinal properties of the herb.

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It is easy to make your own dried Black Walnut leaves. After harvesting leaves you can hang them up to air dry, place them in a dehydrator (follow the dehydrator's instructions), or place them in the oven on the lowest heat and monitor them until the leaves are dried.

When harvesting your Black Walnut leaves, make sure you know that they are in fact 100% Black Walnut leaves. Black Walnut is a large deciduous tree, native to North America, which can grow upwards to 130 feet. It prefers sunlight and is typically found growing at the edge of woods, in fence rows and other areas where it can be in full sunlight.

You can use these tips to identifying the tree:

Bark: grey-black and deeply grooved

Leaves: The leaves are alternate, odd-pinnate with 15-23 leaflets with the largest being located in the center. Leaflets have toothed margins and a main central vein. The terminal leaflet is often absent from the leaf. The leaves attach to the tree with long petioles.

Walnut: Green with 2-5 in a bunch. Please note the walnuts only heavily produce every other year. This year is a heavy year!



Photo: Cari Schawo



Mighty Roots Academy has one of the largest Black Walnut trees I've ever seen! This tree is beloved by all and many students sit in the swings hanging from the tree or eat under it at lunch.

Krystle is the Musical Director and a Learning Guide at Mighty Roots Academy. You can follow her @onthegreenmeadows



In the Stillness
of the Trees,
I am Home.

~ Wendell Berry



From Garden to Jar

PICKLING CUCUMBERS WITH
OUR GARDENING CLASS

by angela schilling

Our gardening class celebrated the fruits of their labor by getting to harvest cucumbers they grew themselves and turning them into delicious homemade pickles! This project was a hands-on way for our students to learn about the full process of growing, harvesting, and preserving food. There's something magical about transforming garden-fresh cucumbers into crisp, tangy pickles with just a few simple ingredients.

Not only did our students practice patience and teamwork, but they also discovered the joy of creating something they could share and enjoy with their families. Keep reading to find the easy recipe we used for our pickles, perfect for anyone who wants to try pickling at home! ———>





MIGHTY ROOTS PICKLES RECIPE:

- 3/4 cup water
- 3/4 cup white vinegar
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tbsp kosher salt
- 1 1/2 tsp fresh cracked black pepper
- 3 medium-sized pickling cucumbers (like Kirby pickles) thinly sliced
- 1/2 medium sweet onion thinly sliced

Combine ingredients and bring to a boil. Pour brine over cucumbers and onions and refrigerate 24 hours before enjoying.



Angela is a learning guide at Mighty Roots Academy. She lives in Belton, MO with her hubby, two kids, two pitties, and three snakes. She loves the quiet and stillness that gardening brings.

BRANCHING OUT

The Benefits of Climbing Trees

At Mighty Roots Academy, we believe that nature is the best playground, offering children countless opportunities to explore, grow, and learn. One of the most timeless and beneficial activities for kids is tree climbing. More than just a fun pastime, climbing trees fosters essential developmental skills in children. Let's explore why tree climbing should be encouraged and celebrated.

1. Physical Benefits

Tree climbing provides a full-body workout that strengthens key areas of the body:

- **Muscle Strength and Endurance:** Pulling, gripping, and lifting their bodies as they navigate branches engages muscles in their arms, legs, and core, boosting both muscle strength and endurance.
- **Core Strength:** Maintaining balance while climbing improves a child's core stability, which is essential for posture and overall body control.
- **Gross Motor Skill Development:** This activity helps children practice large movements like pulling, pushing, and reaching, all of which are fundamental to their gross motor development.

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2. Coordination and Spatial Awareness

- **Motor Planning:** When children climb, they have to plan their movements and think about where to place their hands and feet next, sharpening their motor planning skills.
- **Spatial Awareness:** As they climb, kids naturally develop a sense of where their body is in space, enhancing their spatial awareness—an important skill for everything from navigating their environment to understanding geometric concepts.

