

Annual General Meeting Report

By Audrey Stirling
Ruri and Harris' Mum

Thank you to all those who came to the 16th Annual General Meeting of the Playgroup Programme (PGP) on October 13. It is very cheering for the Board to see that members are interested in the running of PGP and our plans for the future! Thank you also to everyone who signed proxy forms before the meeting, allowing us to reach the quorum required to approve items on the agenda.

Audrey Stirling (Director) described some of PGP's achievements in 2008—2009, during which five new Board members and many new teaching staff and leaders settled in. A great deal of work took place on forward planning, resulting in a PGP Business Plan for 2008—2011. It deals with securing PGP's long-term location, filling class capacity, marketing, service quality, teacher training, procedures, social events, fund-raising and web site design. Significant progress was made on most issues in 2008—2009. Priorities for this year include the redesign of the web site, a new Marketing and Communications Plan and a manual of PGP procedures. We have 151 children enrolled this year.

Colette Foort (Treasurer) reported on financial outcomes for 2008—2009 and presented the Budget for 2009—

2010. Our finances are healthy: PGP made over 4000 CHF profit in 2008—2009 and has significant funds in reserve. This year, we have contained some costs (e.g. rent levels that are now fixed for the next couple of years) and brought in some extra income (e.g. literacy workbooks are now charged for, as in comparable organisations). We estimate over 50,000 CHF income in 2009—2010. The Treasurer asked members please to claim back all money spent on behalf of PGP - even small amounts - as it is important we know exactly how much it costs to run the programme. The 2009—2010 Budget was approved during the meeting.

The meeting then moved on to the election of the Board for 2009—2010:
Audrey Stirling (Director)
Colette Foort (Treasurer)
Nadine Nassif Lips (Secretary)
Tania McMahon (Registrar)
Jane Kwiatkowska-del Pozo (Literacy Coordinator)
Kerry McCance (Craft Coordinator)
Joanna McMahon (Special Projects)
Debra Dimancesco (Member Representative)
Trish Clements (Leader Trainer and Representative)
Liz Stevenson Haefliger (Newsletter Editor)

Finally, the Board asked you, the members of PGP, to help the organisation take forward its

ambitious plans for this year. For example:

- Please read the Business Plan (available on the PGP notice board) and comment in the upcoming Member Survey, or email to audreystirling@yahoo.co.uk
- Send feedback to the Board about what PGP could do better, or what holds PGP back. Can you spot an opportunity which PGP should take advantage of?
- What can you personally do to help (e.g. web site design, fund-raising, ideas for social events)?
- Join the Board! We have an immediate vacancy for a Secretary. There will be further vacancies in 2010—2011 for a new Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, and Leader Trainer and Representative. Email audreystirling@yahoo.co.uk

Thank you for your support and enjoy the rest of PGP's 22nd year!

Editor's Note: I would like to take this opportunity to thank to Liz Burgess for her recent contribution of extra time and effort.

Remember to compile your Literacy and Playgroup photos for the montage in the May/June Newsletter. Feel free to send the image files to me (newsletter_pgp@yahoo.com) at any time through mid-April.

Three Month Calendar

Fri 1 Jan	New Year's Day	Mon 1 Feb	Start of PGP Second Semester	Wed 17 Mar	Saint Patrick's Day
Mon 4 Jan	Back to Playgroup	6 to 14 Feb	School Break in Vaud	Mon 22 Mar	Board Meeting
Mon 4 Jan	Back to School in Vaud and France	13 to 28 Feb	School Break in France		
Mon 11 Jan	Back to School in Geneva	Sun 14 Feb	Saint Valentine's Day		
Mon 18 Jan	Board Meeting	Mon 15 Feb	Mar/Apr Newsletter Deadline		
Mon 25 Jan	Mid-year Workshop	20 to 28 Feb	School Break in Geneva		



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The March/April Newsletter

**Deadline is MONDAY,
FEBRUARY 15.**

**Send contributions to
newsletter_pgp@yahoo.com**

By Alexandra Robak
Isabelle and Nina's Mum

Red, white & green – a personal take on organic wine

Many of us favour organic food, at least in theory, if not always in practice. What about wine? It's easy to forget that wine is grape juice; mighty fine grape juice on occasion, but still a farmed product. If you insist on organic carrots, should you also insist on organic wine?

I like to think of wine as a fairly natural product. Wearing my rose tinted glasses, I dream of sun-kissed grapes grown in beautiful vineyards. Picked and crushed, the grapes start to ferment naturally; press out the alcoholic juice and there we have it – wine – a true gift of the gods.

Except, of course, it's not that simple. Growing, picking and pressing are often on an industrial scale, using intensive methods, machinery and science labs. Synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides and herbicides are all in common use in vineyards. Add to that the use of chemicals and processing agents in the winery and most wines are far from natural. Should we be alarmed?

Yes and no. Standing in a biodynamic (über-organic – see box) vineyard in the Agly hills of Roussillon, I had a mini conversion to the organic cause. Around me the vineyard teemed with vitality – flowers, butterflies, bees and tremendous, healthy looking vines. Nature really did seem in balance, with beneficial insects eating pests that prey on the vines. The contrast with the neighbouring, conventionally farmed vineyard, was stark. It had no flowers, or weeds, or much sign of life at all besides the vines – which didn't look bad in themselves, just a little artificial compared to the organic vines around me. Later on, a tasting of the biodynamic wines confirmed that they were something special; full of flavour and a real sense of place.

So, do I buy organic wines? Well no, at least not for the sake of it.

Is organic wine better for the environment? Water waste, soil degradation, loss of biodiversity – the modern winemaking industry is not kind to the environment. Organic producers actively promote biodiversity and sustainability and while organic wine still comes with an "eco-footprint", according to a University of Siena study, it is typically half that of an equivalent non-organic wine.

