Learning Ahead:
Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts

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Learning Ahead:
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Seasons: May & June

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Hilltown Families, Inc.
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Who am I? Where am I? These are the fundamental questions proposed by the humanities. Inquiries related to local history, literature, and education inspire us to think deeply about the places where we live and how our identity fits into the context of our community and the seasons.

Looking through a seasonal lens, a May and June cultural itinerary for Western Massachusetts includes:

- Giving handmade and NATURE-BASED gifts to honor the mother figures in our lives. Supporting NON-COMMERCIAL celebrations: Mother's Day
- Sharing of skills, stories, and fresh produce once a week through PLACEMAKING and COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION: Farmers’ Markets
- Acts of KINDNESS and INTERGENERATIONAL engagement mark history and honor community members: Memorial Day
- FOOD celebrations and COMMUNITY MEALS connect us to the seasons and one another: Spring Harvest
- Native species and their impact on our culture strengthen our SENSE OF PLACE: Spring Wildflowers
- Family trees and scenic byways as a CATALYST for learning: Father’s Day
- OUTDOOR ADVENTURES and local geography inspire the muse: Summer Trails
- ART and CULTURE come alive in the summer: Berkshire Mountains

Spring and the beginning of summer is a time full of anticipation and excitement. Once the last frost has passed, our thoughts turn towards the sunshine, the anticipated growing season, and time spent outdoors with family and friends. Everything is colored in a verdant hue, the trees are starting to fill out and May flowers joyously rise from the ground while the June sun brings enough warmth for short sleeves and long summer days outside. In Western Massachusetts, the local farms are hard at work making sure to provide our dinner tables with fresh, delicious produce through community supported agriculture and farmers’ markets. Late spring and early summer is the season of growing and gathering, sowing, and sharing. These are the months to explore the natural world with renewed interested and reawakened senses and experience all that is offered to nourish our hearts, bodies, and minds after the winters and early spring months.
Solomon’s Seal in Chesterfield, MA
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Although Mother’s Day has officially been a holiday in the United States since 1914, the celebration of motherhood dates back to the ancient Greeks and Romans who celebrated mothers and their roles in society through festivals that honored the goddesses Rhea and Cybele. Rhea, daughter of the earth goddess Gaia and the sky god Uranus, was considered the mother of gods and Cybele was known as the “great mother.”

Throughout the world, there are many cultural traditions that celebrate motherhood. For example, in Thailand, Mother’s Day is observed in August, in honor of Queen Sirikit. There are ceremonies and parades as well as the gift of jasmine to mothers.

In Ethiopia, Mother’s Day is celebrated during the end of the autumn rainy season as a part of the Antrosht festival. During this 3-day festival, daughters give vegetables, butter, spices, and cheese to mothers while sons give meats.

Here in the United States, mothers are often celebrated through the gifting of flowers and cards on the second Sunday in May. These gifts can easily be handmade or grown at home. Handmade cards are a non-commercial way to celebrate the holiday by infusing individual creativity into the crafting of the card and its message. Perhaps write a
Instead of purchasing flowers grown far away, **flower bulbs or seed packets** are an alternative way to giving flowers. The recipient has the opportunity to grow them herself and enjoy them for a longer amount of time than cut flowers. Plant an edible flower garden for her, giving the gift of both flowers and food!

**Small Town Explorations**

Mother’s Day festivities here in New England are simple and sweet. They usually include a shared meal with family and meaningful time spent together. Now that the weather is warm, consider a picnic or **outdoor explorations** as a way to celebrate the mothers in your life while connecting to special places in Western Massachusetts.

**The Bridge of Flowers (Shelburne, MA)**

Once a trolley bridge, the Bridge of Flowers spans the Deerfield River, connecting the town of Buckland with the village of Shelburne Falls. Nearly 100 years old, the gardens on the bridge feature a variety of flowers in bloom not only in May but all season long. A stroll across the bridge followed by perusing local art galleries and shops offers a flavor of the creativity and culture that support the micro-economies sustaining our small towns. From April 1 through October 30, visitors to the bridge can expect to see well-marked bulbs, perennials, annuals, shrubs, and trees in bloom during different times of the season, supporting an interest in plant studies and reuse of industrial spaces. Visit their website to find out what flowers are in bloom before you go, and see how many you can find in bloom: [www.bridgeofflowersmass.org](http://www.bridgeofflowersmass.org).
Pulaski Park (Northampton, MA)
A sweet little park in the center of downtown Northampton, this newly (2016) renovated park is adorned with market lights and has cozy seating areas. This park provides a space for families and neighbors to gather in conversation and enjoyment during the day or evening. In the warmer days of May, ice cream from a nearby vendor enjoyed in the park before taking in a play or concert at the Academy of Music Theatre would be a lovely way to enjoy downtown Northampton and an evening on the town with your favorite mother figure: www.northamptonma.gov.