3. Cognitive Growth

- **Decision-Making Skills:** Climbing requires children to make quick decisions about their next move, honing their problem-solving abilities. They must assess which branches are safe to step on and how to maneuver around obstacles, teaching them to think critically in the moment.
- **Executive Functioning Skills:** The process of managing and regulating their actions—like adjusting their climbing strategy when a branch wobbles or a foot slips—helps to build executive functioning, the brain's ability to organize thoughts and actions.

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4. Resilience and Emotional Growth

- **Resilience:** Climbing trees presents physical and mental challenges that build resilience. Whether they're figuring out how to overcome the fear of heights or navigating a tricky branch, kids learn how to keep trying when things get difficult.
- **Self-Confidence:** Each successful climb boosts a child's self-confidence. Mastering a new tree or reaching the top gives them a sense of accomplishment and helps foster a belief in their abilities.

5. Sensory Benefits


- **Heavy Work Input:** Tree climbing provides "heavy work" input, a term used to describe activities that involve pushing, pulling, or lifting. This kind of sensory input helps regulate the body's sensory system, contributing to a child's ability to focus and calm down in stressful situations.

Why Tree Climbing Matters for Today's Kids

In a world where screens often dominate childhood activities, tree climbing offers an engaging, unplugged experience. It allows kids to connect with nature while enhancing their physical, emotional, and cognitive growth. The sense of adventure and achievement that comes from climbing also teaches children to trust in their capabilities and push their limits safely.

At Mighty Roots Academy, we strive to integrate nature-based activities like tree climbing into our curriculum to encourage holistic development. As fall approaches, let's make the most of the beautiful outdoors and watch our children flourish—one tree at a time.





“If you are
too busy to
climb a tree,
you are too
busy.”

- Nicolette Sowder

AUTUMN AWAKENINGS

A Sensory Celebration of the Season

words by
krystle willmore

As the season changes it's important to regulate ourselves to the atmosphere around us. The best way to do this is through Nature Therapy. Nature Therapy is the practice of coming into presence by igniting your senses through the natural world. It can be practiced by anyone and done right at home and in your yard!

A dysregulated nervous system will cause issues such as difficulty sleeping, brain fog, reduced motivation, increased irritability, digestive issues, and much more. All of this can be triggered by a change in weather! This is why it's important to help regulate our nervous system so that we can smoothly transition into each season. We should also understand that nature has its own cycle and if we tune into this rhythm we will set ourselves up for success.

Autumn is a season of surrender and preparing to rest for winter. As the leaves fall from the trees, we are reminded that we can't always be full and that there is a time to let go. The tree frees itself and returns to emptiness, ready to begin the cycle again.



We aren't going to physically lose any leaves, but one way we can surrender is to let go of the expectations we place upon ourselves. When we allow ourselves room for error, we let go of unnecessary stress. This helps us to better focus on our priorities in life. There is a season of challenging ourselves, but Autumn isn't the one. We should be gentle and know that this time is temporary and we will feel our full sense of self again.

(continued)



photo: carolyn willmore



photo: krystle willmore



photo: carolyn willmore



photo: krystle willmore

Even with this practice, our bodies still need some help with regulation. The simplest way to go about this is to tune into our senses. Our bodies will best respond to this when we connect these senses to the natural world. Here are some suggestions to try this Autumn season:

Sight: watch the trees change color, look for squirrels that are carrying food to store for winter, watch the sunset.

Hear: listen for the wind rustling through the trees, listen to the different animals and insects at dusk, try to notice the quietest sound while walking outside.

Taste: drink a warm tea or cider, go apple picking and mindfully eat the apple, try a new food you've never had.

Smell: notice the scent of a black walnut tree, light your favorite scented candle, see if you can notice a different smell in the air.

Touch: crinkle a leaf that has fallen to the ground, walk barefoot on the grass, bake some bread and knead the dough with your hands.

When you consciously tune your senses to the world around you, your body starts to relax. This will not only help you to have a better mood emotionally, you will also physically feel better. This isn't a one time thing though, it is something you need to practice often. Remember, don't try to be perfect and do it daily, let go of any expectation, just do it as you remember. Naturally the practice will become a routine and you will also notice the beauty that is all around all the time.

