



Gifts from the Heart: ART Activity

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MAKING MEANING

Scroll down for fun adaptation for families.

Making meaning about life experiences is important to living a healthy, happy existence. Experience tells us this and research backs it. In fact, science is beginning to reveal some of the ingredients to a meaningful life. For example, creating a meaningful life takes thinking about the past, present, and future as well as their relationship to each other. This doesn't mean dwelling on the past and worrying about the future, but rather considering where you've been, where you've gotten to, and where you are headed. What's more, living a meaningful life may not always feel happy; it may feel challenging, stressful, or disappointing at times. But what really matters to living a meaningful life is how you integrate all of these experiences into the story that is you.

Recently, as I unpacked our box of holiday decorations, it occurred to me that it was not unlike opening a time capsule. My children delighted at finding their "hand print ornaments" they made last year, measuring their now bigger hands against them; I recalled the friends who have moved away, when I unearthed the cookie cutters we had used for a get-together with them a year ago. And there was more to discover and remember. By interacting with these objects, that moment that started as excitement for the holidays (turned stressful while trying to stop my kids from breaking the breakables) became enriched with a sense of meaning. Past and present bridged with an appreciation for the fact that my children will grow and life will continue to change. These objects, in this box, brought a richer sense of meaning to the moment.

As the holidays approach and as the year's end slips by, we invite you to take time to make your own time capsule. Here's wishing you a meaningful and happy new year.

Activity: Time Capsule

1. Find (or purchase) a medium sized, glass jar. While a clear jar makes a nice piece to display, you can also use a plastic container with a lid or a box if you'd prefer.
2. Find objects for your jar that represents the year. Place them in your jar:
 - a. Think back over this past year. What events or people stand out in your mind? What objects represent these events or people? They can be personal, community-related, or world related.
 - b. Look in the bottom of your purse or your desk drawing. What do you find there?

- c. If you are short on objects and mementos, write or draw something representative of that time, event, place, or person. Or go online and find a picture that represents the memory.
 - d. If you'd like, include a thought (wish or hope) about the future.
3. Close your jar and attach a tag or sticker denoting the year.
4. Display your time capsule or pack it away until next year when you can rediscover it.
5. Take a moment to reflect on your time capsule:
 - a. What did you notice about your process? What about it was challenging or easy?
 - b. Are there any themes to the types of objects you placed in your time capsule?
 - c. Is there anything you would have like to put in it, but couldn't for some reason? Is there anything you included that made you feel uncomfortable? Happy? Sad? Nostalgic?
 - d. Looking at your capsule now, what meaning can you make about this year gone?

Adaptation for Families

1. Invite each family member to think of items or pictures they would like to add to the jar. You can do this together or invite people to add to it over the course of days or even weeks.
2. Participants may draw pictures of significant memories or items if there are no mementos from those events or if favorite items are too large (or too precious) to go into the jar.
3. You may want to place a "Family photo" so that it faces out and can be seen clearly when looking at the jar.
4. If you have children, you may want to add a small, hand-written note including what they want to be when they grow up, their favorite thing to do, their favorite color, etc.
5. Let children know that it is okay to add something that is important to them (if they want to) because they can always take it back out (you won't be burying these in the back yard!).

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