



Waldorf Essentials

**Foundations
of
Early Childhood**

by Melisa & Erik Nielsen

Waldorf Essentials

Foundations of Early Childhood and Kindergarten

Melisa Nielsen LLC

Contents

Introduction	1
• What is the best way to put this book and course to work for you?	1
Rhythm, Parenting and Living	2
• What exactly is this “rhythm” thing?	2
• Sleep window?	3
• Dinner is the runway for bedtime	4
• Let’s talk about inner work	8
• Discipline and Development	10
The Role of Media and Environment in Early Childhood	12
Storytelling	14
Movement	16
Music	18
Circle Time Creation	20
• Melisa’s 6 Keys to Circle Time Creation	21
• Now what about those mixed ages?	22
• The Nuts and Bolts of Circle Planning	24
Festivals	28
The Nature Table	31
Handwork	32
First Grade Readiness, Placement and Preparation	33
• Is your Child Ready?	33
• Preparation	35
Recommendations for the 3-4 Year Old	36
• Sample Circle Time and Story Books for the 3-4 Year Old	37
Before the Journey: Stories, Festivals and Recipes	42
• Autumn	43
• Winter	54
• Spring	72
• Summer	80
Resources and Suggested Reading List	88
Song and Verse Bank	89
• Verses for Parents	89
• Songs and Verses for Transitions & Activities	90
• Songs and Verses for Giving Thanks & Expressing Reverence	92
• Songs and Verses with Gnomes & Fairies	93
• Songs and Verses for Autumn & Autumn Festivals	95
• Songs and Verses for Winter & Winter Festivals	96
• Songs and Verses for Spring & Spring Festivals	99
• Songs and Verses for Summer & Summer Festivals	102
• Songs and Verses, Miscellaneous	106
• Songs and Verses for Opening & Closing	112
• Tongue Twisters	114
Indexes	
• Song and Verse Index	115
• Story Index	118
• Recipe Index	118
• Handwork Index	119

help you eat better and it will get your children off to bed sooner. Next we will start crafting a rhythm that feels good to you.

If you really want to get into the Waldorf flow, you can go deeper. Many families work in the color, grain, planet and even scent of the day. Steiner fathered some of these ideas and others were taken from religious traditions of old that are still alive today. When my children were small, I loved to dress somehow in the color of the day and also eat the grain of the day in a meal. It was a great non-abstract way to learn the days of the week.

Day	Color	Planet	Grain	Scent
Sunday	White	Sun	Wheat	Frankincense
Monday	Violet	Moon	Rice	Jasmine
Tuesday	Red	Mars	Barley	Clove
Wednesday	Yellow	Mercury	Millet	Copal
Thursday	Orange	Jupiter	Rye	Cedar
Friday	Green	Venus	Oats	Rose
Saturday	Indigo	Saturn	Corn	Myrrh

Circle Time Creation

If you are familiar with circle time at all outside of Waldorf schooling, then this might feel different and even intimidating at first. In mainstream schools, circle time is often just referred to as time spent together as a class, sitting in a circle. A teacher might tell a story or sing some songs, but often that is where it ends. In a Waldorf school setting that circle has more meaning. An opening circle often starts the class day or lessons for the early childhood and younger grades and then a closing circle completes the class day. At home, we can approach things a little differently.

This chapter will take you through the what, why and how of circle time at home with Waldorf. It will also take you through your child's growth and questions like, "When are we done with circle?" or "What do I do when my 9 year old refuses to come to circle?" and my favorite, "How do I do a circle with mixed ages?" These are all hot questions! We will also discuss my six keys to circle time creation. In the Appendix to this book you will also find a large bank of songs and verses to use as you are creating circles for your children. In the course you will also find templates you can print to make your own circle time song collection, and finally, you will also find a recording for each song or verse. These are all found in the course on our website.