Other parks rich in history, botanical beauty, and creativity include:

- **Berkshire Botanical Garden** (Stockbridge, MA) www.berkshirebotanical.org
- **The Botanic Garden at Smith College** (Northampton, MA) www.smith.edu/garden
- **Chesterwood** (Stockbridge, MA) www.chesterwood.org
- **Three Sisters Sanctuary** (Goshen, MA) www.threesisterssanctuary.com
- **The Mount** (Lenox, MA) www.edithwharton.org
- **Naumkeag** (Stockbridge, MA) www.thetrustees.org
- **Stanley Park** (Westfield, MA) www.stanleypark.org

Nature and Outdoor Recreation

We are so fortunate in Western Massachusetts to have a variety of hiking areas and beautiful places to discover and explore with those we care about. Honor the mothers in your life while celebrating the local landscapes that inspire creativity!

**William Cullen Bryant Homestead (Cummington, MA)**
Every year, the William Cullen Bryant Homestead hosts a Mother’s Day Tea and poetry reading. This catered tea service takes place in the historic home and, weather permitting, on the veranda. Throughout the tea, poetry by Bryant and other prominent 19th-century poets is read aloud for everyone to enjoy. In addition to the tea, the Rivulet Trail is always available for folks to hike through old growth forest and see ancient specimens of hemlock and an incredible tall stand of Eastern white pine. In our March/April issue of *Learning Ahead*, we featured the Rivulet Trail as a local resource to support an interest in ecopoetry. Look back and give that another read and check out the homestead this spring. )Download previous issues at hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/learning-ahead.)
Notchview Reservation (Windsor, MA)

Have you ever considered star-gazing as a Mother’s Day excursion? At the Notchview Reservation in Windsor, some of the best star-gazing is available. Given the reservation’s high altitude, a clear night offers incredible views of the star-studded night sky for constellation lovers.

Bear Swamp Reservation (Ashfield, MA)

Hike the 3 miles of trails at Bear Swamp and witness the beautiful wildflower blooms during the spring. Bring a picnic with you to enjoy at the Apple Valley overlook! Download a map here: www.thetrustees.org/assets/documents/places-to-visit/trailmaps/Bear-Swamp-Trail-Map.pdf. While hiking, see if you can identify the remnants of water mills and maple sugaring.

Skinner State Park (Hadley, MA)

Beautiful day outside? Consider hiking up Mt. Holyoke at Skinner State Park! This mountain view inspired the Hudson River School painter, Thomas Cole, to paint his famous “Oxbow” painting in the 1830’s. (Featured in the September/October issue of Learning Ahead. Download issue at hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/learning-ahead.) At the top, enjoy a picnic lunch at one of the many picnic tables near the Summit House.

DAR State Forest (Goshen, MA)

Donated to the Commonwealth in 1929 by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), this state forest has two lakes, camping opportunities, swimming, a beach, and 15 miles of hiking trails available for all to enjoy. Although May might be too cold for swimming, consider boating to explore the lakes, or perhaps reserve a camping site for early season summer camping.

Savoy Mountain State Forest (Savoy & Florida, MA)

A deep woods feel with 41 campsites and a group site located in an old apple orchard; there are many places to swim, fish, hike, and picnic. Hiking trails feature breathtaking views of the hills and surrounding areas.
Poetry Explorations for Mother’s Day

2002 Poet Laureate Billy Collins has been described as “the most popular poet in America” by the New York Times. Collins’ poetry is rich with human emotion told in a way that is quirky and whimsical. His poem “The Lanyard” is a reminder of all the gifts mothers offer to their children, friends, and families – the gifts that are often taken for granted or unrecognized, moments from infancy that are not remembered because we are too young – and yet they are some of the most important and precious gifts ever received. Read Collins’ poem on Mother’s Day (Google: Lanyard Billy Collins Writer’s Almanac); perhaps share it with someone who embodies motherhood for you and reflect on the qualities and unsung gifts you have received from them. Perhaps list them in your handmade card and include a copy of Collins poem as a reminder of gratitude and love.

Think about this:

How does Collins’ poem use humor as a way to highlight the immense gratitude the poet feels towards his mother in the poem, “The Lanyard?”

What non-commercial gifts and activities can you do on Mother’s Day to celebrate motherhood in Western MA?

What traditions do you associate with celebrating Mother’s Day?

How can we use Mother’s Day as a catalyst for learning about art, ancestry, and women’s history?
With the spring comes the return of farmers’ markets. Local farmers have been planning and growing and are now ready to bring their seasonal produce to town commons, squares, and gathering places across the region to enjoy with our families and neighbors. The experience of going to a farmers’ market exceeds the basic transaction of purchasing fresh vegetables. Farmers' markets are places that bring a community together, affording the opportunity to support local agriculture, make healthy food choices, share stories, and connect with neighbors and farmers. Farmers’ markets are community builders, the American version of the European plaza, and are intrinsically a part of our New England culture and traditions.

