

# THE BRAVE LEARNER

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Finding Everyday Magic in  
Homeschool, Learning, and Life

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A TARCHERPERIGEE BOOK

about the country and hearing citizens interviewed will add levels of experience not as easily accessed in a book. If a family from Madagascar moves in next door, however, the encounter adds depth and nuance to all that was learned before.

Reading about the solar system is one way to learn about the sun, moon, and planets in our night sky. To deepen the experience, we might take our children to a planetarium where a skilled narrator projects stars and planets onto the inside of a domed ceiling. When viewing the planets directly through a telescope, earth-bound humans are offered an encounter with the real thing—enriching all that learning.

Reading about a culture's religion is not the same as visiting their house of worship or participating in their High Holy Days. Moving to a country whose dominant religion is not your own is a whole other level of encounter. Watching a sport on television is not the same as attending a game. Attending a game is not the same level of immersion as playing it!

All three methods for learning are valid—each one deepens the learning experience, allowing us to delve into the mystery at the heart of it.

**1. Read: Internet Scavenger Hunt.** Read fiction and nonfiction, statistics and news stories to delve into a subject of study. Then, ask good questions. Go on an Internet scavenger hunt for topics like Shakespeare, airplanes, or racism. Create a list of questions to be answered by better and better search terms. Find as many answers as possible, then allow those answers to provoke more questions. Teens can Google on their own. Younger kids benefit from working with you. Put your computer screen on the TV, if you can.

I've written two sets of questions for you. The first batch is for young children. The second is for teens, working with a controversial topic.

### Children Five to Twelve

1. What subject does the topic relate to (math, language, science, entertainment, sports)?

2. Who's good at it?
3. What country (city, state) is known for this topic? Why?
4. What historic sites are there for this topic?
5. List famous aspects of it (quotes, discoveries, breakthroughs, published works, changes in history).
6. Google images/videos for the topic. What comes up first? Which image draws your attention?
7. Click on an image or video. Where does it take you?
8. Now that you've Googled, what else do you want to know?

### **Teens Thirteen to Eighteen**

1. Google the name of the topic plus the word "controversy." What's the conflict?
2. Who are the parties on each side?
3. What's at stake?
4. Who are the celebrity and/or expert voices in this conflict?
5. What resolutions have been attempted?
6. What hasn't been tried, but has been suggested?
7. Where else in the world is this an issue? How did that community address it?
8. What political, ethical, and religious issues are raised by this controversy?
9. What organizations are associated with each side?
10. Who catalogs reliable data for this issue?
11. After all your research, what are your thoughts?

The Internet scavenger hunt introduces the value of good questions and the power of reading widely from a variety of perspectives. It's also a chance to evaluate sources and consider which are most helpful. Take notes, if you'd like. I'd serve chocolate-chip oatmeal cookies while Googling, but that's just me.

**2. Experience: Explore Places.** Schedule trips to places that showcase subjects you want to study. Yes, the places you go can be wonderfully fun! When we studied the western frontier movement in America, we took trips to Disneyland and hung out in Frontier Land. Coonskin caps, muskets, stories about Davy Crockett, the "Colors of the Wind" video from *Pocahontas* on loop—these drew us in and brought our reading to life.

Look up historical sites in your city. One of the best excursions our family took (despite the 16-degree weather!) was a tour of the Underground Railroad sites in southwest Ohio. We drove along the Ohio River, toured a boat, and admired the view of Kentucky from the John Rankin House in Ripley, where escaping enslaved families were sheltered and nourished after their harrowing journey across the river in the dead of winter. We felt the chill of that winter ourselves, making the dangerous crossing even more remarkable in our imaginations.

We had read about Harriet Tubman's life, and we'd watched a documentary about the abolition movement. It was entirely another thing to stand on the ground where human beings had stood in their first moments of freedom, looking across the big pulsing river and wondering how on earth *anyone* had made it to Ohio alive.

If going is challenging, bring the activity into your house. *Little House in the Big Woods* by Laura Ingalls Wilder gives suggestions for making maple candy in the snow. We "churned" butter in baby food jars with heavy cream and a marble. Our family hand-dipped candles and spent an evening reading by candlelight. Bring the experience into your home whenever possible; kids love it!

**3. Encounter: Getting to Know Others.** Our study of Asia came to life when my family took a day trip to Little Saigon in Orange County, California. We met a Vietnamese artist who had lost his wife and chil-

dren to a capsized boat when they fled to America as South Vietnam fell. In his artist's studio (sandwiched between a grocer and a bakery in a strip mall) were his gorgeous paintings of pre-war Vietnam. I'm ashamed to say that until we visited his shop, my only mental image of the country had been war-torn black-and-white photos and napalm. It hadn't occurred to me that Vietnam was a place of extraordinary beauty before the war. The encounter with this man changed all of us, our limited perspective about Vietnam overturned.

Encounter forces a shift in perspective to include these human beings, right in front of us, who are different yet reassuringly the same. Paper-and-pen ways of learning are limited. Encounter flips the switch to mystery faster than any other activity.

### Try It!

- \* Visit a cultural center in your city.
- \* Locate experts in the field of interest. If your child is learning to play guitar, find a guitar shop that handcrafts guitars. If your child loves geology, visit a jeweler to see gemstones being polished. If your child plays peewee football, visit NFL team practices (they're free).
- \* Road-school (if you can). Move to another city or country temporarily (even a couple of weeks) to experience the deep-dive of immersive learning. Choose your vacation destinations with encounter in mind.
- \* Participate in a religious or cultural event different from your own.
- \* Meet and interview people who've survived a war, natural disaster, cancer, or a life-threatening accident.
- \* Make friends with people unlike you! If your family is wordy, find mathy friends. If your family is rural, go visit friends in a big city. Push out of your natural habits and into the excitement of new.