

The World Is Your Classroom

Raising happy, healthy kids

BY CRAIG AND MARC KIELBURGER

Our parents are teachers, which is why they used every chance they had to take us on a field trip – only, we didn’t always know this is what our excursions were. We would often explore different neighbourhoods of Toronto with our father. And because we grew up in the suburbs, a trip to the “big city” was an adventure. We spent endless afternoons enjoying the vibrant energy in Little Italy; learning about silks, spices and Bollywood movies in Little India; and making our way through the bustle of Kensington Market as languages from around the world washed over us.

On these expeditions, Indian samosas, Chinese dumplings and Vietnamese soups took the place of hot dogs or ice cream from street vendors. Sometimes we’d try to recreate this fare at home with ingredients from ethnic grocery stores. Our parents, encouraging as always, would commend our efforts and tell us how “delicious” it was. Looking back, we’re just happy no one ever fell ill!

These adventures were our parents’ way of introducing us to new cultures, foods and languages, and showing us different people and ways of life. On these excursions we were able to see for ourselves that not everyone lived the way we did in Thornhill, Ont. We saw the diversity that exists in other areas of our larger community, and came to understand issues such as prejudice at the same time. This education was one we could never get in a textbook or classroom; it was joyful and gave us a respect for all people. It also made us unafraid and curious to explore – and be at home with – global cultures. Perhaps, most importantly, it expanded our vision of community.



➤ **More than 220,000 people immigrate to Canada from all parts of the world each year. One in seven Canadian children under age 15 is a visible minority. The three largest visible minority groups among children in Canada are Chinese, South Asian and black.**

Source: Government of Canada

Most big cities across Canada offer similar cultural experiences to the ones we experienced. Whether you live in the city, suburbs or in a rural region, you can create your own adventures – on the road or through the Internet, where a world of information awaits you. The world is literally at our doorstep. All we have to do is reach out and embrace it. So, what are you doing with your kids this March break?

Craig and Marc Kielburger are the founders of Free the Children and coauthors of Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World (Simon and Schuster, 2006) and Me to We: Turning Self-Help on Its Head (John Wiley, 2004).

Get in the Act: Next Steps

- 1 Let your kids take turns picking the country you’ll prepare food from or the restaurant you’ll visit. Read up about the culture in advance.
- 2 Mark different cultural and religious festivals and holidays from around the world on your calendar and talk about them at home. Find out what ethnic populations are prominent in your children’s school and discuss the traditions they celebrate.
- 3 Become a host to a family or individual who has just arrived in Canada. Sign up at a centre for new immigrants or the YMCA. The commitment doesn’t need to be big, and you’ll all benefit from the experience.