

CHES MEETING MINUTES

Friday, December 5, 2008

- **Attendance:** Gina Miguel, Christi Baum, LeShundra Haughton, Vicki Slakey, Robyn Cruz, Val Campbell, Tina Nassar, Joan Stultz, Heather Stockman, Brittney Davey, Alicia Riley, Kathryn John, Susie Clark, Nancy Bean, Judy Romero, Dani Sigurdson
- **Natomas Border's Gift Wrapping:** Volunteers are needed for this fundraiser (money comes from donations). We have 3 slots open for 3 days; 12/13, 12/21, & 12/23. We plan to buy the *Teaching the Classics* DVD set.
- **Special guest speaker:** Barbara McCoy is a homeschooling mom of four. She has a nature blog. If you ever wanted to incorporate nature studies into your homeschool, but never knew how or where to start, her blog is for you! Known as **The Outdoor Hour – Nature study close to home in 15-20 minutes a week** - Barbara offers weekly challenges posted every Friday. Read her blog on how to get started with the challenges. She offers ideas that can be used with children of all ages.
<http://handbookofnaturestudy.blogspot.com/>
 - One example of a weekly challenge would be on garden flowers. Go outside and find some pollen. Find a flower to look at, buy one at the grocery store if necessary.
- Handbook of Nature Study by Anna Botsford Comstock is needed for each challenge. Amazon sells this for \$23.40, but if you shop around you can pick up a used copy online for less. This book is written especially for educators. It is a collection of monthly newsletters compiled into a book. It teaches you how to teach nature study to your kids. Barbara recommends reading the lesson yourself to get observation ideas to share during nature studies with your child. You can also go back to it and read more facts if your kids are showing a lot of interest.

- Do the first five nature challenges in order. They tell you exactly what to do to get started. Then you can pick and choose the ones that interest you the most.
- Once you start doing nature studies your eyes are opened to the world around you. You start to realize that where you live is a pretty interesting place.
- Make it fun for little ones. Gather leaves or pine cones; like a treasure hunt. Keep a small basket on hand. If it fits in the basket, they can bring it home!
- Draw a still life of the things you find on your nature studies.
- Kids need to be able to work with their hands.
- Nature studies help kids become more creative thinkers.
- Nature Studies don't have to take a lot of time. You can find something to study in your own environment. Draw trees in the backyard and compare how they change.
- Take part in the nature study with your children. Keep your own nature journal.
- Explore one tree, one flower, or one bird at a time. You'll be surprised at how much you learn.
- Don't forget the little things to explore. Walking around, skipping rocks on the water or worms in the garden. You'll find many other life experiences while building relationships with your children. It's not always just about nature study.
- Get your kids OUT, away from the computer, video games and television. It does change who they are.

➤ **What nature study is not!**

- Taking kids to the park and sitting on the bench watching them. Interact with your kids, but don't talk too much. Listen to what they say and hear their questions. Then go home and lookup the answers.

- Don't fail to realize that your backyard can be a source of interest for years. You never know what you are going to learn.
- Mom's that don't consider themselves outdoor people must give it a try! Learn alongside your kids.

➤ **Book recommendations:**

- Peterson field guides to help with identification. Begin with trees, birds, wildflowers and insects (if you have boys, especially).
- The Outdoor World of the Sacramento region: A local field guide by The American River Natural History Association
- National Audubon Society Field Guide to California by Peter Alden
- Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder by Richard Louv

➤ **ART** - Many kids stop keeping nature journals because they get frustrated with their drawing skills. Two excellent books to help with drawing:

- Drawing with Children by Mona Brooks. Teaches how to draw. Also gives ideas of what to use in nature journals (crayolas, watercolor pencils, oil pastels)
- Mark Kistler's Draw Squad – Go through at least once with your kids to learn how to draw.

➤ **Keeping photo scrapbooks of your nature studies:** You can make a digital scrapbook at <http://www.shutterfly.com/>. Every picture has a memory attached to it. Add dates, time, what the weather was like or a few sentences about that day.

➤ **Nature studies can be kept in a 3 ring binder.** Take individual pages out with you. Trace things and fill in the details later (good for little ones). Add pressed flowers, leaves, and rubbings. Be creative.

➤ **Nature Scavenger Hunt idea** (borrowed from a journal entry in one of the sketch books Barbara brought to share). Write on an index card. Find: 1.) Something green, 2.) Something brown, 3.) Something yellow, 4.)

Something small to look at under a microscope, 5.) Something bigger than you, 6.) Something hard, 7.) Something soft, 8.) Something special. The index card can later be attached to the drawings.

- **Tie nature study into your other subjects.** Incorporate living books - Charles Darwin, Louis Pasteur. Barbara grew peas when her kids were reading about Gregor Mendel. If you have a microscope; scoop water out of a pond and study the protozoa. Look for Invertebrates. Dig earthworms from your garden; dissect and study under the microscope. (Purchase earthworms from <http://www.hometrainingtools.com/>)
- **If you know your way around a camera** – Arachnids can be studied with macro photography. Get close enough to capture a spider spinning its web. Photograph ladybugs and other small insects.
- **Share your studies with your friends and family.** Let them know what you're looking for. You'll be surprised how excited they get to share their findings with you.

- **Incorporate nature study into family trips. Great nature study locations:**
 - #1 on her list – Death Valley in March! Great for any kind of geology studies.
 - Sequoia and Kings Canyon
 - Channel Island – off the coast of Santa Barbara
 - Lassen Park in the summer
 - National Parks have teacher links to read before you go. You can also purchase field guide brochures at the gift shops before you go out to explore. Prepare ahead of time, but be open to whatever comes up.
- **Handouts**
 - Seasonal Tree Study
 - Seasonal Weather Study

- Nature Journal notebook page - good for a younger child to get started.
- Nature journal page for older kids.
- Winter Nature Walk (from <http://heartsandtrees.blogspot.com/> by Amanda McCoy, her daughter). This is a free scavenger hunt. They are available for every season.
- A Mr. Linky tool on her blog, allows you to see what others are doing with the challenges.
- **Harmony Fine Arts:** Barbara also has an art and music program designed for homeschool families. <http://harmonyfinearts.com/>

Barb was very inspiring and we hope to have her present again at the end of the year. This time it will be her classical art program.

Please note: There will be no January meeting due to PACT being closed for moving the first week we are back to school. Our next meeting will be on Feb. 6. We will plan to share any nature study stories and work we have done. We will also start the *Teaching the Classics* lessons.