In Western Massachusetts, many farmers’ markets have expanded to not only include agricultural products but to also provide a space for local artists, crafters, performers and teachers to make their services, knowledge, and products directly available to the community. This type of collaborative consumption allows community members to support small businesses and individuals that directly affect the health of a small town’s economy, promoting sustainability and resilience at a local level. Additionally, some farmers’ markets host spaces for instructors to lead workshops on topics related to homesteading, nutrition, and cooking. The opportunity to learn at farmers’ markets through intergenerational skill-sharing makes them an important community-based educational resource that brings people together via shared interests.
Where are your local farmers’ markets or farm stands? Check out Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture’s (CISA) website and see when and where they are happening. Their website offers many resources for both consumers and farmers to help sustain agricultural enterprises in Western Massachusetts. Additionally, their outreach efforts include workshops and informational sessions that highlight the importance of supporting local food security in our region. www.buylocalfood.org

Farmers’ Markets & Meals: Explore, Gather, Share

Create a meal with friends from start to finish! Learn where your food comes from, meet the farmers, and prepare a meal together. On the day of a farmers’ market, get together with friends or your family and peruse the market to see what produce is available. Based on the seasonal produce you find at the market, be inspired to create a meal together. Cooking seasonally with ingredients found at a farmers’ market helps to connect to the seasons and the history of New England by understanding when and how local produce impacts our meals and food traditions.
Stop by different market booths and meet the farmers that grow your food. Introduce yourself! Perhaps mention what you plan to make that evening. Ask them for tips on how to prepare their seasonal produce and swap recipes with others. Purchasing food directly from a local farm is part of a storytelling experience. From their land and hands to your hands and kitchen, it all becomes woven together into a tale of sustainability and local community.

After you have assembled all of your items, gather with your companions to prepare a meal together. It’s an opportunity for intergenerational sharing and learning; this is an activity that allows for people of all ages to participate! Perhaps some are responsible for setting the table and creating a beautiful space, and others are chopping vegetables, braising meat, or baking bread; there are many tasks available for everyone to have fun and contribute!

At the meal, take a moment to express appreciation towards each other, the land that nourishes us, the farmers that grew the food, and the experience of being together. Capture moments of laughter and connection and send a candid picture or two to the farmer who grew your food. Remind them of the important work they do to bring people together through food, stories, and sharing.

Recipe Collections & Storytelling

Food is an integral part of our human story. The act of cooking calls upon centuries of cooking methods, ingredients, spices, and flavors that have shaped our distinct cultures and traditions. Within our families, recipes are passed down and certain dishes are often considered an important part of our unique family gatherings and
holiday celebrations. For example, when someone says, “No one makes apple pie like my grandmother,” that reflects how food shapes our memories and connects us to those we have spent time with and who are an important part of our personal history.

The art of recipe collecting and writing is something that allows the generations to share their family’s culture through the legacy of food. Cooking manuscripts from the 18th and 19th centuries permit us to see what early Americans in New England were preparing, giving us insight into how some of those food recipes have informed our current meals. In their own way, recipe cards and collections tell stories of who we are and how we connect with each other.

What story do your recipes tell? Instead of looking up recipes quickly on the internet and then closing the browser once you’re finished, perhaps use the spring/summer months to create a recipe collection by making your own handwritten recipe cards to share with others. This type of storytelling and collecting is slowly becoming a lost art, yet it’s one of those small pieces of our personal histories that we can pass down to future generations, keeping our memories and family traditions alive through the food we make. Who will inherit the recipes you discover and invent this summer? What stories will they tell of the food that grows near you in Western Massachusetts? How will future generations 100-200 years from now understand the cultural and food traditions we practiced?

Curious to explore more about how cooking is related to our stories? Food writer Michael Pollan’s book, Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation, expands on the connection between our human history and the natural evolution of cooking in the world’s cultures.

**Literary Musings on Farming and Food**

The act of growing food, the experience of living on a farm, and the process of cooking have all inspired writers to ponder how the cultivation of land has influenced the stories we tell and the moments we remember. Farming is a rich part of the Western Massachusetts New England tradition. The rich soil of the Connecticut River Valley is a community asset and important to preserve as farmland. Both the pastoral and wild landscapes of Western Massachusetts are an important piece of our New England history, identity, and sustainability. These are the landscapes that inspired poets like William Cullen Bryant and painters like Thomas Cole to champion the American landscape as being different and separate from Europe’s established cities and their developed environment. Our land is a part of our story and history.
Agriculture connects us to the land. It is how we define our relationship between our everyday lives and the soil.

In addition to Michael Pollan’s book, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*, here is a short list of literature inspired by farming and food to add to your reading lists:

- *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver
- *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* by Michael Pollan
- *In Defense of Food* by Michael Pollan
- *The Dirty Life* by Kristin Kimball
- *Blessing the Hands that Feed Us* by Vicki Robin

**Think about this:**

How do recipes unfold the stories of our ancestors?

What do recipes say about our agricultural practices and the places from which our families came?

What if you were to do a 10 mile diet like Vicki Robin in her book *Blessing the Hands that Feed Us*? Where would you find your produce? What farms would provide you with your food? What food would you have to do without? Imagine the local community you would become familiar with!

How can the purchasing of food locally help build a stronger and more resilient community?

