

December 2023



The Homeschool Journey Newsletter

Christopherus Homeschool Resources
Waldorf-inspired Parenting and Education

Dear friends,

Let's begin with some lovely encouraging words from a few of you....

Love it ALL, especially opportunity for Grade specific group sessions, very exciting, while also LOVING anthroposophy for homeschoolers!!!! Hurrah!!!! This is exactly the kind of soul nourishment that I've been finding in short supply in these parts. Very excited you're offering these!

Megan

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Dear Donna,

Thank you so much for offering the talk on 'Gratitude in Teenagers.' You have been a real inspiration for me over the last 14 years on my Waldorf journey, inspiring me to run home school classes for the last 12 years. Our oldest students are turning 15 soon and have really enjoyed and benefitted from what we all see to be our best lives, thanks to you! Through Steiner-Waldorf approach and your guidance with your work they have been aided to become: kind, enthusiastic for life, creative to the core and deeply rooted in awareness that, as you say 'all will pass' - except the love and presence of God. They know this inside their hearts, which is such freedom and joy.

Your talk on teens made me smile and left my heart feeling warm as the reassurance, wisdom and kindness shone through your inspired words! Your anecdotes, phrases, quotes and divine intuition and knowledge enrich our lives!

Sara O'Brien, Maple Tree Tutor Groups

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What you are proposing to put together is invaluable. I feel like a lone wolf in the Waldorf homeschooling world. I do feel like Christoperous homeschooling is different than other Waldorf homeschooling (where 12-year-olds are on computers piecing games). It is a lifestyle. People do not understand why it takes so much time and effort to homeschool my children when they think homeschooling is sticking them in front of a computer and press play. A community of other parents doing the same thing is the kind of support is appreciated. People who understand that it's not okay for the 6 and 4-year-olds to watch tv when you teach the 13-year-old. Or for the 13-year-old to play video games.

Latisha

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Most of the above is in response to a new impulse from Christopherus--- various zoom webinars. Having held out for many years from the online scene, I knew that if Christopherus is to grow, that I must offer zoom webinars to folks--and the response has been most heartening! Of course we will never offer any computer programs for children...but it seems that offering classes and talks for parents might just be the way to go!

Before I direct you to the descriptions of the upcoming **Take Hold Grades Webinars**, I should say that the January/February series is not going to take place: so many of you contacted me to say that the logistics defied what they could manage. So instead, I am excited to offer **Private Consulting Sessions** as a replacement which might actually be better!

This is how it works:

* For the \$225 (the price of the group sessions) you get three 90-minute private sessions with me (a substantial savings over my normal private consulting fee).

* Together we will find times that can work for both of us---this will be especially helpful to those who found the time zone changes impossible or who could not make the announced group session days work for them.

* The 3 sessions will be focused on your family: so all your children, your particular homeschool challenges; how you cope with parenting and teaching; what you need help with in terms of the curriculum....whatever help you need!

* Do bear in mind, however, that I do not consult about either medical or legal issues.

[Please pay here](#) and then email me. I will send you a questionnaire so you can tell me about your family and homeschool and concerns. You can also send me a few examples of your child's work for me to comment on (including written composition for those 6th grade and up).

I prefer phone conversation but zoom could also work. We can figure that out once you have paid and sent me your questionnaire.



[The Take Hold Grades Webinars will take place this summer---you can read a description of those webinars here.](#)