Is organic wine better for your health? Chemicals used in the vineyard and winery can appear in wine as chemical residues, albeit in minuscule amounts. According to a report last year by the Pesticide Action Network, non-organic wines purchased in the EU contain chemical residues from an average of four different pesticides.

This is far removed from my romantic image of wine as a natural product, but while I don't like the idea of chemical inputs, there are strict regulations concerning their use and the permitted residue levels in food. Drinking non-organic wine is no worse than ingesting any other non-organic product – we must all decide for ourselves where to draw the line on organic vs non-organic foods.

Are organic wines cheap or expensive? With no costly chemical bills, you might think organic wines should be cheap. Think again. Organic producers have to be much more hands-on than their conventional counterparts. Weeding by hand and checking for pests and disease takes a lot of time and, as they say, time is money. Having said that, you can pay €5 or €500 for a bottle of organic wine.

Do organic wines taste better? Once all the dirt is scraped off, an organic carrot generally looks and tastes better than its non-organic counterpart. There's no such guarantee of quality with organic wine and I've tasted some execrable examples. However, there are an increasing number of quality conscious producers making superb organic wines.

Where can you buy organic wine? Organic wines come in all styles, from all regions, at all price points. Unfortunately for the consumer, it's not always easy to tell if a wine is organic or not. Some wines carry an organic logo on the label (for example the green-white "Agriculture Biologique" in France), but many organic producers choose either not to obtain official organic certification (it can be a laborious, costly process) or not to advertise their certification because they want their wine to be judged on quality alone. Perhaps I'm being unfair, but if a wine is marketed on the basis of its organic credentials it's maybe because it can't rely on the way it tastes.

The bio shop at Val Thoiry has a sizeable selection of wine, though I can't vouch for the quality. Some of our local wine producers are organic – ask around in your area. I don't think you'll have much luck in the local supermarkets, but an independent wine merchant worth their salt should be able to suggest some interesting bottles.

The proof is in the drinking

Many of my favourite wines are organic or biodynamic, but I don't buy them because of the way they are made, I buy them because they taste great. A few of these producers started out with firm organic convictions, but many more have fallen into organics/biodynamics as simply the best way to make the best possible wine. I don't know whether it's a direct result of organics or simply a by-product of their more holistic and hands-on approach, but it seems to work.

That's not to say non-organic wines are bad.

Good producers all care for their land and minimize their chemical inputs, I think it's fair enough that some (particularly in marginal climates) choose to keep non-organic methods in their armoury. So I'll continue to buy wines based on how they taste, not whether they are organic or not. I do, however, wish that wine labels were more transparent – why should organic producers put "organic" on the label, when one should really expect those who use chemicals to list all the aids, agents and additives they put into a wine.

What is organic wine?

Good question – and one that regulators, unable to agree on a common definition of "organic wine", seem incapable of answering. Accordingly, when people refer to organic wine they usually mean "wine made from organic grapes", which can still contain additives (synthetic yeasts, sulphur dioxide etc).

Biodynamics

One step beyond organics, biodynamics is based on the ideas of Austrian philosopher Rudolph Steiner. Taking a holistic view of their land, plants and the phases of the moon, winemakers use natural preparations (ranging from nettle tea to cow manure fermented in a buried cow horn) to enhance the soil and work according to lunar and cosmic rhythms. It may sound barking, but you have to take notice when some of the world's top wines are biodynamic (ranging from Domaine de la Romanée Conti in Burgundy and Château Pontet-Canet in Bordeaux to Cullen in Australia, Felton Road in NZ and Benziger in the US).

"Contains sulphites"

Most wines use sulphur dioxide as a preservative to stop wine turning to vinegar (in the EU these wines must include "contains sulphates" on the label). Some people blame the use of sulphur for headaches and asthma attacks. Organic wines may still contain sulphur, but at lower levels than many conventional wines.



News Flash from France

By Trish Clements
Hugh and Ronan's Mum

For those of us living in the Pays de Gex and the Haute Savoie, it is easy to forget that decisions in Paris can often affect us more than those happening a bit closer to home in Bern. Living in a frontaliere region has many benefits, however, it can make things a bit more complicated from an administrative point of view having to keep an eye on both sets of current affairs.

A couple of years ago I came across The Connexion, a monthly newspaper published in English aimed at English-speakers living in France. It's editorial covers a wide range of topics – latest political, legal, financial, cultural, business and health issues and how they affect ex-pat residents in France. I have found it a great source of information that I might not find out so readily elsewhere.

The editorial does lean towards ramifications for UK expats, but it is still informative from a general point of view too.

An annual subscription delivered to a French address costs €30. You can order a free trial issue by visiting their web site at www.connexionfrance.com.

Dad's Corner

By Graham Roberts
Eilidh and Iain's Dad

My five-year-old son pokes his tear-streaked face through the door. "Daddy, I have nothing to do." But you have all those toys, I think. Use them!

Sometimes, wading through a sea of plastic after the kids are in bed, I reckon our grandparents had it easy: wooden blocks and spinning tops are quick to clear up at the end of the day. Are we really better off with battery-powered, mass-produced, wall-to-wall branded playthings?

Beware, however, the favourite toy. Years later, it may bite back.

Take my case. My father went to work by train, and I saw him off at the local station every morning from my pram. A steam engine still shunted the wagons there, so of course I was given a succession of toy trains to push along the floor at home. And I did.

Also available on their web site are a number of Help Sheets (payable) which cover subjects from house purchasing, income tax, self-employment, etc. Very useful if you need to de-mystify complex French bureaucracy before tackling it en français!

I laugh, I love, I hope, I try, I need, I fear, I cry. And I know you do the same things too, So we're really not that different, me and you.
Colin Raye



ASSOCIATION PASSEPARTOUT

Remember the days when you used to skip French classes at high school? Remember when you thought you would never need French? Well, now we all live in the Geneva area and there is more to the French culture than those old high school lessons.

