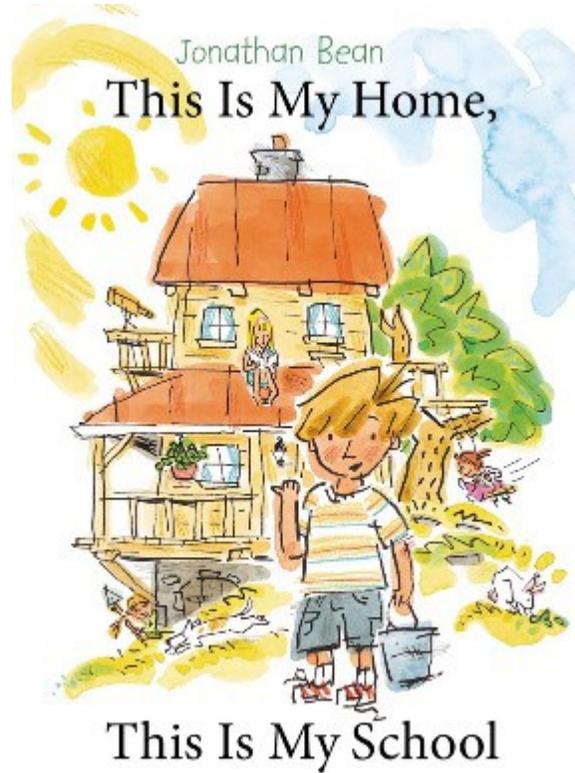


Literature Guide for Jonathan Bean's
This is My Home, This is My School



by Robin M. Huntley

Summary

This is My Home, This is My School introduces young readers to the idea of self-directed learning. Centered around a somewhat chaotic household and its many inhabitants, the story points out that, for the homeschooled narrator, home and school are one and the same – making home a place for living *and* a place for learning. Based on author/illustrator Jonathan Bean's childhood, the book helps readers see the ways in which a family can use their everyday experiences to support the acquisition of almost any kind of knowledge.

Beginning with pages that repeat the story's title, the book follows the narrator through a quick tour of his home, wherein it is learned that his siblings are his classmates, his mom is his teacher (and dad the substitute), his kitchen is his cafeteria, his back yard is his playground, his family van is his school bus, and all of the rooms of his home (as well as the outdoor spaces nearby) serve as his classrooms. Readers see family members (students!) engaged in a wide variety of activities during the tour, from traditional “school-style” activities like computer research and worksheets to less structured activities like basement science experiments, cooking projects, family music jams, treehouse building, and stream exploration.

The characters in the story are clearly quite happy and content with their lives, and appear to have a good amount of freedom during their days. The book's end pages reveal, however, that there's some structure within the chaos: lesson plans for each family member show that math, grammar, vocabulary, literature, history, and science are all being actively studied according to plan through a mixture of reading, working from curriculum, and exploring. It's the activities that take place in addition to the planned learning that really make the characters' experiences unique amongst a landscape of traditionally schooled children: they have the space to play, explore, pursue their own interests, and answer their own questions. The characters – much like Jonathan Bean's true siblings and homeschooled and unschooled children all over the world – are able to learn in the ways that best fit them.

The reading level of the book is moderately low, and the story can be accessed by readers who are as young as kindergarten age. Though the text is not very complex, the subject matter and illustrations make it engaging for older readers, allowing the book to appeal to a wide audience. Readers as old as 10 can find powerful meaning amongst the concise language and illuminating images that accompany it, and families of all shapes and sizes can learn about the way they learn by examining the somewhat-fictionalized life of others.

Critical Thinking Questions

The questions listed below are meant to be used to spark discussion, curiosity, and attention to detail amongst readers of [This is My Home, This is My School](#). The questions can be asked during or after a reading of the book, and will help readers to make observations, articulate their thoughts, and make connections between the text and its accompanying images. The questions are written with readers ages 7-10 in mind, but can be used with readers of any age (younger readers will need simplified versions of the questions or support in developing their understanding of each question).

- What lessons might the characters be learning through the self-directed activities shown in the book's illustrations?
- Based on the illustrations, what kinds of lessons do you think the parents teach their children on purpose?
- What does the family dynamic seem to be like amongst the characters? How do you think the parents' role as teachers affects the dynamic between them and their children?
- The characters in the story seem to have a good amount of freedom at home. In what ways do you see them exercising their freedom?
- How does the characters' freedom affect their learning?
- What do the characters' school-style lessons look like?

- Do you see them learning through any activities that you've done before?
- The home/school depicted in the book seems to be a bit chaotic, but there's always learning taking place. Where do you think the chaos comes from? Do you think that the characters mind? How might the chaos help or hinder their learning?

Mini-Lesson

Unlike most mini-lessons, this activity is intended to be done in many small mini-lessons over a long period of time. Designed to be used with readers of any age, the lesson calls for participants to be mindful of the ways in which they learn at home, paying close attention to the what, where, why, and how of their learning. As the lesson is designed to be used with all ages, readers will need to adapt it in order to tailor it to their own needs abilities. Partaking in a long-term series of mini-lessons derived from the lesson outlined below can support readers in recognizing their interests and learning style, and can help them to identify the learning potential afforded to them through their man-made and natural surroundings.