May you have sunshine over your head and earth beneath your feet, always.

-Krystle

Harvesting Health



Making Elderberry Syrup from Homegrown Berries

words and photos
by aaron dutton

When our boys, now thirteen and ten, were four and a half and two, we planted Elderberry cuttings that we rooted in water.

In the six years since planting, the two Elderberry saplings grew into an enormous forest that provides us medicine.

This year we harvested and dehydrated Elderberries in August in preparation for making a preventative medicine in the fall. Dried Elderberries may be purchased at Natural Grocers fairly inexpensively.

(continued)





ELDERBERRY SYRUP

Yield: approximately 3 cups syrup

4 C water
1 1/2 C (6 oz) dried Elderberries
2 Tbsp freshly grated ginger
2 cinnamon sticks
6 whole cloves
1 star anise pod
1 C raw honey

Place all ingredients, except honey, in a pot. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer for 45 minutes. Allow to cool to room temperature, strain and add honey.

Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

Dosing:

Kids: 1/2 tsp up to 2 tsp daily

Adults: 1 tsp up to 5 tsp daily



MEET OUR LEARNING GUIDE

KERRY MCGHEE

Mighty Roots Academy has been blessed with learning guides who are not only educators but also passionate role models who inspire curiosity and a love for learning.

In this edition of 'Meet Our Learning Guide,' we introduce Kerry McGhee, a dedicated learning guide who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the classroom. As a parent and educator, Kerry understands the importance of nurturing young minds both at home and in our academy, fostering an environment where students can explore, question, and grow.

(continued)



Tell us a little about yourself.
Hobbies, Interests?

“I teach mostly science classes and some reading and math at Mighty Roots. Before kids, I worked for nonprofits doing program administration, fundraising, and development work, so I also help with grants and fundraising at MRA.

I have a business degree from Truman State University, and I am a student again, working on my teaching certificate in Waldorf education. I have three kids (12, 9, 7), a dog, and two cats. I enjoy reading, riding bikes, running, swimming, and hiking - being active outdoors! I also enjoy traveling with my family and I am always game for a good documentary.”

How did you find out about Mighty Roots?

“I learned about Mighty Roots through other homeschooling families.”

What inspired you to be a Learning Guide?

“The Mighty Roots approach to education was very much in alignment with my educational philosophy. I saw how much my kids enjoyed being here, and how much they were growing. I also thought I could learn some things myself! After substituting a couple of times, I was hooked and applied to be a Learning Guide.”

(continued)





What do you love most about teaching at Mighty Roots?

“There’s a lot to love about teaching at Mighty Roots! I love the diversity of topics I get to explore with the kids. It’s so fun to see them light up when they make a connection or discover something new! Each learner shows me a new way of thinking and I love the unique perspective each student gives.

The staff at Mighty Roots is also great; I learn from what other guides are doing and just enjoy getting to be around such amazing individuals! Of course, I love that we get to be outside so much too. There’s nothing better than watching a herd of kids dash through the woods, laughing, and enjoying each other.”

Which subjects or activities are you most passionate about teaching?

“I really enjoy teaching science because I think it's kind of magical! Getting to guide the students in asking questions, being curious, and cultivating wonder for the world around us is the best job. I also really enjoy teaching reading. It's so exciting to see students put together the building blocks of phonics, comprehension, and writing to help them share their ideas and explore the world.”

(continued)

What drew you or got you into homeschooling?

“I never anticipated homeschooling before I had kids, but as my oldest approached school- age I realized I didn't want to put her in a traditional classroom setting. I loved watching her explore, be curious, and dive deep into her interests. I realized she was learning in a deeper way than she would sitting at a desk in a classroom. I also greatly appreciate slow mornings and doing school in pajamas with endless coffee!”

What are some challenges you find with homeschooling?

“The anxiety of being exclusively responsible for your child's education! Like all families, I want to be sure my kids are equipped to tackle any challenge and take any direction in life. That's a big responsibility! Luckily, having a supportive community like Mighty Roots makes this much easier.”

“DO HARD THINGS, GENTLY.”

What is one piece of advice you would give to a family just starting out on their own homeschool journey?