Passepartout, our new language and cultural association is here to help you. We are 2 experienced teachers who take great pleasure in teaching French as a foreign language and we'll help you master the bilingual subtleties of life in the Pays de Gex. Our newly renovated classroom is located in the old bistro-bar in the village of St Jean de Gonville (near Val Thoiry) and offers a relaxed and authentic learning environment. Classes are restricted to a maximum of 5 students so that everyone can learn and participate at a very competitive price. We'll make sure you get the most from your time in France, as well as learning everything you always wanted to know about the subjunctive but were afraid to ask.

For information or enquiries, please contact us at paspartout.langues@orange.fr

Or give us a call.

Petra BERKERS: +33 04 50 56 38 40

Catherine JAUCENT-MACPHERSON: +33 04 50 59 13 49

Years later, making my living by selling information technology, I went to live in Kenya for a while. In spite of the many other distractions on offer there, I found that I spent more and more time at Nairobi's railway museum, almost forgotten in a quiet corner of the city. Giant colonial steam locomotives stood outside, all peeling paint and rusting metal.

I fell under their spell and soon was running a project to spruce them up with fresh red paint and gleaming brass work. Yes, I was back on the toy room floor. Then came the suggestion that perhaps one of them could be made to work again ... somehow I ended up leading that project as well, and over the next few months it slowly swallowed up my time until I was working every evening and weekend with my team of steam fitters. It was worth it when the locomotive was finally ready and I rode it for miles through the African bush, whistle screaming, hordes of kids shrieking in terrified delight as we rattled past.

More recently two of the museum's managers went to England to tour the workshops in Birmingham which specialise in restoring steam engines. I went with them. After an intensive day of discussions I went to say goodbye to the workshop's chief engineer, a national expert in his field. He stood next to a giant of polished steel and gleaming green paint and explained how he'd spent twelve years and half a million pounds restoring it from a wreck to as-new condition. The workmanship was superb. He had a far-away look in his eyes as he touched the levers and pipes. I knew how he felt. I would bet he had a toy train when he was a kid.

So next time you trip over a discarded Bionicle or Polly Pocket, instead of stifling a curse, ask its owner why they're so fond of it. My five-year-old prefers space rockets to toy trains, despite my best efforts to help him see the error of his ways. His toys let me see an adult world through child's eyes, and – like my steam engines – sometimes that way seems much more fun. Just ask your kids!

BIRTHDAY PARTY VENUE: Last year, my son celebrated his sixth birthday with a nature excursion party. It was led by the association La Libellule (www.lalibellule.ch). Book early to get your first choice date. We were nervous the morning of the party because it was raining. However, the sun luckily came out later in the day. Note that these parties take place rain or shine, so dress accordingly. Henry invited eight of his closest friends to join us plus four of his family members (12 maximum). The excellent guides from La Libellule pick you up at an agreed location in a minibus and then transport you to your natural destination (e.g. Bois de Jussy). The party can be tailored to a specific theme, age group, or locality. Overall, an amazing experience. Everyone (even Grandma) had a blast finding bugs in the mud, searching for snakes, catching frogs with nets, eating sandwiches and candies under the canopy of trees, and so on. The pleasure of being outdoors for three hours merited the extremely reasonable cost.

Playgroup Tips for Making Life Easier in the New Year

By Trish Clements

As we embark on a new year and new decade, we have compiled some time, money and sanity-saving tips which should help us to get the new decade off to a flying start.

What is striking from the tips below is that if we organize ourselves just a bit, it is easy to save time, which alleviates stress and usually saves us money too! Definitely worth the effort.

....in the Shops

Have a pre-prepared shopping list with columns laid out in the same order as the aisles of your local supermarket! Print it out, check the cupboards and fridge, tick what is needed and add any extra stuff. Then try and whizz around the shop as quickly as humanly possible, not an easy task with 2 monsters in tow.

Buy toys during the sales for all the birthday parties that year.

....in the Home

Review your priorities, write down the top 3 things you HAVE to do that day and everything else is a bonus. You will really feel that you have accomplished your tasks for that day.

Spend the weekend organising the whole week, food, clothes, etc.

Cook in bulk, especially pasta sauces. Cook tomatoes, courgettes, aubergines, onions, garlic, herbs and bacon in a big pot. Blend and freeze in separate containers. Then just leave it out in the morning and use it for all the pasta dishes. Added bonus, the kids eat their veggies without knowing.

Always have a well-stocked store cupboard and freezer (Picard is a god-send). It's amazing what you can rustle up with a bit of imagination if you've not got time to get to the shops.

When baking, to avoid the temptation to lick spoons or bowls, make sure you are chewing very minty gum. Cake batter, frosting, and gum do not mix!

Save and re-use your old egg cartons. When your children are painting, use the egg carton as the palette. Fill each holder with a different color. You can use the top half to mix colors. Then recycle the cardboard egg cartons when done.

If you are running out of space to display all your children's artwork, take a photo of the child with their masterpiece before storing away. This will make a nice record of their work and will free-up wall space for their next efforts.

....on the Move

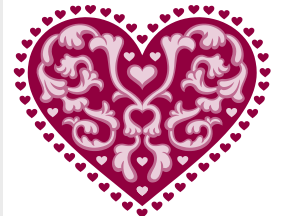
Have a pre-prepared travelling list to avoid stress about packing for holidays. It includes such essentials as portable DVD player, dou-dous, doliprane, etc.

Keep a list of essential phone numbers in a safe place in the car with some CHF/Euro change in case of an emergency (and when your mobile does not work).

Seat belt extensions are great as they avoid having to perform contortions trying to find the slot hidden by the children's car seats. It can be adjusted to bring the slot into easy reach for the older kids to fasten their seat belts on their own – a great time saver in the mornings.

Thanks to the following members for sharing their top tips with me: Denise Nickerson-Cauderan, Gillian Spence, Helen Dixon-Altaber, Liz Haefliger, and Lucy Brown.