Have you ever thought of growing your own food? Container gardening is a great way to get started!
For some, Memorial Day is a deeply personal holiday, a day for remembering those who have served our country. Participating in these Memorial Day celebrations and ceremonies can also be a form of placemaking, strengthening ties to community and encouraging social interaction between generations. These events also offer a chance to personally thank local veterans and recognize them for their bravery and service.

Memorial Day honors those veterans who died serving our country in the armed forces. Many of the ceremonies take place in outdoor, common spaces, such as Main Streets, town commons, and downtown sidewalks. Community members gather together, in the spirit of kindness and compassion, to show gratitude for those who dedicated their lives to serving our democracy. During these parades and outdoor ceremonies, folks bring bouquets of flowers, fresh baked bread, and other small tokens of kindness to share with veterans still living, in appreciation for their service, and that of their fellow soldiers who lost their lives.

Memorial Day parades are an opportunity for place-making and intergenerational dialogue. Community members of all ages come out for the day’s ceremony and parade, while many of the activities take place in the gathering spaces of a town. It provides a space for neighbors, families, and friends to spend time together in a communal place. Many Western Massachusetts’ towns ask their historical societies to organize
events around Memorial Day to help us learn about local history and about those who served our country in the distant past. It is a day of remembrance from both a contemporary perspective and a historical perspective. In the past, the following towns have hosted Memorial Day parades: Amherst, Agawam, Athol, Chicopee, Easthampton, Florence, Great Barrington, Greenfield, Hadley, Holyoke, Housatonic, Plainfield, Pittsfield, Stockbridge, Westfield and Williamsburg, among other towns in the region.

Each parade and event may include local school marching bands, community picnics, community dinners, bike rides, gun salutes, and guest speakers. Memorial Day parades connect communities to their local history and past while celebrating, and being grateful for, the chance to spend time together in town.

Poetry Explorations: Walt Whitman’s Ashes of Soldiers

Walt Whitman’s *Ashes of Soldiers* is a poem written to honor the soldiers who lost their lives during the civil war. In this poem, Whitman writes to remind the reader of all the soldiers whose names are lost in history but who should be remembered for their dedication and service. On Memorial Day, consider reading Whitman’s poem in honor of all soldiers from decades past and their significant contributions to our nation’s identity and democracy. *(Google: Whitman Ashes Soldiers)*

Think about this:

How does Walt Whitman’s poem “Ashes of Soldiers” attempt to honor those fallen soldiers who may no longer be remembered?

Why did Whitman write this poem for them?

Does your town have a Memorial Day parade? When did it get started? Who started it? Check out your local history society or library for more information!

What Memorial Day traditions does your family celebrate?
Did you know that Western Massachusetts was once considered the “asparagus capital of the world?” Our region is known for this late spring harvest that still grows profusely in Western Massachusetts. Many of our local towns honor the asparagus harvest as a traditional part of spring through food celebrations and community meals.

Asparagus History

The extremely fertile soil that produces the asparagus of the Connecticut River Valley was created by a layer of sandy loam left by sediment from Lake Hitchcock, a glacial lake that covered the valley 12,000 to 15,000 years ago. Asparagus production was at its height between the 1930’s and the 1970’s. This crop was a vital part of the region’s agricultural economy and was even exported abroad due to its quality. Unfortunately in the 1970’s a fungal disease claimed much of the Mary Washington variety of asparagus, the crop grown in Western Massachusetts. Since then, other varieties that are disease resistant have been cultivated.
Although it’s no longer the same as it was when it was a booming agricultural product, the asparagus harvest in Western Massachusetts is still abundant. Local asparagus at the farmers’ markets excites locavores and has even inspired the annual WGBY Asparagus Festival on the Hadley Town Common! This community festival takes place in the late spring and is a celebration of all things local and agricultural in Western Massachusetts, including asparagus, asparagus ice cream, and asparagus fries!

Eating Seasonally

Interested in cooking up asparagus at home? Visit www.HilltownFamilies.org and search for “Asparagus Risotto,” a delicious spring recipe offered by Alice Cozzolino of Cummington, MA. Then consider how the limited availability of asparagus during the late spring connects us to the season and reminds us to appreciate seasonal eating. Other spring crops to include in your recipes at this time of year include fiddleheads, ramps, rhubarb, and strawberries. By keeping ourselves in tune with the seasons and the agricultural cycles, we can begin to cultivate a diet centered on sustainability, support local economies, and feel deeply connected to the community that cultivates the food we eat.

Think about this:

By eating seasonally, how do we keep ourselves in sync with nature?

Why do you think it is important to support local farmers and keep local agriculture healthy in our region?

What favorite recipe do you have for any of the spring crops?

Is there a dish you remember from your childhood that was only served in the spring for a spring holiday? How about a food celebration or community event? How does the memory support your sense of place?
Strawberries in Sunderland, MA.

