

Johann Christoph Arnold



Their Name Is

Today

Reclaiming Childhood in a Hostile World

STUDY GUIDE

FOREWORD BY MARK K. SHRIVER

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Reclaiming Childhood in a Hostile World

Johann Christoph Arnold

This study guide is intended for group reading and discussion
by parents, teachers, administrators, and anyone else who cares for children.

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Foreword

1. Mark Shriver explains how he and his wife Jeanne draw on Johann Christoph Arnold's stories in their daily interactions with children. Who will join you in using this book in your work with children? With whom else might you share this book?
2. Shriver lists several adjectives that describe the qualities this book will help you instill in children: compassionate, courageous, confident, independent, secure, unselfish, loving, and joy-filled. How have these qualities been nurtured in your own life?
3. How does your own childhood experience impact your relationships and interactions with the children in your life?

Preface

1. In what ways, large or small, are you already advocating for children?
2. Recall a time when you felt hopeful in your work with children. What led to that sense of hope? Were you able to share your inspiration and hope with others?

1: The World Needs Children

1. Arnold writes that children demand honesty and simplicity. He challenges us to imagine what would happen if we applied these values to our government foreign policy, corporate business models, environmental decisions, and education theory. Take a few moments to truly envision a world impacted by applying the values of honesty and simplicity in even one of these areas.
2. How do the childhood values of honesty and simplicity apply to your own home and family life?
3. In what ways can you bring simplicity into your family, classroom, program, or school?
4. Retired teacher and parenting consultant Beverly Braxton lists many of the concerns we have about children growing up in today's world: "...the amount of time spent on media, children's exposure to sexual content and violence, lack of family time, eating on the run, the stress of academic excellence, and children becoming less interested in spending time outdoors" (page 3). Arnold acknowledges that the task of addressing these concerns can feel overwhelming. He suggests, "At least each of us can start with the children we encounter each day." Which of these problems can we address first? Which concerns you most?

5. Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore describes the necessity of children having “not only schools for their lessons, but a world whose guiding spirit is personal love.” How can we, as parents or teachers, show this personal love toward children?

2: Play Is a Child's Work

1. Arnold explains the necessity of allowing children to be children for as long as possible. How does this play out in your daily life and work? In what ways are you able to keep childhood alive?
2. Froebel's vision of early education has strongly influenced Arnold's life and work. How do you connect with Froebel's philosophy, as described on pages 16–17?
3. Where do you see play valued in your school or program? In your family or community?
4. In what ways are current education mandates negatively impacting children? How do you navigate these challenges?
5. Arnold shares the stories of educators Susan Sluyter, Maggie Dent, and Dr. Sherone Smith-Sanchez, who have all publicly defended play and vigorously questioned the current testing mania. In what ways did their stories resonate with you?
6. What role do teachers and parents have in defending play and working to change the current education mandates?
7. On page 26, Arnold quotes Plato: “What is honored in a country is cultivated there.” From your perspective, what is honored and cultivated in this country? What about in your school or community?

3: Great Expectations

1. What is the meaning of success in modern society? What is the meaning of success in your own family? How would you respond to Arnold's question, “What is the true meaning of success?”
2. Reflecting on your own life, where have you learned from your failures – large or small?
3. How would you describe the effects you see due to the current trend of “overprotecting” children? In what ways do you encourage children to learn and grow from the mistakes they make?

4. When Arnold implores us to rediscover the importance of the sand pile in our modern world, he is talking about more than sand. Why and how can we do this?
5. Where do you see modern children playfully exploring nature? How can you advocate for increasing children's nature play in your classroom, school, or community?
6. On page 42, Arnold asks, "What is the purpose of the best academic education if it fails to prepare children for life?" In your work with children, what do you see as your personal mission? Can you share some ways you've found to "prepare children for life"?

4: Screening Out

1. In what ways did technology impact your own childhood? How did the presence or absence of technology impact your play?
2. How do you see technology impacting the children you care for?
3. When was the last time you had a staff or family discussion about screen time and technology?
4. What is your school's policy on screen-time during the school day? Are you able to give input to help form the policy?
5. As a parent, how do you monitor screen-time in your own home? As an educator, how do you talk about screen-time with the parents in your program?
6. Arnold presents "white space" and "nature" as essential antidotes to the negative impact of excessive screen-time. How do you make time in children's lives for white space and nature?
7. Acknowledging that the technology obsession starts with adults, Arnold offers a call to action, "Let's put our smartphones away and tune in to the living, breathing wonders who are waiting for us to look up and notice them." In what ways can you apply this call to action in your own life?

5: Material Child

1. Arnold describes the current explosion of marketing to young children as "abuse." Why do you think he chooses such strong language?
2. Consider the quote, "Isn't it strange that the more gifts a child receives, the rarer it is to hear a thank-you?" (page 65). How do you see this phenomenon play out in your daily life? What steps can you take to cultivate gratitude in the children you interact with?