As mentioned above it, circle time is used a bit differently depending on the school setting. We are focusing on the Waldorf school setting and then we'll translate that to our homes. In a Waldorf school, the teacher would likely greet the child as they walk in with a handshake and an opportunity to welcome each child to school that day. This brings the child into the classroom. Likewise, we greet our children as they rise each morning. Hopefully we have gotten up before they do and we are centered and ready to meet them. If we have been busy with chores, hopefully we take the time to really welcome our child into the day. This sets the tone for so much and will often be the barometer for the rest of the day.

In the school kindergarten setting, the children first have free play and then come together for circle time, greeting one another as a group. Often this happens with a "Good Morning" song or a song that might start with "Let's make a circle..." These calls to circle give the child the understanding that a transition is taking place and replaces words like "Come on children, let's make a circle." In a home setting this might take place after breakfast, chores and a walk, just before the day's lessons are about to begin. For early childhood and kindergarten, the circle or gathering is where their lesson takes place. In contrast, for the older child it might be the place where math practice, spelling practice, flute lessons, etc. are realized.

It is easy to get hung up on the words "circle time" but let's deconstruct it a bit so it is easy to see how they are different in the home setting and at school. At school, the circle brings the children back together after they have been apart as a group. At home, however, that is not the case. At home, we are together all the time, so circle or gathering time, if you prefer, has a different meaning. For homeschoolers that gathering often signifies the start of the day's lessons. It helps to realize that while you will have some formal rhythm in the circle, it isn't nearly as rigid when it is two or three children than it would be if you had 20 or 30 in your charge.

What should be included?

Now that you know how a circle can be different at home, what should it include? Well, really that can vary but as a general guideline for early childhood you will include some movement, a story and some songs and/or verses. Building them up so they work with the whole is part of the art of circle time that can sometimes feel overwhelming. We will break it all down. I promise that if this is one of your stressors then it is likely that you are overthinking and paralyzed needlessly by fear. Remember, they are young and very forgiving so don't take yourself too seriously.

Planning a circle for an older child will look different as well and might feel more like "warm up" exercises than a circle; in truth, that is all they are. As children grow, the traditional Waldorf circle time morphs into main lesson warm up. Remember that it changes as they do. We'll cover those logistics later in the chapter.

CIRCLE TIME

Spring Circle 5-6yo

#1 early spring

THEME/MONTH

Props & Notes:

acorn

plant some seeds

field trip to

botanical gardens

Opening/Call to gather:

Good Morning to You

Verse/Songs:

Mother Earth

Eee Says the Bee

Spring is Coming

Story:

The Brave Acorn

Little Gnome

Closing (optional):

The Earth is Firm



Complete

Self Evaluation: How did it go?

Festivals

Festivals are an exciting and fulfilling part of your yearly rhythm. I have listed ones you will commonly find in Waldorf communities. These are very simplified descriptions and I encourage you to dig deeper and find spiritual meaning for yourself. The beauty comes when you delve into your own culture and find ones within your faith or background that speak to you. Many religious traditions have beautiful festivals. As you move through the years, different faiths and cultures are presented, and this becomes a fun time to add in a few festivals from those faiths. I generally advise people just starting out to pick one or two from this list each year until you have worked yourself up to a rhythm of regular festivals, ones you know well and can pull off. This helps you ease into each season without the stress and worry of needing to learn everything at once. I found that learning about the festivals really gave me a chance to ponder much of my own spirit.

Planning each festival takes time. During a festival week, we generally take the time from our school schedules to work on things pertaining to that festival/holiday. If we are having a party, which we often do, we will spend a day working on the decorations or the food for it. I may start the week out with a story, either one I remember about the festival, one I have made up, or a library book. This gets everyone in the mood to start thinking about what we will be celebrating and when it will occur. That will generally be our lesson for the day. I find that having them completely involved also gives them a sense of ownership and allows them to ponder what things mean to them without them needing me to orchestrate it all for them.