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
In New England, spring ephemerals and beautiful woodland wildflowers appear throughout the spring, lasting only a short while during this fleeting season. During this time of year, our fields and forests are community-based resources that can support our interests in botany, ecology, and even entomology, while connecting us to the seasons and the spaces that surround us. Guided hikes led by naturalists, botanists, and enthusiasts happen throughout the season, helping identify the environments in which different wildflowers grow, their relationship with local pollinators, folklore, and medicinal or culinary use. Visit www.HilltownFamilies.org every Thursday for a comprehensive list of activities happening around the region to support your interests and education, including guided wildflower walks and hikes.

Another option is to visit the trails on your own to discover wildflowers for yourself. Look back to our September/October Season issue of Learning Ahead for over 25 places to go on a self-guided hike with your family, friends, or on your own here in Western Massachusetts. (Download previous issues at hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/learning-ahead.)

Art and Reason

While exploring spring ephemerals, think about how these fleeting flowers have influenced artists across the centuries. Take, for instance, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, a common spring wildflower that can be seen in the

Jack-in-the-Pulpit in Chesterfield, MA.

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
deciduous woods of Western Massachusetts. It is native to the Northeastern United States and flowers from April to June. In 1930, artist Georgia O’Keeffe created a series of six paintings of this flowering plant while on Lake George in New York. The National Gallery of Art owns five of these six paintings. You can view a digital image of Jack-in-the-Pulpit No.5 at www.nga.gov. Looking at the painting, how does the artist choose to represent the flower? Remember, this flowering plant is quite small; how does the artist create a sense of drama and intensity that may often be overlooked when coming across the plant on a woodland walk?

Are there any other wildflowers you can think of that have influenced artists? Take a moment to consider why flowers are so appealing to humans. Is our attraction to flowers emotional or practical? For the honeybee, flowers are a source of food. What do they signal for humans? Could it be for the same reason? Other reasons?

Honeybees at Apiary in South Deerfield, MA.
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
Honeybees: Harvest, Customs & Literature

As summer approaches, the buzzing of bees and the appearance of butterflies and hummingbirds reminds us of how these creatures are all part of a symbiotic life cycle that is happening around us in the natural world.

Honeybees are an important part of our agricultural system as they pollinate a significant number of crops that we rely on for food sources. They also produce honey, one of the oldest known forms of sweeteners in our diets. In fact, there are cave paintings in the Araña Caves of Valencia, Spain, that include an image depicting a hunter dangerously attempting to gather honey from a cliffside hive. The painting is estimated to be about 15,000 years old and was discovered in the early 1900’s. It speaks to the human fascination with honey and how it was prized as a food source.

In early America, the custom of “telling the bees” was practiced as a tradition brought over from Europe. After a death in the family, the beekeeper would “tell the bees” so they too could enter proper mourning. It was thought that otherwise the bees might not produce honey or leave the hive to pollinate our crops.

Many poets have been influenced by this custom. John Greenleaf Whittier, a poet previously featured in the September/October issue of Learning Ahead, describes the practice in his poem, “Telling the Bees,” and even more contemporary poets, including Deborah Digges and Lizette Woodworth Reese, have also taken the name of this practice to title and inspire their work. Download previous issues at hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/learning-ahead.

“It fell to me to tell the bees,
though I had wanted another duty–
to be the scribbler at his death,
there chart the third day’s quickening.
But fate said no, it falls to you
to tell the bees, the middle daughter.”

(Excerpt from "Telling the Bees" by Deborah Digges, 1950 - 2009)

Honey: Farming & Food

Depending on the climate and local flora, the taste of honey changes based on which flowers in a region the honeybees have pollinated. Honey produced in the Hilltowns
of Western Massachusetts could have a slightly different taste than the honey produced in the Pioneer Valley. It’s fascinating how the flavor profile of the honey changes based on environmental differences; it truly reflects a sense of place, topography, and geography.

**Warm Colors Apiary** in South Deerfield is a local resource that supports an interest in beekeeping and honey production. Visit their annual honey festival in the fall for samples of freshly collected honey. Be sure to also look for **farm stands** alongside the road throughout the warmer months for honey gathered and sold by hobby apiarists and smaller apiaries in the region. Collect honeys made from different flowers and regions and sample them with friends to see if you can detect the different flavors and colors different flowers impart to the honey. If you want to see a display of honey samples from all over the world, visit the **Cummington Fair** in late August for a comprehensive display.

Interested in beekeeping yourself? **Hampden County Beekeeper’s Association**, established in 1930, promotes apiculture and offers monthly discussions, meetings, and a bee school from January-April for new beekeepers interested in learning. Visit them at [www.hampden-county-beekeepers.org](http://www.hampden-county-beekeepers.org) to learn more. In the meantime, learn more about how the honey bee has impacted our culture by checking out Tammy Horn’s book, *Bees in America: How the Honey Bee Shaped a Nation*.

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**Think about this:**

What were some early American uses for honey?

What other sweeteners might have been present or absent from their diets?

How does Georgia O’Keefe choose to represent the Jack-in-the-Pulpit?

How does she create a sense of drama and intensity that may often be overlooked when seeing the plant on a woodland walk?