3. It's easy for adults to fall prey to mass-marketing and materialistic messages. Parents might believe that buying material things is a way to show love to their child.
 - a. As parents, what are the pressures you experience as you care for your children? Are there any like-minded families or friends near you who can support your choices toward being together, rather than focusing on "stuff"?
 - b. As teachers, while knowing that parents are working hard and trying to do the best for their children, it is sometimes difficult to raise new ideas for them to consider. Have you tried talking with the parents you work with about the "less is more" idea? How would you advocate for the benefits of spending more time with a son or daughter?
4. What are some positive moments with adults that you recall from your own childhood? Why do those moments stay with you? In what ways do your positive memories help shape the interactions you have with the children in your life?

6: Actions, not Words

1. Arnold believes that when adolescent rebellion becomes too pervasive, indeed "a way of life," children are usually rebelling against hypocrisy. Where do you see hypocrisy creeping into your own life? How can you help bring consistency into the lives of the children you care for?
2. Consider the quote from Carl Jung on page 82: "If there is anything we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could be better changed in ourselves." In what ways do these words resonate with you?
3. Recall an occasion in your life when a child showed resilience in overcoming obstacles caused by adult hypocrisy or failings. How can we adults follow this example of resilience or forgiveness in our own lives?
4. Consider Ravi Zacharias's words: "If our children and young people don't hear our voice, they will hear someone else's" (page 89). What messages are you sending to your students or your own children? What do they believe is important to you?
5. Teaching and working with children, especially children in a state of trauma, takes patience and understanding. Where do you find relief from your own life stressors, so that you can offer children the patience and understanding they deserve?

7: Guidance to Grow

1. “Don’t be afraid to discipline a child, but the moment you feel he is sorry, be sure there is immediate and complete forgiveness” (page 93). How does your past, and the way you were disciplined as a child, affect your ability to follow these words of wisdom from Arnold?
2. How do you model perseverance for the children in your life?
3. Richard Wareham writes: “Each child should be taught, at home and at school, some simple values that will help him all through life” (page 102). In what ways do you collaborate, as parents or caregivers, to teach the values he describes?
4. In the United States, minority children as young as age four are disproportionately suspended or expelled. What steps can you take in your own school or program to raise awareness and create an open dialogue about this troubling trend?

8: In Praise of Difficult Children

1. Arnold cites the following statistic: “...the United States accounts for five percent of the world’s population and eighty-five percent of it Ritalin use...” (page 110). How do you react to this statistic?
2. Is there such a thing as “normal”? Consider posing this question to the elementary and middle school age children in your life. Facilitate a discussion as they unpeel the layers of feelings they have about the word “normal.”
3. In Sara Barnett’s story, she describes some parents’ unwillingness to spend five minutes a day playing with their child. Barnett further links destructive behavior to not having proper attachment with parents. Do you observe this difficulty in your classroom or home? Have you found ways to support family “together time” each day?
4. The healing and restorative effects of spending time in nature are well-documented. How can we help children with learning disabilities to experience nature on a regular basis?
5. Kyle’s story is a powerful one. Do you know a child like Kyle who would benefit from more time outdoors? Is there a family you know who could benefit from hearing Kyle’s story?
6. Think about a time you felt isolated as a child. Was there an adult who noticed and supported you? If not, what would you say today to the child you were? What support would you offer?

9: Discovering Reverence

1. Arnold urges us to have reverence for children and the qualities they are born with: innocence, vulnerability, honesty, and spontaneity. In our modern world, what specific steps toward reverence for children can you take as an individual? As a school? As a community?
2. Where do you see evidence of empathy among the children you care for? What about among the adults you work with? In your family?
3. Mary Gordon, founder of Roots of Empathy, shares the story of Darren, who asks, “If nobody has ever loved you, do you think you could still be a good father?” (page 139). What lessons can we take from Darren’s story?
4. If you follow a faith or religion, how does that commitment sustain you in your daily life and work? What inspires or guides you in your interactions with children?

10: Tomorrow Comes

1. On pages 153–154, Barbara shares a childhood story of two particular days she spent with her father—days that made her feel special. Why do you believe those two days had such a long-term impact on Barbara?
2. Are there specific moments or days from your own childhood that you draw on today for warmth and inspiration? What lasting, sacred memories are you helping to create for the children in your life?
3. Arnold poses three paradoxes on page 156: “Raising children conscientiously, yet giving them freedom; protecting them, yet encouraging self-sacrifice; guiding them, yet preparing them to swim against the stream.” How do you reconcile these ideas through your own life and interaction with children?
4. Arnold begins his chapters with a thought-provoking quote or a proverb. Are there any quotes that particularly resonate with you? How could you share those words and thoughts with people in your life?