The dates I have listed are for the Northern Hemisphere. Generally, in the Southern Hemisphere, you can just switch the seasons. Please see our website for more specific festival information.

Harvest (late summer) Pagan cultures often referred to this as Lammas or Lughnasadh. Most people just know it as the Harvest. This is a time when farmers and gardeners bring in the remainder of their garden and generally begin storing it for winter. It's a time to celebrate with many meals that can be completely vegetarian and in most cases raw. Have fun with the excess corn and carrots, make corn dollies, bake apple pie (or ask me for a great raw apple pie recipe!), celebrate the Creator (however you see him/her) for the bounty received.

Michaelmas (September 29th, or thereabouts) This is a season to our family rather than just a festival holiday. The festival refers to St. Michael, the patron saint of the sea and maritime lands, of ships and boatmen. So what does that have to do with St. George and the dragon? And why do we care what he's the patron saint of? Well, there are all kinds of stories about St. Michael. He is supposed to be the angel that flung Lucifer out of heaven for his speaking against God; some faiths believe St. Michael to also be the spirit being of Adam from the garden of Eden. The story of St. George comes in because of the obvious good versus evil in the Michael story about Lucifer. Michael is referred to as Michael the Victorious. St. George is often seen fighting the dragon as a symbol of evil, thus they are generally celebrated together. This festival has great significance especially for young children still battling their inner will. The battle of good versus naughty is one some know. Older children also often see the battle mirroring battles that could be going on around them and their "need" as children to try to understand it all. There are many library books that refer to the St. George and the St. Michael story, enough that you could tell a different one each day of the week. That is what we generally do. We also bake dragon bread (simply a sweet or savory bread shaped like a dragon) to symbolize our overcoming adversity. Michael is a great symbol for overcoming the darkness of winter that lay ahead.

Halloween/All Souls Day (October 31st/November 1st) What a fun and exciting celebration! This festival becomes a perfect time for us to remember our dead, those in our family who have passed on before us. During the month we hang decorations and decide on costumes, but during the actual week, we remember our family. We pull out photo albums and tell stories we remember from those who have gone. We also take this time to visit the cemetery and take flowers to a grave that looks unkempt. We often will find a really old headstone in our cemetery and try to find out if there is town history with that person (we live in a small pioneer town). This becomes an excellent time for introspection. After we trick or treat, to limit the amount of sugar in our home, we ask the children to pick out ten or so of their favorites and then they leave the rest for the sugar plum fairies. These are great little fairies that take your candy and leave something fun and little in its place. Sometimes she leaves handmade goods, sometimes a little dollar trinket. Then she whisks the candy away from little hands and teeth!

The Nature Table

The Waldorf method is often noted for the beauty with which we approach everyday tasks. The nature table is one of these beauties. All children like to collect things in nature (thinking about the boxes of rocks I constantly find in my children's rooms); the Waldorf method takes these explorations a bit further with the creation and keeping of nature tables. This starts in many Waldorf homes long before kindergarten and often continues long after the children have left home. Like everything else, the nature table can also have a rhythm. I like to use this four week cycle that I learned years ago in Waldorf training. This rhythm is a four week cycle that begins the season and can be added to as time in each season passes. Each week represents a kingdom in nature; during that week, you would concentrate of collecting things for the nature table from that kingdom. My general rule for this is "less is generally more!" I limit each child to one thing a piece. Otherwise, by week four, there will be no room!

Week one: Mineral

Week two: Plant

Week three: Animal

Week four: Human

This is especially fun to do during Advent. During this time it is fun to make a gift for the children from each kingdom. The only rule in my house is that it has to live on the nature table until the end of the season.

Here are some fun ideas:

Week 1: a quartz point or other stone that can help them

Week 2: a needle felted mistletoe branch or Yule tree

Week 3: a needle felted or small wooden animal

Week 4: a wooden figure.

As with other elements of Waldorf, have fun with this. Don't worry about the "rules" - enjoy yourself!