“It will all work out, and it doesn't have to look like anyone else's homeschool journey! The beauty of homeschooling is that it gets to be individualized to your family and your child. There are so many resources and opportunities out there, you will find what you need when you need it. Homeschooling requires that you trust the process and allow things to unfold organically.”

Is there a particular quote or mantra that guides you in life?

“Do hard things, gently. A reminder to myself that I can pursue hard things without being hard on myself. There does not have to be a race to accomplish them. I do not have to do things perfectly. I can ask for help. I can fail and restart. I can keep moving forward and allow the process to unfold in ways I didn't expect.”

Kerry is a Learning Guide at Mighty Roots. She lives in Lee's Summit with her family, dog, and two cats.

Song for Autumn

by Mary Oliver

In the deep fall
don't you imagine the
leaves think how
comfortable it will be to touch
the earth instead of the
nothingness of air and the
endless freshets of wind?

And don't you think
the trees themselves, especially
those with mossy,
warm caves, begin to think
of the birds that will come –
six, a dozen – to sleep
inside their bodies?

And don't you hear
the goldenrod whispering goodbye,
the everlasting being crowned with
the first tuffets of snow?

The pond vanishes, and the white field
over which the fox runs so quickly
brings out its blue shadows.

And the wind pumps its
bellows. And at evening especially,
the piled firewood shifts a little,
longing to be on its way.





Improving Play
and Inspiring Joy:
The VanDyke Family's
Impact On Our
Mud Kitchen

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

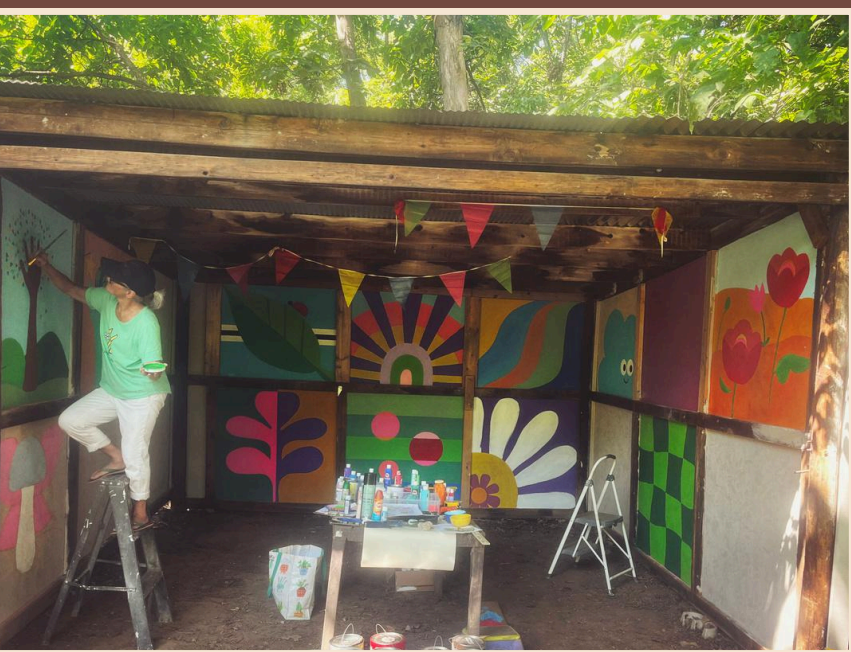
This summer, the VanDyke family generously volunteered their time, energy, and creativity to help transform our beloved mud kitchen at Mighty Roots Academy. Their dedication has not only enhanced the play and learning experience for our students but also reinforced the sense of community we cherish here at the academy.

(continued)

**"Great things
are done by a
series of small
things brought
together."
~ Vincent Van Gogh**

The mud kitchen, a favorite spot for students to explore creativity, sensory play, and imaginative role-playing, had seen a few years of enthusiastic use. It was in need of some refreshing, and the VanDykes jumped at the chance to help.