Why is the health of bees important for our own food production?
In 1910, inspired by the already established Mother’s Day, the first Father’s Day was proclaimed. It wasn’t until 1972 that it became a federal holiday to be observed on the third Sunday in June. Similar to Mother’s Day, consider celebrating this holiday with the father figures in your life. Give non-commercial gifts that are handmade or creative in thought to those you consider fatherly spirits by making cards and offering gifts that engage your creativity and our local community. (So much better than another tie or wallet!) Looking for the right words to share in your handmade card? Let poets inspire your muse! Many have shared emotions and stories as they relate to the father figure in their lives. Visit www.poets.org and search for "poems about fathers."

Vistas & Byways

June is a month that encourages time spent outdoors, so why not plan an excursion along one of the many Western Massachusetts scenic byways! Along the way, you can stop at different farm stands, take photographs of beautiful country views, take a hike, and enjoy a picnic lunch at one of our many vistas. (See September/October Season issue of Learning Ahead for a list of area vistas. Download previous issues at hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/learning-ahead.) Scenic byways to explore with the father figures you cherish in your life can be found at www.bywayswestmass.com. They include:

- Route 116 Scenic Byway
- Connecticut River Scenic Byway
- Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway
- Route 122 Scenic Byway
- Route 112 Scenic Byway
- Mount Greylock Scenic Byway
- Jacob’s Ladder Scenic Byway

While traveling these back roads, look for rivers and their tributaries and see if you can identify their impact on local history as you travel through different mill towns, taking the time to learn about the different manufacturing industries that resulted in the 19th-century industrial age. Note the architecture of the mill buildings, the infrastructure remnants of rail transportation, and the repurposing and transformation
of spaces once used for industry. You’re sure to also encounter covered bridges, museums, historic districts, landmarks, and wooded landscapes while traveling, so plan accordingly and arrive curious!

**Family Trees: Storytelling & Personal History**

Celebrate Father’s Day and Mother’s Day with family stories and shared memories. In doing so, you may want to think about making your own family tree together as a way to preserve your **personal histories**. You can collect letters, photographs, and other significant objects in your family history before sitting down to create your family tree. Social media sites, such as Pinterest, can help you curate a group of images that inspire what you would like the family tree to look like. Perhaps it’s an art activity everyone does together that can be framed and displayed in your living room. If you’d like a family tree that is multimedia, consider adding anecdotes, recipes, stories, photographs, and letters. Making a family tree together provides the space for intergenerational interaction, storytelling, and the sharing of personal history.

**Think about this:**

Unlike major highways, how do our scenic byways foster a sense of place and allow us to discover new and hidden places in our communities?

What Father’s Day traditions do you celebrate? Do other cultures have similar celebrations?

Where do you begin your family tree? Why does the tracing of your family history begin there and not with the generation before or after?

How has communication impacted our sharing of family lineage and stories?
Towards the end of June, we find the beginning of summer and a landscape ready for exploring in the warmer months. In Western Massachusetts, we are fortunate to have so many conserved landscapes that offer mountain views, scenic trails, access to waterways, and places to discover nature’s inspiring energy.

In the 19th-century, outdoor recreation became a popular leisure activity. Summit houses, such as the one atop Mount Holyoke at Skinner State Park, were constructed to accommodate tourists traveling to see mountain views. An interest in the wild landscape and sweeping view of countryside inspired many Americans to explore the natural landscape and value spending time outside. Many writers and artists looked to nature as a creative muse for poetry and painting. Walking through the woods became a pleasurable and meaningful pastime.

Hiking trail in Pioneer Valley.
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
Follow the footsteps of earlier Americans and stay active and healthy during the summer by walking. Many of the local woods and trails in Western Massachusetts were common destinations for 19th-century hikers and fueled the creative genius of many writers. Engage with local history and experience the landscape from a literary perspective by reading some of these writers' works while on the trail or before you embark on your next outdoor adventure. For example: imagine reading William Cullen Bryant’s *The Rivulet*, with the poet’s description of the prattling water, as you stand by the same rivulet yourself and hear the same sound! (Featured in the March/April Season of *Learning Ahead*. Download previous issues at hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/learning-ahead.) In a way, the poem acts as a time machine, bridging together the woods of Bryant’s life in the Hilltowns with the same forest you can hike today.

Additionally, check out Henry David Thoreau’s book, *Walking*, from your local library. A lecture delivered in 1851 and later published as an essay, Thoreau discusses the importance of nature to mankind through the act of walking and immersion in nature. Follow Thoreau’s lead and ramble through the woods along many of these Western Massachusetts trails. Look back to our September/October Season issue of *Learning Ahead* for trails in our region. Other trails to consider include literary trails featured in the March/April Season issue of *Learning Ahead*. (Download previous issues at hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/learning-ahead.)