I'm in favor of love as long as it doesn't happen when Dinosaurs is on television. Jill, age 6



Kids' Ideas About Love: *No one is sure why it happens, but I heard it has something to do with how you smell. That's why perfume and deodorant are so popular. Mae, age 9 (www.rinkworks.com)*

My mother says to look for a man who is kind. That's what I'll do. I'll find somebody who's kinda tall and handsome. Carolyn, age 8



YOGATTIC

Hatha-Yoga for beginners and intermediates in English and French in the Pays de Gex (France)

Yoga means the union of body and mind. It aims at keeping our body healthy so that we can have a rested mind and spirit. Yoga was born in India approximately 4000 years ago from ancient Vedic scripts. These scripts are not attached to any religion but are approached as a philosophy and lifestyle.

The classes will not have more than 7-8 people, they will take place, sometimes with music, in a pleasant and peaceful room. We will cover, breath, core strength development using postures, relaxation and introduction to meditation for those who wish. Classes are open to men and women, and don't think you need to put your foot behind your head... Yoga applies to all body shapes and all ages!

I am a certified RYT 200 (Registered Yoga Teacher) by the Yoga Alliance and have followed a teacher training of more than 200 hours with Lance Schuler and Neera Scott.

SPECIAL OFFER: 4 beginner classes for €30.- / CHF 45.- (=1 free trial + 3 consecutive classes). To benefit fully from this offer, you should plan to sign up for 4 weeks (i.e. 1 lesson a week).

SCHEDULE:

Monday 09:00 - 10:15, 12:30 - 13:30, 14:00 - 15:15, 20:00 - 21:15

Tuesday 09:00 - 10:15

Thursday 09:00 - 10:15, 12:30 - 13:30, 14:00 - 15:15

Friday 09:00 - 10:15, , 14:00 - 15:15

PRICES: 1 Free trial and in general €13.- / CHF 20.- per class or €110.- / CHF 170.- per card of 10 classes valid up to 4 months.

CONTACT NADINE: Mobile: +41 79 342 79 14 or Email: yogattic@hotmail.com

An Interview With Leisa Campbell-Lendrum

Tell us a little about yourself

I was born in Oxford and went to school in Wallingford, Oxfordshire. I did my English degree in Bristol and my secondary teaching training in Southampton. My first teaching job was in Dunstable, teaching 13 to 18 year olds. I gave up this job to go to Brazil for 3 years with my boyfriend, now husband, and then we moved to south London; I taught in Brazil and London too. I love teaching and curriculum planning and am very pleased that I am able to help PGP. I am passionate about improving standards of literacy as many of the problems in schools and society are due to low attainment.

I moved to Thoiry in July 2003, 7 months pregnant with my first child, Ellen. My husband had started work at WHO in May, but I stayed in London to finish the year of teaching. I was happy to leave after 5 years and fulfilling my ambition to be Head of English; it was hard work in a state comprehensive of 2200 pupils - and I wanted children. We have 3 children: Ellen, 6, Lit 2; Owen, 4, Pre-Lit; and Matthew, 21 months, 18-3s.

What the Assistant Literacy Coordinator does

In the last 2 years I have been supporting Jane del Pozo, the Literacy Coordinator as Assistant Literacy Coordinator. I don't know how one person did this in the past, as the job is huge even with both of us doing it. I provide the teaching advice, suggest resources and materials. Jane is wonderful and does the rest.

The whole programme is fantastic, all the teachers work really hard and I have been really interested to look at the curriculum, the resources and its effectiveness. Everything was already in place and working well, but, as with all teaching programmes after a few years, there are always new teaching methods and resources. So I am trying to build on all the best things about the literacy teaching and add a few new things too. This is what I am used to doing and I hope that the changes will benefit the children and help them to read more quickly, for example, in Pre-Lit teaching the letters in groups rather than alphabetically.

We are aiming to make the Pre-Lit, Lit 1 and Lit 2 more phonic focused, consistent with current teaching in the US and UK.

All the research proves that this is more effective than other methods and is essential for children with speech and language learning difficulties. We have introduced workbooks for the children to use so that they follow a structured programme, can review their progress, and to help the teachers, so that they don't have to spend so much time photocopying.

I am teaching Literacy 2 on Wednesday afternoons this year and I am currently redeveloping the Literacy 2 lessons. I am using flashcards, white boards and stickers to play sound games. As well as using word lists and teaching sounds in phonic groups – hopefully the children remember the sounds more easily and accumulate a reading vocabulary.

Also, I look for resources for all of the teachers and this has been lots of fun even if a little time consuming!

Despite that, I am really enjoying it, I can really see and hear my daughter's progress and she loves knowing what the class is doing beforehand, giving out the stickers and writing on the board.

What Group Support Coordinators do

The support coordinators work very hard providing resources, lesson plans and teaching advice to the teachers in their team as well as doing lots of other unseen things – meetings with teachers, phone calls and talking to parents. Last year I was supporting Pre-Lit, this year I am supporting Lit 2.

Where you like to do your grocery shopping

I shop weekly in Migros, Val Thoiry, as it is so close and very quiet in the mornings, so it is relatively easy shopping with Matthew. On the way to Playgroup in the mornings I go to Le Clerc, which is cheaper. I go to the Thoiry market on Sundays and the organic shops too.

Your favourite restaurant in the Geneva region

Well, we haven't been to that many places, for obvious reasons. But I like Cafe Peney for a grown up treat; and with children the open air restaurant at the Botanical Gardens and the Mexican restaurant in Balexert.

Your favourite summer holiday destination

We have been to Spain for the last three summers, really enjoying Javea and Tamariu. Although my favourite place is Bonigen, on Lake Brienz, near Interlaken. We have been in May and August when it is beautiful and the lake has been beautifully cool. The whole area is gorgeous. The children love it and we stay at the Seehotel overlooking the lake, which is a Kidshotel and very family friendly.

