Hello Everyone! How have you been? Did you have a wonderful Easter or Passover? How was your Earth Day? I hope you were able to get outside and count butterflies or lady bugs or plant some flowers. Did you enjoy our little trip to Australia? I sure did! If you were inspired by any of the arts and crafts ideas I've sent home please send me a picture of them! You might just get to see them on the City of El Cerrito website or featured in the next newsletter!

For this weeks newsletter, I thought it could be fun to share some of my favorite things: books, crafts, cooking, photography, gardening and camping. Are you ready to explore a few of my favorite things? OK! Let's GO!!

Camping has always been one of my favorite things to do! These are pictures from a camping trip I took to Patrick's Point State Park back in 2016.
BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS
I just LOVE books! Books have a special magic and can transport us to far away places we’ve never been to, introduce us to new people, thoughts, ideas, and expressions. Books give us talking bears, ballerina mice, magic wands and flying with dragons. Books give voices to trees and show us how to be brave. Here are a few of my ALL TIME favorite books, I hope you enjoy them as much as I have!
House on Pooh Corner
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw6vJPLk6sM&list=PLy4MDcO-UJ3FKn-VYkJ77gvfsm-5EyoEDF

Angelina Ballerina
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdusdGxkvR8

Raising Dragons
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoMybZILM

The Lorax
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdWesdMfyd4&t=950s

Amazon has most of these books, and many others, available as free audible books for the whole family to listen to.
https://www.amazon.com/b/ref=hud_2_gwrd_adbl_pr_163_cpa?node=21164361011&actionCode=AMZOR06004102092EK&pf_rd_r=DVM1MN2GTKEFDB157ZEJ&pf_rd_p=62fbe72d-a784-4073-a7e3-04d391b92c3c

MAKE YOUR OWN BOOK
How much fun is it to make your own book? All you need is paper and crayons or markers and a grown-up to write out your words! First, draw out the pictures for your story. Then, have your grown-up helper write out your words on a blank paper or on the bottom of your picture paper. When the story is all written out you can make a cover for your new story and staple it together.

“Books give a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything.”

-PLATO

“Books are a uniquely portable magic.”

-Stephen King
**ARTS & CRAFTS**

Arts and crafts are another of my all time favorite things to do. I'm happiest when I'm creating something...so knitting, beading, photography, latch hook rugs...my list just keeps going. Here are a few of my favorite Springtime craft projects.

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**Speak for the Trees**

Be The Lorax and ‘Speak for the Trees’ with this simple craft project.

**Supplies:**
- Cardstock
- Craft glue
- Pompoms
- Yellow paint
- Black sharpie
- Red, Green or Blue sharpie
- OR yellow & black yarn

**Directions:**
Paint at least 2 Truffula tree trunks or glue pieces of string to your paper to look like tree trunks. Then glue on your pompoms. If you painted your trunks, when the paint is dry use the sharpie marker to make the black zigzag details of the truffula tree bark.
Then, under the trees write in the words “Unless” or “I speak for the trees”. This simple project looks beautiful matted and framed and is something that Grandparents love to receive.

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**May Day Craft**

When I was a little girl, my Gran would help me make May Day baskets for our elderly neighbors, in today's isolation, this might be a tradition we can bring back. Let's spread a little ray of sunshine and surprise a few neighbors, and brighten someone's day, wishing them a Happy May Day.

**May Day Basket Cones**

**Supplies:**
- Construction paper
- crayons or markers
- optional: paints or stickers
- tape
- ribbon
- hole punch
- scissors
- flowers
- treats

**Directions:**
Decorate a piece of construction paper anyway you want, just make it pretty. Then roll the straight edges together to form a cone, and tape the edges closed along the back edge. Next, using a hole punch, punch holes around the top edge of the cone. Now, cut a piece of ribbon that will be long enough to weave through the holes in the cone, and starting at the top of the cone, weave the ribbon in and out of the holes. You’ll want the long pieces at the top of the cone to tie a bow for the handle.
OR cut a strip of construction paper and tape or staple it over the top of the cone to make a handle. Then cut some flowers and fill your May Day basket. If you don’t have a garden to pick flowers from, you can always make some paper flowers. A few links for making paper flowers:
You can also add sweet treats, like lollipops, mini chocolates, seed packages or other treats to your May Day baskets.
Now, comes the super fun part...the idea is that these baskets are a surprise, so sneaky social distancing is KEY here. Hang them on your neighbor’s doorknob, knock and dash away, knowing that you just made someone smile!
**COOKING**

Some of my happiest childhood memories are of cooking with my mom and my grandmothers. To this day I love making cut biscuits like my Grandma B taught me, or making homemade apple sauce or rice pudding or waffles. Let’s make some more cooking memories together!

Teacher Melanie’s cooking abbreviations:
C = cups  T = Tablespoon  tea /tsp= teaspoon

**Grandma’s Biscuit Recipe**
This recipe has been in my family for over 200 years!
Ingredients:
2C all purpose flour
1T baking powder
1/4C shortening
1/4 tea salt
1C Buttermilk (can use 3/4 reg. milk)

Directions:
Blend all ingredients well. Don’t overwork the dough. Roll out on lightly floured surface to about 1/4” thickness. Cut with a floured jelly jar glass. Brush tops of biscuits with melted butter or bacon grease. Bake on a baking sheet at 450 until tops are golden brown. The original recipe doesn’t note how long to bake, so keep an eye on them. Should be close to 10 min.