Over the course of several weeks, they worked tirelessly to revamp this area—making it even more inviting, functional, and fun for all ages. They helped to create a space where children can explore, imagine, and get their hands dirty. From creating vibrant artwork to the wall to providing materials for a more nature-inspired cooking experience, their contributions have been a true labor of love.



The improvements encourage creativity and collaboration, providing the perfect backdrop for role-playing activities that engage multiple senses.

(continued)



The Importance of Volunteers

At Mighty Roots Academy, we believe in the power of community, and the VanDyke family embodies this spirit perfectly. Their willingness to dedicate time and effort shows just how much of an impact volunteers can make. Thanks to their commitment, our students have a refreshed space that enhances their outdoor learning experiences.

We are incredibly grateful for this family's generosity and the example they set for others in our Mighty Roots community. Their contributions will inspire joyful learning and imaginative play for years to come! Thank you, VanDyke family, for helping us create a lasting impact!



"In helping others, we shall help ourselves, for whatever good we give out completes the circle and comes back to us."

~ Flora Edwards

The Magic of Mud

How Mud Kitchens Spark Imagination and Growth

words and photos
by cari schawo

Young children love to get dirty and use their senses while exploring. A mud kitchen is a great place for this. While exploring and playing in a mud kitchen, children get to use a wide variety of their senses. They get to explore textures, sounds and smells.

It allows children to use their fine and gross motor skills. This is an important skill that helps them strengthen their hand muscles for writing. They do this through, pouring, digging, lifting, stirring and moving things around. While children are doing all of this it is also helping with their eye-hand coordination. Children get to be creative in the mud kitchen, they can create their own recipes and menus.

(continued)





While working with others, they are developing their social skills as well as problem solving skills. If paper and writing tools are available, they can use their writing and reading skills to create menus.

Social growth and development are also an important part of the mud kitchen. Children learn cooperation skills, work on conflict resolution and how to share ideas and how to implement those ideas.

All of this helps children to connect to nature. Besides being immersed in nature while playing in the mud kitchen, they are also using natural materials to make their creations. This can include rocks, sticks, leaves and grass.

To create a mud kitchen is simple. Find a spot in yard that has access to dirt. For the kitchen part, you can use an old table that is short enough for easy exploration.

Place a wide variety of wooden kitchen utensils and steal bowls out where they are accessible to children. Water is an important part of a mud kitchen. Using old laundry detergent containers with a spout is the perfect item for water.

Mud kitchens are such an amazing part of childhood, have fun and don't be afraid to let your child get a little dirty. That is part of the learning!

Cari Schawo studied Early Childhood development at Harper Community collage as well as attended The University of Central Missouri. She has 25 years of early childhood teaching experience. Cari resides in Lees Summit with her husband and has a daughter and son.

A photograph of four young girls hugging each other outdoors. The girl on the left is wearing a teal hoodie and has her arms around the others. The girl in the center is wearing a light green sweater and is smiling. The girl on the right is wearing a purple and white patterned shirt and glasses. The girl at the top is wearing a light blue shirt and is also smiling. They are all looking towards the camera and appear to be in a joyful mood. The background shows a white building and some greenery.

photo by
josh bichel

A Heart Full of Thanks

WHAT OUR STUDENTS ARE GRATEFUL FOR

Gratitude has the power to foster a positive and mindful learning environment. Recently, we asked our students to reflect on the things they are most thankful for, and their heartfelt responses remind us of the simple joys and profound moments that shape their lives.

From the beauty of nature to the love of family and the excitement of learning, these expressions of gratitude offer a glimpse into the minds of our students and the values that resonate with them every day. Here's a look at what they had to say.

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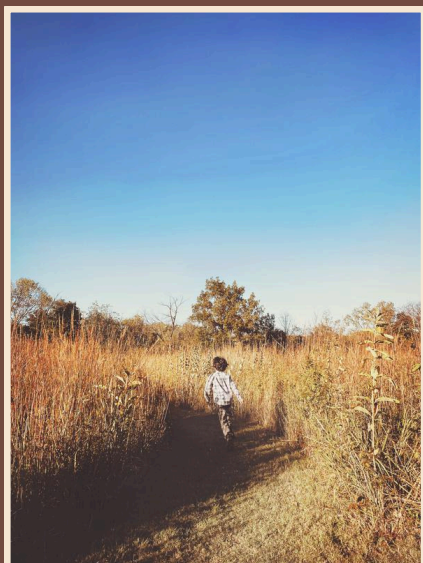


"My Dad. I really appreciate his hugs."