### Think about this:

- How has the Western Massachusetts natural landscape inspired writers and artists of the past?
- Why do you think nature writing was so prevalent in the early-mid 19th century?
- How did nature writing in the United States inspire American conservation in the 19th century?
- What is the Western Massachusetts hiking trail that inspires you the most?
“The Berkshires” refers to the highland region of Western Massachusetts west of the Connecticut River and lower Westfield River. The region is bordered by the Taconic Mountains, the valleys of the Hoosic River and Housatonic River, and by the Hudson Highlands. Culturally, the region is a popular area for exploring art, learning about history, and discovering the local, natural landscape. Particularly during the summer, the various Berkshire towns feature festivals, art shows, and events to experience.
Local History

Northern Berkshire county has a rich history with the construction of many mills in the 19th-century that doubled some of the towns’ populations. The North Adams and Adams Historical Societies can provide history buffs with more information regarding the county’s stories, mills, and early settlements. The North Adams Historical Society includes the Museum of History and Science (www.northadamshistory.org).

Interested in railroad history and the local landscape? The Berkshire Scenic Railway Museum offers the Hoosac Valley train service from North Adams to Adams. These rides offer beautiful views of Mount Greylock and the Hoosac Valley and provide on-board interpretation of railroad history in the region. Visitors can also visit the museum, based in Lenox. For more information on this season’s train service schedule visit: www.hoosacvalleytrainride.com.

Located in Pittsfield, in the central part of Berkshire county, the Hancock Shaker Village is a living history museum with 20 Shaker buildings that depict the life of this intriguing religious community of people that lived and cared for each other during the 19th century. The Hancock community was the third largest of the 19 communities established in New England. In the early 1900’s, the community declined and eventually disappeared. The 750 acres of land and buildings that once were home to the Hancock Shaker community were preserved by local citizens who valued their historical and cultural significance. As a result, people can visit the Hancock Shaker Village and learn from costumed interpreters about this group’s self-reliant way of life during the 1800’s. The museum and it’s grounds provide different learning opportunities to explore the Shakers’ lifestyle and the place they called home. hancockshakervillage.org

Arrowhead also in Pittsfield and preserved by the Berkshire Historical Society, was the home of writer Herman Melville,. Arrowhead now operates a CSA farm and offers guided tours of Melville’s home. There are also self-guided tours for visitors to explore the surrounding trails and nearby places that interested Herman Melville. berkshirehistory.org/arrowhead-farm

Naumkeag in Southern Berkshire county in the town of Stockbridge was the country estate of New York City lawyer Joseph Choate. This magnificent property served as a summer home for three generations of Choates. This historic home includes a spectacular garden created by Choate’s daughter, Mabel and noted landscape designer Fletcher Steele. The gardens include the famous Blue Steps, a series of tiered blue fountains flanked by a grove of white birch. This marvelous estate is open
to the public to enjoy during the spring, summer and fall seasons and offers house tours, outdoor public programs and self-guided garden tours. www.thetrustees.org

Art Museums

**Berkshire Museum** in Pittsfield (central Berkshire Cty.)
The Berkshire Museum’s varied collection offers visitors the chance to explore interests in science, natural history, and art! The museum owns approximately 40,000 objects in its collection, with a significant portion of the collection purchased by 3rd generation Crane & Co. paper mill owner, Zenas Crane, in the early 1900’s. The collection includes objects from all over the world with a focus on Asian Art, Native American Art, Ancient Civilizations, Sculpture, American Art, Hudson River School paintings, Minerals, and Natural History. berkshiremuseum.org

**Clark Art Institute** in Williamstown (north Berkshire Cty.)
The Clark features a collection of European and American art from the Renaissance to the early 20th century. The museum has a particularly rich collection of French Impressionist paintings as well as the works of American artists Winslow Homer, George Inness and John Singer Sargent. www.clarkart.edu

**MASS MoCA** in North Adams (north Berkshire Cty.)
The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art is located in a converted factory building. It is one of the largest facilities for contemporary visual and performing arts. massmoca.org
Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge (south Berkshire Cty.)
Featuring the largest and most significant collection of Norman Rockwell’s work, this museum holds some of Rockwell’s most well-known and civically engaged illustrations and artwork. In the spirit of Rockwell’s interest in reflecting on society and popular culture, the museum “advances social good through the civic values of learning, respect and inclusion and is committed to upholding the rights and dignity of all people through the universal messages of humanity and kindness portrayed by Norman Rockwell.” Visitors to the museum are able to see Rockwell’s Stockbridge studio, as well as some of his most famous works, such as his Four Freedoms. www.nrm.org

Williams College Museum of Art in Williamstown (north Berkshire Cty.)
A part of Williams College, WCMA’s mission is to offer “dynamic art experiences to incite new thinking about art, museums and the world.” The museum holds over 15,000 works of art, including paintings by Georgia O’Keeffe and Edward Hopper. wcma.williams.edu

Theatre

Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center in Great Barrington (south Berkshire Cty.)
A non-profit organization, the Mahaiwe is a historic theater built in the early 1900’s that showed “talkies” in the early 30’s! Today, the theater focuses on bringing music, theatrical performances and educational programming to the local community and Berkshire County visitors. www.mahaiwe.org