**Apple Stuff**
Everyone in my family LOVES this recipe.
2/3C brown sugar
1/3 C butter
1/2 C quick cooking oats
1/2 C flour
2T Peanut butter (any type)
1/2 tsp each ground cinnamon and nutmeg
1/4 tsp allspice
4-5 cooking apples

Directions:
Peel and slice apples, set aside. In another bowl combine sugar, oats, flour and the spices. Cut in butter and peanut butter with a fork or a pastry blender. Layer apples and topping in a baking dish. Bake at 375* for 45 minutes or until apples are tender. You can also cook this in a crock pot 1.5 hours on high or 2.5 hours on low. Stir occasionally. Serve over vanilla ice cream or topped with whipped cream.

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**GARDENING**

Gardening, whether for flowers or veggies is one of my most favorite things to do. So, let’s plant some seeds together and see what we can grow!

**DIY SEED BOMBS**

Seen bombs are a fun nature activity and a great way to bring some life to our yard.

Here’s what you’ll need to make these seed bombs:
6 pieces of construction paper, assorted colors
3-5 packages of flower seeds
Food processor or blender
Scissors
Water

First, cut the construction paper into small, 1 inch squares. Place the squares into a small dish while being sure to keep each color in its own dish. Fill each dish with water just until the paper is covered. Let the paper squares soak for about 20 minutes. Take one of the bowls of paper squares and wring it out about halfway. Place the squares into a food processor and pulse into a pulp. Repeat this with all paper colors and put the pulp back into each of their bowls. Sprinkle some seeds into each bowl of paper, mix them in a little, and press the pulp and seeds into balls. If the pulp is a little dry, put a few sprinkles of water onto the pulp. It will help it to hold its shape better. Set the seed balls onto a sheet pan to dry overnight. Now you can plant them in your garden or anywhere you want flowers to grow!
UPCYCLED CARTON PLANTER
An upcycled carton garden gives you a fun opportunity to be hands-on with your kids as they make and personalize their own flower gardens. Grab a carton and let’s make a flower garden!

Supplies:
- Half gallon milk or juice carton with a cap
- Soap and water
- Scissors
- Potting soil
- Flower seeds or flowers from a nursery
- Optional: gardening gloves
- Optional: materials for decorating (construction paper, paint, glue, markers, glitter, etc…)

Directions:
First, wash out the carton with soap and water by putting some soap and water in the carton, put the cap back on, and shake the carton really well. Then, we poured out the soapy water and rinse until all the soap is gone.

Then cut the opening for your flower carton. This step should be done by an adult. Take your carton and turn it on its side so that the cap is facing sideways. Begin to cut your carton by poking a small hole in one corner. Then put your scissors through the hole and cut along the edge of the carton, leaving a 1/4” lip all the way around.

Decorate your Planter (optional):
If your kids want to decorate their carton to make a pretty upcycled planter, you’ll want to have them do that before putting in the soil and flower seeds/flowers.
Here are some ideas for decorating your flower carton:
~ Cover your planter with pretty contact paper, colourful duck tape or washi tape.
~ Wrap the carton in construction paper with glue and then use markers, stickers, and glitter to decorate.
~ Glue on collected nature items to decorate as a nature collage.
~ Cut out pieces from a magazine and glue them on to fill the outside of the carton.
~ You could simply attach a tag to your carton and give this beautiful upcycled craft as a gift.
**After decorating your planter be sure to poke a few holes in the bottom to allow for draining.

Turn the Carton into a Flower Garden:
Now that your carton is cleaned, cut, and decorated, it’s time to add in the potting soil and seeds, or flowers. This should be done outdoors for a quick and easy clean-up. Fill up the carton with potting soil, patting it down and smoothing it out along the way.

Once it is full, add a little bit of water to make the soil nice and damp.
Then, add in your flower seeds, following the directions on the back of the seed bag.

Another option is to plant some already grown flowers for an instant flower garden. It’s completely up to you which seeds or flowers you plant. You could even plant herbs and root vegetables, like baby carrots or radishes.

Your beautiful flower carton garden is complete! You can keep it inside for a few days next to the window (especially if it’s cold outside), but eventually, most flowers need to be placed outdoors in full sun. While your planter is inside remember to place something under your planter to catch any water that drains out.

Just remember to add water, give sunshine, and take some time to smell the flowers.
CAMPING
The first time I ever went camping was over the Fourth of July weekend when I was only 5 days old. All I have to say is that I have camping in my blood. From that first camping trip to this day I try to go camping at least one full week every year. I don’t know if I’ll get to go this year, but back yard camping can also be a treat!

Just set up a tent in your backyard. Toss in a few sleeping bags, set up the bar-b-que for roasting some hot dogs or hamburgers. And don’t forget to get marshmallows for smores!

PHOTOGRAPHY
Photography is one of those hobbies that allows a person to capture, forever, the things that matter to them the most. My Grandmother was the first one to hand me a camera and let me take pictures….I think I was around 5 or 6. Digital cameras are wonderful tools that give children another way to express themselves.

Here’s a quick guide on how to teach photography to your child. https://kidscameraguide.com/photography-for-kids/

Some Casa kids “sleeping” in the big tent after a busy day “hiking” and “fishing”

Casa Campers “cooking” up something yummy!