—Carolina

"Chai lattes, the leaves changing at Mighty Roots, and Shiloh, because her hair reminds me of Fall."

—Eliana



"My dog Trudy and her silly, hilarious doggie bottom!"

—Elizabeth

"The weather! Not too hot, not too cold."

—Ariela

"My friends at Mighty Roots and how sweet, kind, and silly they are."

—Shiloh



"My new foster brother, Michael."

—Nina

"I'm thankful for all my friends — I'd be so lonely with out them."

—Maylee

"Mountain biking."

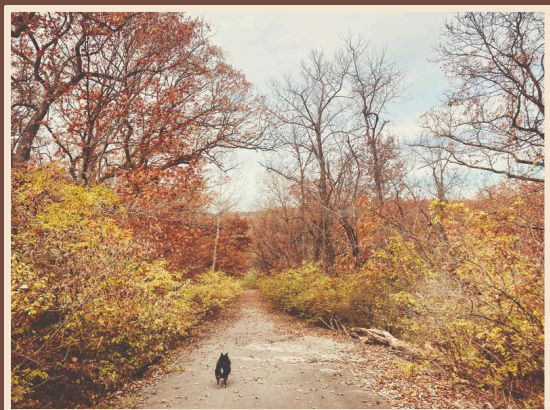
—Isaac

"My family!"

—Addie

"My angel doggie Ender"

—Gideon



"The beauty of the trees."

—Sierra

"My robotics class. And Graham;
his faces are hilarious!"

—Lucas



photo: carl schawo



photo: carl schawo

"Halloween — my favorite holiday!"

—Liam

"My dog, Hiccup, and my family.
Especially my Dad."

—Aven

"Hank, because he plays tetherball with me."

—Nik

"Sara's presence."

—Havi

"The new Mighty Roots stage area."

—Lydia

"My friend, Jonathan, who rode the big
roller coasters with me at Six Flags."

—Zac

"The trees and all the leaves."

—Penny

"My cross-country team."

—Marlow

"Christmas, because of the presents!"

—Micah



WE VALUE YOUR SUPPORT!



photo: cari schawo

At Mighty Roots Academy, we are committed to fostering a lifelong love of learning through hands-on, nature-based education that nurtures the whole child—mind, body, and spirit. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit, we rely on the generous support of our community to continue providing these unique and enriching experiences for our students.

Whether through financial contributions or the gift of your time, every bit of support helps us offer high-quality resources, expand our programs, and ensure that each child has the opportunity to explore, discover, and grow in a vibrant learning environment.

We deeply value your support and partnership as we work together to shape the future of our learners!



Final Thoughts



As we transition into fall, we're reminded of the beauty in change. The vibrant colors of the trees reflect the richness of learning and growing, just as our students do with each new challenge and discovery. At Mighty Roots Academy, we've spent these past few weeks nurturing not only academic curiosity but also a love for nature, creativity, and community.

This season encourages us to slow down, reflect, and appreciate the small moments—whether it's harvesting from our gardens, finding warmth in friendships, or discovering something new in our studies. As the leaves fall and the days grow shorter, let us all remember that learning, like nature, follows its own rhythm. Each day is an opportunity to explore, adapt, and bloom in our own way.

Thank you for being part of our journey! Let's embrace this time to gather our experiences and prepare for the next season of growth.

Our Mission

The mission of Mighty Roots Academy is to provide active, multiage learning in a nature-rich environment.

Our Philosophy

At Mighty Roots Academy, we believe it is most important to develop the skills of independent learning that equip students for a lifetime of inquiry and growth. A true education builds the skills needed for becoming a lifelong learner. We believe that students benefit most when skill-building is the focus, no matter the subject.



Mighty Roots Academy

mightyrootsacademy.com