Recommendations for the 3-4 Year Old

It can be so hard to know where this child fits. They aren't old enough for our kindergarten curriculum that begins around age 5 but they are ready for more than they were as toddlers. We live in a culture that tends to push these little ones toward kindergarten too quickly – even Waldorf culture sometimes. We can feel like these kids are so bright that we might be doing them a disservice by just letting them unfold. Surely we should be doing something, right? At least that is what you are hearing at the grocery store, from your sister-in-law and all the mainstream homeschoolers at the library. It can be hard to hear an experienced mom tell you to breathe, relax and work on your own skills. I know you want more. This section will help you give some shape to your days and feel like you are doing “something”. It is easy to mistake eagerness to learn new skills as academic readiness. Remember to keep a good rhythm and allow plenty of play time. They will unfold as they should.

BREATHE. RELAX. WORK ON YOU.

The plans I am including here are ones that I used with my last child. I'm including the books we used as well as our circle. My son was in a farming block for class 3 for the spring months so we tied many stories into that block. If you have older children, you could replace these themes and topics with ones that mirrored some of your older children's lessons. For instance, if you are studying botany with an older child, then picture books about flowers or different foods might be appropriate. If you are studying the night sky then some books with a nighttime theme would be useful. As a mother of a large family, I am always looking for ways to make my work easier. If one child was studying farming then it was easy to grab picture books on the same subject and I didn't have to shift gears at all. Think smarter, not harder! I bring the stories nice and slow and sometimes will edit plot lines that may be too complex for this age. At the time I put these plans together, we were part of a local Waldorf co-op, so I chose to keep my theme in line with what we were doing in co-op to be cohesive and keep with our rhythm.

When considering if these circle time suggestions will work for you, please know that my daughter had speech delays and some of the songs we repeated often to help her with language skills. I deliberately left them just in case you are challenged with this as well. We lived in coastal California when I compiled this circle; our seasons don't appear to change as much as other areas so you will have to tailor your circle to meet the needs of your children in your climate.

Sample Circle Time and Story Books for the 3-4 Year Old

When we know the author we list it. Keep in mind there are many more songs in the appendix.

Theme	Circle Time Songs	Story/Book Recommendations
Base Circle - generally always included	<p>Good Morning Song</p> <p>Good morning, good morning, good morning to you, Good morning, good morning, good morning to you. Good morning is what we say, good morning is what we do, Good morning, good morning, good morning to you.</p> <p>I Can Reach So High</p> <p>I can reach so high, I can touch the sky, I can reach so low, I can touch my toe. I can turn around, and quickly sit down.</p> <p>Oola Woola by Ellersik</p> <p>Oola woola, oola woola, oola woola, CLAP. Oola woola, oola woola, sits in the sack. Pin pun, pin pun, Pout jumps OUT. Hurray, hurray, he's back, hurray! Pin pun, pin pun, play and AWAY!</p> <p>Finger Fairies</p> <p>Fairies funny, five are we Laughing happy as can be HA HA HA HEE HEE HEE HO HO HO WEE WEE WEE and away we go!</p> <p>The Wheels on the Bus</p> <p>The wheels on the bus go round and round, Round and round, round and round. The wheels on the bus go round and round, All through the town.</p> <p>Standard verses:</p> <p>The people on the bus go up and down, up and down. The people on the bus go up and down, all through the town.</p> <p>We also do:</p> <p>The windows on the bus go up and down. The driver on the bus says move on back. The wipers on the bus go swish, swish, swish.</p> <p>The Cobbler Song</p> <p>This one is occasional. It is really good to get the wiggles out.</p> <p>There's a cobbler down the street, mending shoes for little feet, With a BANG and a BANG and a BANG, BANG, BANG Mending shoes the whole day long, Mending shoes to make them strong, With a BANG and a BANG and a BANG, BANG, BANG!</p>	