Your favourite winter holiday destination

We stay at home or go to the UK. But in my dreams it would be somewhere hot.

Your favourite sport/activity

I am delighted that I can do yoga regularly at Yogattic, with Nadine. Otherwise, my favourite sport is running up and down the stairs when I have forgotten something, the children are in the car waiting and we are late for wherever we are going.

Your favourite book

Recently I have enjoyed Engleby by Sebastian Faulks and The Thirteenth Tale by Diane Setterfield. But my literary love is Charles Dickens. We always have audio books in the car and I love Charlotte's Web, King Arthur and A Christmas Carol – so do the children!

Your favourite movie

I love musicals and I am working through watching them with my children, luckily Ellen loves them too. My favourite is West Side Story but this will have to wait. My childhood favourites are Lassie Come Home, National Velvet and Grease. I was fascinated by Downfall about the last days of the Third Reich. Doctor Zhivago and Love Story are my favourite weepies.

I like to watch Love Actually as it was filmed at my old school in Wandsworth, London and I sneaked into the filming of the kissing scene with Hugh Grant and Martine McCutcheon – even though I wasn't on the official audience list – the Deputy Head was not pleased to see me there!

Your favourite music

I like The Beatles, Elvis, Roy Orbison, the Beautiful South, Madonna and Lily Allen. I do like to sing along too.

Footnote from the Literacy Coordinator

By Jane del Pozo
Anna and David's Mum

Leisa is not only a Literacy 2 teacher, but the Assistant Literacy Coordinator and Group Support Coordinator for Literacy 2. As Leisa did the interview for this issue, and told us more about what she does, I would like to take this opportunity to put the spotlight on other "hidden" roles in the Literacy Programme.

The Group Support Coordinator role is filled for Pre-Literacy by Muriel Archer-Galibourg, for Literacy 1 by Literacy 1 teacher Janet Lowry, and for Literacy 3, 4, 5 and 6 by Rebecca Grove who is also teaching a Pre-Literacy class. I am sure you will appreciate the hours spent "behind the scenes" in supporting the teachers in this way.

I would also like to thank Liz Gray, who has been "floating" help to teachers on Wednesday mornings since she came to Geneva last year. She wanted to get involved and help out even though she had no children in the programme. Liz is returning to New Zealand in January. She will be replaced by Dominique Niquille who will be helping all of the Wednesday morning teachers by enabling the children to choose their library books.

If falling in love is anything like learning how to spell, I don't want to do it. It takes too long. Glenn, age 7

Adults Only - Sensational Snacks

By Leisa Campbell-Lendrum
Ellen, Owen and Matthew's Mum

There are two recipes that I always use for Playgroup mum's snack, the first is banana nut brownies, this uses up old bananas and is really tasty, soft and rich; I don't add the nuts. The children know the recipe too and we make it together. It is really easy.

Banana Nut Brownies

175g/6oz butter, cut into pieces, plus extra for greasing
300g/10oz light muscovado sugar
175g/6oz dark chocolate, broken into pieces
100g/4oz bag of nuts, toasted and chopped
3 eggs, beaten
2 or 3 ripe bananas, mashed
100g/4oz self raising flour
2 tbsp cocoa powder
1 tsp baking powder

Heat oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4. Butter and line an 18 x 28 cm/7 x 11 Swiss roll tin with baking paper. Put the butter, sugar and chocolate in a large pan and heat gently, stirring, until melted and smooth, then remove the pan from heat. Stir in the nuts, eggs and bananas until well mixed, then sift in the flour, cocoa and baking powder.

Pour the mixture into the tin and bake for 30mins until firm in the centre. Cool in the tin, then turn out and cut into 15 squares.

Blackberry and Apple Cake

I use raspberries and double the recipe to make a huge round cake – the perfect mum's pick up.

250g/9oz self raising flour
175g/6oz butter, plus extra for greasing
175g/6oz light muscovado sugar
½ tsp cinnamon
2 rounded tbsp demerara sugar
1 small eating apple, unpeeled, coarsely grated down to the core
2 large eggs, beaten
Finely grated zest of 1 orange
1 tsp baking powder
225g/8oz blackberries or raspberries

Heat oven to 180C/fan 160C/ gas 4. Butter and line the base or a 1kg/2lb loaf tin. Rub the flour, butter and muscovado sugar together to make fine crumbs. Reserve 5 tbsp of the mixture for the topping and mix into the cinnamon and demerara sugar, then set aside. Mix the apple in with the eggs and the zest. Stir the baking powder into the rubbed-in mixture, then quickly and lightly stir in the egg mixture. Gently fold in three-quarters of the berries.

Spoon into the tin and level. Scatter the rest of the berries on top. Sprinkle over the topping and bake for 1hr20mins, testing with a skewer. After 50mins, cover loosely with foil. Leave in the tin for 30mins, then cool on a wire rack.

By Gillian Spence
Maxwell and Anthony's Mum

I made these a few weeks ago with my boys and they loved them. BBC Good Food has a brilliant Gingerbread House if anyone is feeling brave.

Gingerbread Men/Houses/Stars/Etc.

250g unsalted butter
200g dark muscovado sugar
7 tbsp golden syrup
600g plain flour
2 tsp bicarbonate of soda
4 tsp ground ginger

Heat oven to 200C/fan 180C/gas 6. Melt the butter, sugar and syrup in a pan. Mix the flour, bicarbonate of soda and ground ginger into a large bowl, then stir in the butter mixture to make a stiff dough. If it won't quite come together, add a tiny splash of water.

Cut out the template. Put it on a floured baking tray and bake until slightly brown (around 12mins). Transfer to a cooling tray and once cooled decorate with sweets, icing, raisins and chocolates.



Literacy 4 Book Reviews

Editor's Note: Gillian Bell-Williams is the teacher on Wednesday mornings. I paraphrased a tiny bit from the book review questionnaires, which were completed in September 2009.