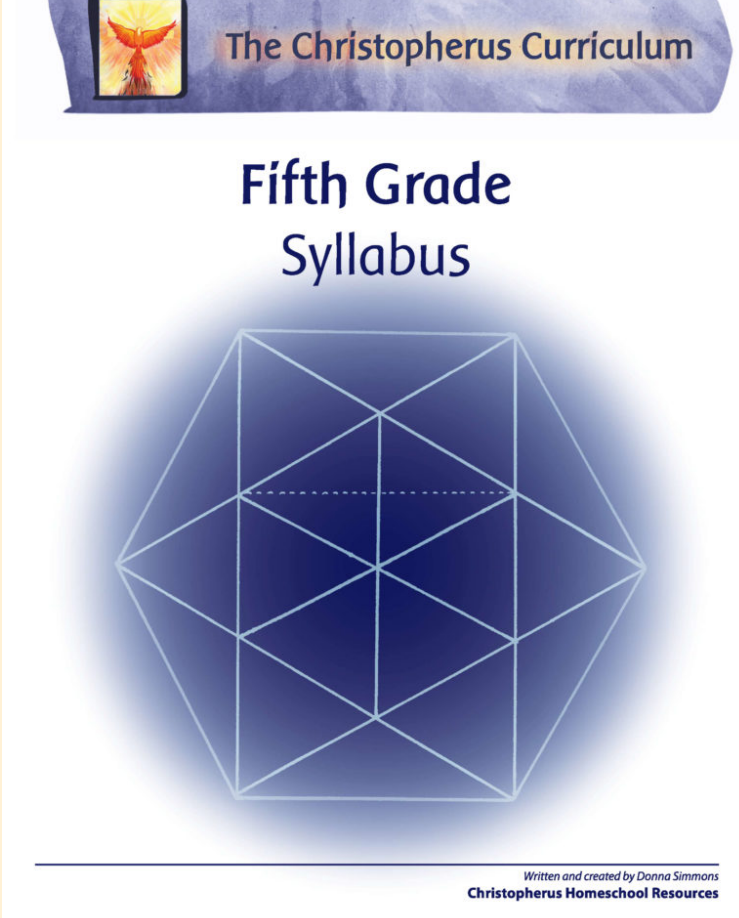
So far we have held two webinars on gratitude and one on festivals at home. These are now available for purchase: **Nurturing Gratitude in Young Children**; **Nurturing Gratitude in Older Children and Teens**; and **Festivals At Home**. [You can purchase them here.](#)



The 6---part **Anthroposophy for Homeschoolers** series will take place in January/February. [Find out more here.](#)

And I do apologize for all these scheduling changes....my hope is that what I have now settled on meets the needs of more of you. I am sorry though if I have caused confusion.

By the way---never hesitate to forward this or any other of my newsletters to anyone you think might be interested---[newsletter archive here](#). We are all very excited about the new impulses enlivening Christopherus and sincerely hope that our friends and supporters will tell as many homeschoolers as they can about Christopherus. Word of mouth has always been the main way we have grown---may we ask your help in continuing that tradition?



I am starting to work on our revised and updated *Fifth Grade Curriculum* (available early-ish 2024) and I wanted to share the following from the section on play. I thought as it is holiday time for many of you, it could be good to keep what I wrote in mind when thinking about children's presents....and if you'd like to forward this to present-buying friends and family, go right ahead!



The following is a blog post I wrote a number of years ago, celebrating the importance of play in older children. I hope it inspires you to ensure that 'play' is never something that takes place on a screen, though it may be quiet and could be more inner focused than outer focused.

Some of the most joyful moments I have had as a homeschooling mom have come during our occasional 'Boy Days', days when my sons invite their friends over, en masse. To see children of their age -- some as old as 14 -- playing, makes my heart sing. To see them dressing up and improvising and organizing and running around, is just wonderful! One minute they're soldiers, the next they're Jedi or aliens, the next they're voyageurs. Pausing only long enough to troop in and refuel ("Mom, is there any juice?"). "How many cookies can we have?"... these games can go on all day. And by the time the last boy reluctantly goes home, my boys are tired and satisfied in that way which only happens when a deep need has been met.

Our society does not value play -- the qualifier 'educational' so often has to be tacked on, lest parents or others fear that the activity be somehow a waste of time. Many of you undoubtedly came to Waldorf education because of its emphasis on the value of creative play. None of us needs convincing of the imperative need of free, imaginative play in young children. But what about the older ones? What about the 10 and 11 year-olds, or even older? Do they also benefit from play? How do older children play?

Thirty years ago [ah my---it's now more like 50 years ago!!] when I was a 10 year old girl (give or take a year or two), girls played dress-up as well as with dolls and doll houses. Now? Apparently, the average Barbie owner is 5 years old and getting younger: older girls do not play with dolls. Make no mistake, I'm no fan of Barbie's, but I think it's a shame -- more than a shame, a crime -- that little girls of 10 or 11 are too 'grown-up' to play with dolls.

Little girls of 10 or 11 -- does that jive with you? Culturally, given our propensity to speed everything up, are we still able to think of 11 year-olds as little girls and boys? Obviously an 11 year-old is very different from a 6 year-old, able to take some responsibility around the house, for instance, and beginning to experience growing intellectual abilities as well as some physical changes, but an 11 year-old is still a child and should be respected as such.