January Three Kings The Growing Sun	<p>Ten Fingers</p> <p>I have ten little fingers and they all belong to me. I can make them DO things, just you wait and see. I can shut them up tight or open them wide. I can put them together or make them all hide. I can make them jump high, I can make them jump low, I can fold them quietly and hold them just so. I have ten little fingers and they all belong to me. Do you have ten fingers, too? Ah, let me see!</p>	<p><i>The Sun Egg</i> by Elsa Beskow</p> <p><i>A Donsy of Gnomes</i> by Sieglinde De Francesca, "Teasel and Tweed" (working together, brother and sister)</p>
February Bees Candlemas	<p>This Little Light of Mine</p> <p>This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.</p> <p>Verses: All over the world, I'm going to let it shine. Everywhere I go, I'm going to let it shine.</p>	<p><i>When the Root Children Wake Up</i> by Audrey Wood</p> <p><i>Brigid's Cloak</i> by Bryce Milligan</p> <p><i>A Donsy of Gnomes</i>, "Gilly" (gardening and bees)</p>
March Farming - farm animals, chickens, eggs and sheep	<p>Since this piece can take a while, we tended to edit down our base circle for this month.</p> <p>Farmer Brown</p> <p>Farmer Brown walks out to the field with BIG GIANT STEPS Mrs. Brown walks out to the field with light dainty steps Billy Brown runs out to the field with lightning fast steps Becky Brown skips out to the field with light, happy steps Baby Brown tiptoes out to the field with tiny, toddling steps</p> <p>Now what could be growing in Farmer Brown's field? Oats, peas, beans and barley grow Oats, peas, beans and barley grow Do you or I or anyone know How oats, peas beans and barley grow? First the farmer sows his seeds Then he stands and takes his ease. He stamps his foot and claps his hand then he turns to view the land.</p> <p>But...before the oats, peas, beans and barley grow, First the farmer plants the seeds. A farmer once planted some seeds With a pat a pat pat and a pat a pat pat. He watered them often and pulled out the weeds With a tug-tug here and a tug-tug there The seeds grew tall in the sun With a push-push here and a push-push there And all their faces shown out With a hey diddle, diddle and theirs in the air.</p>	<p><i>Daisy Comes Home</i> by Jan Brett</p> <p><i>Hedgie's Surprise</i> by Jan Brett</p> <p><i>Farmer Brown Sheers His Sheep</i> by Teri Sloat</p> <p><i>Pelle's New Suit</i> by Elsa Beskow</p>

Autumn

Meet Mindy: She is the vibrant mom of 2 year old Paul and wife to Richard, a web developer, in Boise, Idaho. She was introduced to Waldorf while pregnant with Paul and has enjoyed building a happy home for her family in a one bedroom condo. She loves learning new things and enjoys getting out to share ideas with other moms. They are a non denominational spiritual family.

September 10

I passed a woman while shopping with Paul today while he was having one of his fun tantrums right in the middle of the grocery store, and she had the nerve to say to me, "I bet you'll be glad when you can send him off to preschool!" Preschool? He's only two! The thought of it turns my stomach! And the thought that so many parents feel so guilty about enjoying their children that they do the same...cart their wee ones off to preschool. I mean, sure there are moms that feel like they need to work, but the idea of preschool just... well, I could write for days about it. The comments of the lady, while well intended, made me think about how happy I am to have been given a copy of *You Are Your Child's First Teacher* when I was pregnant with Paul, otherwise I might be carting him off to preschool! I feel so blessed to have this time with Paul. Richard and I waited so long for him to come along that I want to savor every minute, even the tantrums! I kick myself because I know if we had just gotten a snack before going into the store the tantrum never would have happened.

I decided this week that I would start to recall things to be thankful for. Today's list: a washing machine, my husband and son, indoor plumbing, oh, and granola...what a great breakfast we had today with granola in our yogurt!