Adam Hochschild

Space Exploration by Carole Scott

A book that deals with facts. It is a science book about space. I choose it because I like space and I had to do a show and tell about it at school. I learnt about the solar system and how astronauts drink and sleep in a rocket.

Eleanor Munt

Start Riding by Helen Adams and Lesley Sims

A non-fiction book. It is about horses in sports and recreation. I choose it because I like horses and would like to go riding one day. The book explained things well. When you ride, you shouldn't lean forwards and the horse will think you are awkward. Try and keep your balance.

Eileen Dennett

Big Bad Raps by Tony Mitten

This book is fiction - imaginary.

There are 4 chapters in the book. I read Fol de Rol Rap which is about 3 goats. There are 3 goats, a big one, a middle one and a small one, who go for a picnic near a bridge. There is an ogre living under the bridge who wants to eat them. The small goat tells him to eat the middle sized goat because he is bigger and crosses the bridge. The middle one says eat the big goat and crosses the bridge. The big goat then pushes (head butts) the ogre into the water. I enjoyed this book but would pick another book next time. I probably would not borrow the book again.

Jeremy Dunant

Dinosaur Cove, Attack of the Lizard King by Rex Stone

This book is fiction - an imaginary story. There are two main characters. Jamie is a scientist with a backpack full of scientific equipment e.g. a GPS, and Tom is an explorer who has things like binoculars and a torch. Jamie and Tom are two boys living in Dinosaur Cove. One day Jamie is looking for fossils and meets Tom who shows him a cave. The cave has an entrance to a world of strange plants and dinosaurs.

They become friends with them. They are attacked by a T rex who they manage to blind which then is attacked by another T rex. In the end they return to Dinosaur Cove with some fossils. I did enjoy this story and I would borrow the book again.

Lewis Williams

The Famous Five. Five Go Adventuring Again by Enid Blyton

Another fiction book. The main characters are Timmy the dog, Georgina who likes to be called George and wants to be a boy, Julien who is the leader, Dick who likes to lead when Julien is not there, and Anne who likes to do girl things. During Xmas vacation, they go to stay with George's parents at Kieren House. George's father is very clever and stern and has hired a tutor (who turns out to be a baddy) to give them lessons which they are unhappy about. They go exploring and find a cupboard with a false back to it and Timmy finds a secret hole. The adventure begins... I did enjoy the book because they have lots of mysteries to solve. I would not take this book again but would choose another from the series.

MOVIE REVIEW: *KERITY la maison des contes* is definitely well worth the effort. This animated French film opened in theatres in December 2009. It tells the story of a little boy who just cannot figure out how to read. When he inherits a very special library from his beloved great aunt, the magic and adventures begin... You are sure to be enchanted by the stunningly beautiful graphics. Not to mention the charming story told in just 1 hour and 17 minutes.

A Box of Chocolates

By Liz Stevenson Haefliger (Newsletter Editor)
Henry and Paul's Mom

I have yet to find that special artisanal chocolatier (or baker for that matter) in Geneva. But it is just a question of time and I vow that I will not give up this pursuit (not even for the attainment of a 27-inch waist). Chocolate happens to be one of my standard presents simply because it works for practically everyone and you can spend in whatever price range is warranted.

In the event that you might be searching for some good chocolates for Saint Valentine's Day, here is the research I have gathered so far.

There are several outstanding chocolatiers in Vaud. These include but are not limited to:

- Tristan: Located in Bougy-Villars. www.chocolatier-tristan.ch/entree/entree.html
- Blondel: Located in Lausanne. I would highly recommend their truffle logs. www.chocolatsblondel.ch

- Noz: Located in Lausanne. www.noz-chocolatier.ch
- Mélinda: Located in Palézieux-Gare (not too far from the Servion Zoo). www.melinda-chocolat.ch

My current favourite place to buy fancy chocolates in Geneva is du Rhône (www.du-rhone.ch). At 35 CHF for 200 g (approximately 18 pieces) it had better be good. Their chocolates look lovely and the packaging is elegant.

Friends have told me that Martel is a safe bet as a local maker of chocolates with a long history. They have stores scattered throughout Geneva and a factory in Carouge.

I once discovered a hollow chocolate fish that was filled with mini chocolate fish from La Bonbonnière. It was a neat birthday present for a Pisces.

If you are looking for something très Genevois, then consider buying Pavés (bricks) from any reputable store. They are extremely rich.

I generally do not advocate chain stores, but there is a reason why you can find Teuscher (www.teuscher.com) worldwide. Their champagne truffles are yummy and a Swiss classic.

There is a web site that has fairly comprehensive information about Geneva chocolate shops: www.chocolateatlas.com/Chocolate_in_Geneva/Chocolate_In_Geneva.htm.

Not in the mood for chocolate, then you can also turn to Ladurée (www.laduree.com). The legendary Parisian institution sells their famous macaroons here in Geneva. The gorgeous boxes alone will impress whomever you bestow the gift upon. However, as someone who initially lived in the Swiss-German region, I secretly admit to preferring the taste of Luxemburgerli from Sprüngli (www.spruengli.ch).



Do you love the smells, tastes and textures of cooking? There is a small store called **Lyzamir**, close to the main train station, that will surely entice you. Inside are hundreds of spices, grains, legumes (such as lentils and chickpeas), sugars, dried fruits and other products from around the world. Check out the review that was written up in the *Tribune de Genève* (www.tdg.ch/loisirs/restaurants/lyzamir-palais-mille-epices-2009-02-26) on February 27, 2009.