Mapping Learning

In *This is My Home, This is My School*, the illustrations show learning happening in a wide variety of settings and in many different ways. This type of learning takes place for all people, whether they're homeschooled, unschooled, or traditionally educated – it's just the nature of the human brain! Many people (especially young ones), however, haven't developed an awareness of when learning takes place and why. In this lesson, readers will be asked to create a map of their home – inside and out – and to keep track of when, where, and why important learning takes place for them. The youngest of readers can skip the creation step and move straight toward reflecting on their learning, while older readers can complete the entire lesson (with support).

1. Explain to readers that, inspired by the learning activities taking place in the book, they'll be working to identify moments when they engage in meaningful learning outside of school. Young readers will focus on their homes (or perhaps even just a portion of their homes), and older readers can focus on their homes and their immediate surroundings, or perhaps even a neighborhood. Explain that the process will take place over a long period of time, with learning maps being updated whenever necessary and until they are full and/or readers are satisfied with what they've gained from the project.
2. Begin by crafting maps on which to take notes about meaningful learning. Maps should be made on paper that is large enough to allow lots of space, but not so large that it cannot be easily hung in a visible location. Young children may work to identify spaces that should be included in the map, while older readers can begin from scratch in order to create maps that include the rooms in their homes, the outdoor spaces that surround them, and perhaps even the yards of neighbor friends, nearby woods, or other spaces near home that are frequented alone or with supervision. Maps should include labels, but do not need to include details like furniture, windows, doors, etc. Even color can be ignored – all that's necessary is a rough floor plan and sketch of outside spaces. All other space on the map will later be used for note-taking, so the more sparse, the better! Map-makers should strive to show what their home and its surroundings are structured like in as minimalist a style as possible.
3. Hang completed maps in a prominent location at home! This place could be a reader's bedroom, a family library or craft space, the refrigerator, a bulletin board, or any other space where it will be visible, safe, and welcome to stay for a while (a few weeks to a few months).
4. Once the map is completed and hung, shift focus to the learning that takes place at home. Adult facilitators will need to offer readers with the time and space to reflect

when first beginning the project, and each reflection/discussion session can serve as its own mini-lesson. Readers and facilitators might discuss what they've done lately, and can work to identify what learning took place in recent days. Looking at the map to inspire thought about specific spaces included within it might spark important thoughts. Pointing out learning when it seems to take place can be useful as well, as it will help readers remember such moments when reflection times come. Work to add 1-3 notes to the map each time reflection takes place, but don't force it – learning happens when it happens, and if readers don't remember the activity or can't identify what they learned about, it doesn't truly count. This activity should be done on their own terms. Notes can be taken on the map in a very simplistic way, with the activity and topic learned about identified briefly. Dates may be included, too.

5. Continue to offer reflection sessions while teaching readers to self-identify learning moments. Encourage readers to notice when they're learning, and to take immediate note of such moments whenever possible.
6. Keep the map hung until it's full, or until the project has served its purpose: to support readers in identifying the ways in which they're able to learn within the home and its immediate surroundings. When the project is finished, readers should be able to talk about the things they have learned and the ways in which they've learned them, and should also be able to imagine ways in which they might continue to learn using resources, materials, and spaces immediately available to them.

Extension Activities

Each of the following activity suggestions are designed to support readers in not only deepening their understanding of the book, but in connecting the information shared within its pages to the world around them. Loosely written so as to allow for adaptability, the activities have been designed with

readers of many ages in mind.

Identifying Lessons

Explore the pages of [This is My Home, This is My School](#) to search for inspiration for home-based learning! There are endless ways to learn, and the book is full of images of learning. Though the purpose of the activities depicted isn't always clear, the activities that the characters engage in aren't always considered educational. Peruse the illustrations to identify the ways in which the children learn, then choose one (or a few, or many!) to tackle as an educational pursuit.

Learning Style Identification

Because no one's brain is identical to another's, we do not all learn in the exact same ways. Every person has their own learning style, and there are many factors that play into it. Identifying interests and disinterests, strengths and weaknesses, and learning preferences can help readers to learn more about themselves and to better understand their own process of learning. Exploring the work of Howard Gardner (multiple intelligences) in a kid-friendly way is a great place to start. Learning style inventories can be found through simple internet searches and, while not all such inventories are created equal, they can be fairly illuminating. For younger readers, this activity might mean making a list of favorite activities rather than getting down to the same minutiae that older readers will be able to consider.

Real Life vs. Story Life

Best for readers who attend school (but possible for all readers to try), this activity calls for participants to compare and contrast their own lives with those of the characters depicted within the book. A Venn diagram can be a useful tool for this activity, and small groups of readers who share similar educational experiences could even work together to make comparisons. This activity could

easily digress into comparisons of family size, pets, etc., but should be centered around learning activities. How did the characters in the book learn science? How is social studies taught at school? Where do art classes take place? Where do borrowed books come from? All of these questions (and many more) can help readers to make meaningful comparisons between their own educational experiences to those of the characters in the book.