I was really thinking about what I wanted to put on the nature table for our upcoming fall festivals so Paul and I took our afternoon walk through the neighborhood today and we gathered leaves and acorns for our table. When we got home I was so inspired that I sifted through my stash of yarn ball ends and found the beautiful bulky gold I used for Mom's birthday scarf and grabbed my #9 knitting needles and went to town. I made up this little knitting pattern for a gnome to sit in our leaves.

My Gnome Pattern

Materials needed: yarn in whatever color and gage you prefer, needles in the appropriate size for your yarn, and some undyed wool roving to stuff with.

Cast on 26 stitches

Knit 18 rows

Row 19 BO first 6 stitches knit to end of row

Row 20 BO first 6 stitches knit to end of row

Knit 6 rows

Knit 2 together

Then cast off

Fold in half and sew large portion together as cape. Sew the very top portion together as head. Leave the middle not sewed for the opening of gnome's face. Stuff gnome. (See picture in Handwork section of the course.)

September 15

Wow, I can't believe my entries are so far apart! Chasing Paul wears me out some days – in fact, it really got me thinking about my sleep. I was talking to some other moms with toddlers at our play group yesterday and one of them suggested I go to bed earlier and get up before Paul so that I can feel fresh when he gets up. So last night I gave it a try. I nursed Paul to sleep and instead of getting up to surf the net I stayed in bed. Funny thing is that Richard got bored and came to bed, too. He and I both woke up with renewed energy this morning and were able to steal some alone time that we both craved. We ate breakfast together, chatted about our day, and we even prayed together! It was the first time I remember praying together in months. By the time Paul woke up we were both ready to greet him. Richard went off to work and we started our day here at home.

Song and Verse Bank

This section will give you the songs and verses. They are numbered and correspond to the index as well as the audios included with this course. I have collected many of these over the nearly 20 years that I have been holding circles with my children and in gatherings. Some have lost the original author; where possible I list the author. If you find one that is not properly credited, please bring it to our attention and we will remedy it in the next printing. You will notice that if a song or verse does not have a title we index it by the first line instead. The numbers correspond to the number in the audios and they should match up. Should you find any that are off, please let us know. We edit and edit and edit again but we are human.

Verses for Parents

1

Receive the Child with Reverence
Educate the Child with Love
Relinquish the Child in Freedom
~ Rudolf Steiner

2

Steiner's 6 Exercises from the Point of View of Rhythm

1. Thought control. This means that, at least for a short time each day, you stop all sorts of thoughts from drifting through your mind. For a space of time, you allow peace and tranquility to enter your thinking.
2. Initiative in action. You must perform some action, however trivial, that originates with your own initiative. (Don't get hung up on this one; it could be as easy as planning to water a plant at the same time each day.)
3. Detachment, imperturbability. You must learn to regulate your emotions so that you are not up in the sky one moment and down in the dumps the next...[it] means that you master yourself throughout the greatest joys and deepest grief.
4. Impartiality or freedom from prejudice. This quality sees goodness in everything and looks for the positive element everywhere.
5. Faith. You must always remain open to new experiences. (Work to have faith with what stands in front of you rather than always making assumptions. Be open.)
6. Inner balance. Inner balance is a natural result of the other five qualities; it is formed gradually from the other five qualities. You must keep these six qualities in mind, grasp life, and progress gradually - like drops of water wearing away a stone in the proverb.~ Steiner, September 1906

3

To bind the Self to matter means to shatter souls.
To find oneself in the Spirit means to unite mankind.
To behold the Self in man means to build worlds. ~ Rudolf Steiner

4

Now the heart's spring of hope beholds
The sun, His coming glory
In this light of blessing
Token of the highest life
In winter's deepest night. ~ Steiner, *Solstice*

Child Development

BIRTH TO TWENTY-ONE



melisa nielsen



Waldorf Essentials

CURRICULUM. COACHING. COMMUNITY.



To visit our site go to: www.waldorfessentials.com

If you have questions or
need support emails us at:
team@melisanielsen.com