What's On In and Around Geneva

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Tools, materials and snacks are provided at these fun, hands-on workshops organized by L'Espace des Inventions de Lausanne. The popular workshops will start again in February. Bookings are required. The new programme will be available at the beginning of the year. Check the web site for more information. www.espace-des-inventions.ch

2 to 7 Feb – **THEATRE: Bal Caustique**. With a story about a clown and a circus, Am Stram Gram Theatre presents a stunning new production that will take you off the ground with a mix of areal arts and acrobatic circus skills. From 8 years old. 56 route de Frontenex, Geneva. Tel: +41 22 735 79 24. www.amstramgram.ch

3 to 21 Feb - **PUPPET SHOW FOR TODDLERS: Grand Père (Grandfather)** presented by Le Théâtre des Marionnettes de Genève. From 1 to 3 years old. 3 Rue Rodo, Geneva. For bookings call: +41 22 418 47 77. www.marionnettes.ch

7 and 10 Feb – **MUSIC: GAETAN**, the very talented young, Swiss author and composer will enchant the audience with **Martin la Chance**. Presented by Spectacles Onésiens, at Le Manège, Onex. 14:30. From 4 years old.

17 Feb - **ART EXHIBITION:**

Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Genève MAH (The Art and History Museum) celebrates its 100 year anniversary. A vast programme is planned for the whole year with artists' interactions, exhibitions and joint activities with various music, dance and theatre companies in Geneva. Festivities will start on the 17th with the grand opening of L'Exposition du siècle ! Hier, aujourd'hui et demain (The exhibition of the Century! Yesterday, today and tomorrow). Among the many activities proposed that day, children will be invited to participate in a big treasure hunt followed by the pressing of a commemorative coin. In the evening, the program will include a performance by the Conservatoire de Genève, a birthday cake and a candle lit tour of the exhibition.

17 Feb to 7 Mar - **PUPPET SHOW: Marietta chez les clowns**. This is the story of a new Pinocchio (a girl this time!), who comes to life in a family of clowns and decides to become one as well. This show meets halfway between theater and circus. A co-production by Le Petit Théâtre and la Cie Naphtaline. At Le Petit Théâtre, 12 place de la Cathédrale, Lausanne. Wed. 17:00; Fri 19:00; Sat 15:00 and 19:00; Sun 17:00. From 7 years old. Tel for bookings: +41 21 323 62 13. www.lepetittheatre.ch

19 Feb - **BEIJING CIRCUS. Li Ya la fille de l'Empereur (Li Ya the daughter of the Emperor)**.

The new production of the Phoenix Circus is presented for one night only at the Geneva Arena. An amazing program with 50 artists, unprecedented acrobatic acts, hundreds of costumes, lavish sets and unique laser effects ever made for a circus show... www.geneva-arena.ch

23 and 24 Feb - **OUTDOORS: Husky sledging in the French Jura**. MSM camps offer two types of outings in Les Rousses: either with the whole family (for kids of all ages) or a children only outing for kids from 5 years old. The accompanying adults are mainly sports teachers (1 for 8 children) and are all used to being with international kids, either French or English-speaking alike. Departure from and return to Meyrin. For more details tel: +41 79 608 86 84 or email at info@msmcamps.com.

27 and 28 Feb - **International Cat Show**. Different breeds of cats will be presented. Centre Sportif du Bout-du-Monde, Geneva. www.sfgc.ch

Until 28 Feb - **Open air ice-skating rink at La Praille**, on the second floor of the commercial centre. Entry and skate rental is free. www.la-praille.ch. Closed on Mondays.

Until 28 Feb – **OUTDOORS: Ice-skating rink**. Open air ice skating at the Parc des Bastions, in the heart of town, just a few yards from the Reformation Wall.

What's On In and Around Geneva

By Bérénice Fitzpatrick (Newsletter Assistant)
Romain and Matisse's Mum

JANUARY

Jan and Feb (except 7 Feb) – **CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS**: Wednesday workshops at the Museum of Natural History resume in 2010 with the first topic on "Mollusks and shellfish". With more than 100,000 known species, mollusks are the second largest group of animals after the arthropods. Did you know that the most powerful venom of the world is produced by a mollusk? And that the rocks of the Jura and Salève contain many shellfish? A museum expert will guide you in the discovery of the fascinating diversity of these invertebrates. From 7 years old. Children must be accompanied. Natural History Museum, Geneva. 2nd Floor, 14:00 to 16:30. Free entry. www.ville-ge.ch/mhng

Until 3 Jan - **FESTIVAL**: This is your last chance to catch a glimpse of the Trees and Lights Festival. All the trees in the city centre are lit up with coloured lights and paint, wrapped-up and animated with music. A real work of art!

Until 3 Jan - **OUTDOORS**: **Ice-skating in Divonne**. The municipal ice-skating rink under a covered hall is bigger this year. Crepes and drinks are also available. Adults €7, children under 12 €5 (includes skates). Every day: 10:00-12:00; 14:00-16:00; 17:00-19:00. Nights: Tues, Fri, Sat: 20:00-22:00.

Until 4 Jan - **FESTIVAL**: **Post Tenebras Lux**. For the second time in Geneva, a system of dynamic Christmas illuminations highlights interesting sites in the city centre.

Until 5 Jan - **FUN FAIR**: **LUNA PARK**. The merry-go-rounds are there, the sweet stands too. The annual fun fair set up at Plainpalais is still there for you to enjoy, but just for a little while longer!

5 Jan – **OUTDOORS**: **Husky sledging in the French Jura**. MSM camps offer two types of outings in Les Rousses: either with the whole family (for kids of all ages) or a children only outing for kids from 5 years old. The accompanying adults are mainly sports teachers (1 for 8 children) and are all used to being with international kids, either French or English-speaking alike. Departure from and return to Meyrin. For more details tel: +41 79 608 86 84 or email info@msmcamps.com.