Williamstown Theatre Festival in Williamstown (north Berkshire Cty.)
Since 1955, the Williamstown Theatre Festival has engaged audiences each season with innovative productions and a variety of public programming. wtfestival.org

Outdoor Recreation

Notchview Reservation in Windsor (central Berkshire Cty.)
Renowned for its Nordic skiing during the winter, Notchview also hosts an incredible trail system for summer outdoor explorations, trail running, and stargazing. Some of the best stargazing in the state. www.thetrustees.org

Savoy Mountain State Forest in Savoy (north Berkshire Cty.)
Over 50 miles of tranquil wooded trails to hike with spectacular natural features and scenic views. www.mass.gov
Field Farm in Williamstown (north Berkshire Cty.)
A 316 acre reservation with four miles of trails that wander through fields, gardens, modern sculptures and incredible mountain views.
www.thetrustees.org

Monument Mountain in Great Barrington (south Berkshire Cty.)
Inspired by William Cullen Bryant’s poem Monument Mountain, authors Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville set out with a group of friends to hike Monument Mountain. As a thunderstorm rolled in, the group sought shelter in a cave. While trapped, Hawthorne and Melville were deep in discussion as they waited for the storm to pass. As they emerged from the cave, Melville saw Mount Greylock from the distance - its shape reminding him so much of a whale breaching the ocean that he was inspired to write a sea story about a whale. It is said that this hiking excursion and Mount Greylock’s summit is what planted the initial creative seed for Moby Dick. Today, visitors can still read Bryant’s poem Monument Mountain, just as Hawthorne and Melville did, and hike up the mountain, a 1,642 foot high summit that provides views of Mount Greylock and the Catskills. www.thetrustees.org

Bartholomew’s Cobble in Sheffield (south Berkshire Cty.)
Featuring views of farmland, the Housatonic River, caves, and the Cobble, a geological feature that was once coral reef 500 million years ago, Bartholomew’s Cobble offers the Ledges Trail, taking you through the forest to discover the property’s interesting flora and fauna. Known in late spring for its wildflowers, Bartholomew’s Cobble hosts a wildflower festival every year for folks to learn about spring ephemerals. After hiking the Ledges Trail, hikers can enjoy walking up Hurlburt’s Hill to see bobolinks and views of the Housatonic River Valley. www.thetrustees.org

Mount Greylock in Adams (north Berkshire Cty.)
The tallest peak in Massachusetts and a part of the Appalachian Trail, Mount Greylock’s summit stands at 3,491 feet. The mountain is Massachusetts’ first wilderness state park, acquired in 1898. There are different ways to reach the summit with a landscape that continuously changes as you ascend. At the top, hikers are greeted by a beautiful boreal forest featuring spruce and balsam fir as well as old growth. The misty clouds that hang around the mountain’s peak, imparting an ethereal or mystical feel, inspired Harry Potter author, J.K. Rowling, to set her next wizardry story in North America atop Mount Greylock. www.mass.gov
Think about this:

How have Berkshire County’s diverse communities and rich history inspired an interest in art, literature, history, and the outdoors?

Read William Cullen Bryant’s “Monument Mountain.” Notice how the poet describes nature as both wild and peaceful. How does the mountain embody this “harmony” within the poem?

How has the beauty of the Berkshire Mountains inspired other artists mentioned above? Can you identify the beauty of the Berkshires in their work?
ABOUT HILLTOWN FAMILIES

Who am I? Where am I? These are the fundamental questions proposed by the humanities. Inquiries related to local history, literature, and education inspire us to think deeply about the places where we live and how our identity fits into the context of our communities and the seasons.

Hilltown Families’ mission is to support the common good of our community through the development of a sense of place by a shared understanding in the value of self-directed learning through community engagement. These learning values are referred to as “community-based education” and are accessible and inclusive to an intergenerational audience. This process of learning unites community members through shared interests, establishes a shared history, and deepens a connection to place.

Hilltown Families believes in creating resilient and sustainable communities by developing and strengthening a sense of place in our children and citizens through community-based education and engagement. Established in 2005 by Sienna Wildfield, Hilltown Families identifies, curates, and shares community-based learning opportunities that reflect back to the community its potential while impacting the culture. Community members of all ages are encouraged to engage in repeating social and environmental patterns that support interests, building upon seasonal cycles to support learning found in the intersections of food, habitat, and culture within community resources, events, and opportunities.

Funded in part by Mass Humanities, Learning Ahead: Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts is a bimonthly publication produced by Hilltown Families that sheds light on embedded learning opportunities found in cultural resources that exist within the geography, history, and cultural traditions of the Hilltowns and surrounding area.

With these seasonal itineraries, self-directed teens, lifelong learners and families are encouraged to engage together in cultural opportunities that support similar interests, resulting in a shared history and a strengthened sense of place.

By emphasizing place-based exploration through humanities inquiry, these cultural itineraries connect residents of all ages to their place, helping to shape a more comprehensive understanding of our cultural identity, heritage, and history. This contributes to establishing meaningful relationships between young people, elders, and more active citizens.

Hilltown Families is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. www.HilltownFamilies.org