I love the film, *The Sound of Music*. Laugh if you will -- and we can all share a chuckle about many aspects of the film -- but it shows children who are expected to be children, treated like children, and allowed to be children. Not until she is 16 is the oldest understood to be on the threshold of womanhood. Sure, she's more mature, grown-up, and is given more responsibilities than the younger ones -- but she's still allowed to be carefree, playful and open to life's experiences. She's allowed to play.

OK, so I don't expect people to dress their children in rompers made out of curtains, and, sure, 21st Century America (or Australia, Europe, Canada, Mexico, ...) is not 1930s make-believe Austria, but still... Do we as parents and adults allow and offer our older children opportunities for play, or have they slid into a regime of lessons, sports and controlled experiences like Scouts or 4-H?

So why is it so important for them to play, anyway? Because play is another term for creative, open-ended and flexible activities, those that summon up the child's powers of imagination, and create in him the possibility for finding new ways to interact, create and explore. Play is an antidote to the rigid, dogmatic and controlling behaviors which can plague us as adults if we have not had enough freedom to play as children. I wonder how much of the modern adult's desire for escapist 'play' -- extreme sports come to mind -- is a result of a childhood need that was not met. A characteristic of extreme sport is to challenge oneself and to overcome obstacles -- these are also characteristics of children's play. Could it be that when children aren't allowed to be children, they then have a hard time moving on definitively into adulthood?

Many children from about 10 and up have little opportunity for play. When school time is over (and that often includes home school) then chores, enrichment activities, sports, reading and time on the computer or watching TV/videos, takes up most of the rest of the child's schedule. Aside from the computer/TV time, all of these are worthwhile activities, certainly things to be encouraged. But what about play? Do our children have time to fiddle around, daydream, doodle, be bored, make things and play?

Children need 'unformed time', time when nothing is scheduled, nothing demanded, during which they are not allowed to watch TV or use the computer. Playtime. And when friends come over, parents can encourage play by not allowing the children to use the computer or watch TV or a video. Those activities are not play! Unfortunately, many modern children have been brought up to confuse media use with play, and you may have to be involved with the children when they come together, helping them form games and activities -- something that my generation's parents didn't need to do!

Having lots of board games available -- everything from traditional games like chess and mancala to competitive board games like Monopoly and cooperative games -- is helpful. Darts, pool, archery and ping-pong are all a lot of fun, as is a trampoline and a basketball hoop in the yard.

But none of the above is really in the same league as the kind of unformed play I'm getting at. Games and equipment, like the above, will hopefully get things going and lead to more open play. For this you need things like dressing-up -- cloaks, swords, crowns, belts, hats... Bricks and figures (and, yes, action-type figures come in here) are great open-ended toys. In the yard, tree stumps and logs, a plain playhouse or tree house, and old tires are great. And, if they don't associate sand play with babies, a sand box will still be used by older children.

Another possibility for when there is a group of children is to get them playing a game like kick-the-can, tag or hide-and-go-seek (the book, *Hopscotch, Hangman, Hot Potato and Ha Ha Ha: A Rulebook of Children's Games* by Jack Maguire, is a great resource). As I mentioned earlier, one may need to 'hold' a group of children, especially if some of them are self-conscious about playing, or have been raised to think that using a screen is play, or that hitting and fighting is play. Help them organize the game and then occupy yourself with something nearby, where you're busy but still very aware of what's going on. Gauge how things are going and either step in and smooth rough spots or, preferably, if all is well, disappear and leave them to it. With luck and, if you've judged the situation correctly, they'll take hold of the game and then create something new out of it. This is the aim: to enable the children, out of themselves, their creativity and relationships, to form some new game, some new possibility, some new adventure.

Once upon a time, children had their own language, codes, activities and ways of relating to one another. They played on the street or at someone's house, and they didn't need adults to show them how to play. Now their play is the subject of books and studies by anthropologists, and real play has been pushed aside, either by over-scheduling or by the pervasive presence of electronic media. It is a fundamental need of children to play: let's build families and communities where that need is honored.

Well friends, this is a very special holiday time for many of you....I hope your homes are filled with the blessings of the season and may peace and good will fill your hearts.

Til January,

Blessings on your homeschool journey,

Donna