Until 10 Jan - **SCIENCE EXHIBITION**: **Génome: Voyage au Cœur du Vivant**. Dive into the heart of a cell nucleus. Immerse yourself in the infinitely small and live an amazing sensory experience. Free entry, every day except Mondays. From 10:00 -19:00 on Ile Rousseau, Geneva. Tel: +41 22 379 72 27. www.unige.ch/450

13 to 31 Jan - **PUPPET SHOW** presented by Le Théâtre des Marionnettes de Genève. **Problème de plume (Feather trouble)** is the story of Mr. Petitmonde's life, totally uneventful but he wishes to keep it that way. Until one day, a feather throws Mr. Petitmonde outside his comfort zone and forces him to investigate. Where does it come from?

To whom does it belong...? Our ingenuous character visits a strange zoo and questions the animals like a child questioning the world around him. The odyssey of Petitmonde touches on concerns linked to the climatic changes and the necessity to widen one's horizons. From 4 years old. 50 minutes. Bookings: + 41 22 418 47 77. www.marionnettes.ch

15 to 20 Jan – **ARMY SURPLUS**: Army stock and camping material sale at Geneva Palexpo. www.geneva-palexpo.ch

16 to 20 Jan – **PUPPET SHOW**: Marionnettes Les Croquettes presents **La princesse des dragons (The Princess of the Dragons)**. In China, under the sea lives the king of dragons with his three beautiful daughters. The arrival of Bamboo, a young flutist from Earth upsets the lives of the underwater kingdom... From 4 years old. Sat, Wed 14:30 and 16:00; Sun 11:00 and 14:30. Salle Communale, Satigny. Tel: +41 22 880 05 16.

16 to 20 Jan – **THEATRE**: Théâtre Am Stram Gram presents **L'histoire du Prince Pipo (The story of Pipo the prince)**, a modern tale about a young prince who leaves his parents to discover life by himself. But Pipo is quite imprudent and ends up fighting with volcanoes and witches and transforming himself into a dragon. Then, he meets Popi the Princess... An extravagant show with a dozen multicolored umbrellas. For ages 6 up. 56 route de Frontenex, Geneva. Tél: +41 22 735 79 24. www.amstramgram.ch

Until 17 Jan – **PLAYGROUND**: **Espace Junior**. A temporary play area for children aged 2 to 12 years old, with games, inflatable castles, a car track, trampolines, playhouses and more. Geneva Palexpo, Hall 7, Grand-Saconnex. Tel: +41 79 213 29 26. www.espacejunior.com

17 and 20 Jan – **CLOWN ACT**: **Chichili the Clown** is presented by Les Spectacles Onésiens. With a clown suit, giant shoes and a big red nose, Chichili the Clown will enchant your children with his juggling, acrobatic skills and his many tricks. For ages 4 up. Le Manège, Onex. Tel: +41 22 879 59 99. www.spectaclesonesiens.ch

20 Jan to 7 Feb – **THEATRE**: **Pacamambo**. Wadj Mouawad, is a Lebanese-born writer living in Quebec, who was recently associated with the 2009 Avignon Festival. He is widely acknowledged as one of the leading writers in French theatre today. With Pacamambo, Wadj Mouawad created a story for children and adults on the mystery of death. From 8 years old. Le Petit Theatre de Lausanne, 12 place de la Cathédrale, Lausanne. For bookings, tel: +41 21 323 62 13. www.lepetittheatre.ch

22 to 24 Jan – **FAIR**: **The 16th Exhibition for Holidays, Sports & Leisure** (Salon des Vacances, Sports et Loisirs). A great way to get a wide variety of travel ideas and to discover what the region offers for sports and fun. Lots of demonstrations and activities for children.

Geneva Palexpo. www.vacances.ch

22 to 24 Jan - **Disney on Ice Rêve de Princesses (Princesses' dreams)**. A magical and unforgettable moment for everyone, that will take you into Disney's dream world of princesses. 6 performances only in Geneva. www.geneva-arena.ch

23 to 31 Jan – **FESTIVAL**: **International Hot Air Balloon Festival, Château-d'Oex**. This is the 32nd edition with more than 80 balloons from 20 different countries exhibiting in the middle of the Alps. Festival hotline: +41 26 924 25 24. www.ballonchateaudoex.ch

27 Jan – **MUSIC**: **De peaux, de plumes et de becs!** The Contrechamps Ensemble will perform flute and piano compositions by Claude Debussy and Olivier Messiaen at the Am Stram Gram Theatre. An unforgettable journey into a dream world of fauna and birds, which gives an opportunity for children to discover the repertoire for flute and piano of two major composers of the twentieth century. 16:00. From 7 years old. For information and bookings, contact: Ensemble Contrechamps. Tel: +41 22 329 24 00 or email: concerts@contrechamps.ch. www.contrechamps.ch

27 to 31 Jan - **PUPPET SHOW**: **La montagne aux trois couleurs (the three color mountain)** is presented by Marionnettes Les Croquettes. This is the story of Big Mouth, a little Indian who defies the village rules by drawing the magic arrow of the shaman. The disappearance of the arrow puts the whole tribe in danger... From 4 years old. Centre de Loisirs, Chêne-Bourg Wed, Sat 14:00 and 16:00; Sun 11:00 and 14:00. Tel: +41 22 348 96 78

Until 31 Jan - **The Calvin Jubilee 2009**. A Jubilee to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the birth of Jean Calvin. Events and activities all on the theme of Jean Calvin, the Geneva-based leader of the Protestant Reformation are taking place at various locations in Geneva. For more information, visit www.calvin09.org

OUTDOORS: **Qimmiq Sledging around Mijoux**. Discover the unique sensation of sledging in a common effort between man and dog. Gerard and his dogs will take your family for a unique adventure at Monts Jura. Call G. Baldensperger, tel. +33 04 50 41 39 74 or +33 06 29 59 91 85. www.qimmiqaventure.com

FEBRUARY

Feb - **CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS**: **Le club des petits inventeurs (Little Inventors' Club)** proposes regular workshops for children between 7 and 12 years old, to discover, learn and make their own little inventions, which they will be able to take home afterwards.

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