

DC BABY Favorite for Kids' Classes



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Vicki Gersten founded Jonah's Treehouse after searching in vain for challenging movement opportunities in downtown DC for her three-year-old son, Jonah.

This lawyer and mother of two (Jonah, age three and Gabriel, age two) was already a veteran of enrichment classes ("I feel my sons and I attended, at one time or another, every play and movement class, music program, gymnastics program, and story time under the sun!") and had a strong vision of what she wanted in the Jonah's Treehouse curriculum. Gersten, a literature major with a music background, believed that many children's movement programs out there lacked an element of artistry that she was determined to incorporate into her classes. Each Jonah's Treehouse class devotes a few minutes to children's literature and poetry, with the teacher reciting poems and encouraging the children to act out the literature in interesting ways.

The gross motor movement segment of the program is characterized by challenging obstacle courses of mat shapes and wooden climbing pieces (Gersten had custom climbing pieces designed by a local artist because she wanted pieces that could be reconfigured to create new internal "landscapes"). Never a big fan of waiting in line ("my son Jonah could not wait in line—lost interest when he had to sit and wait his turn—so I didn't want other parents to have to go through that...apologizing when the child's actions are

actually age-appropriate"), Gersten enlisted the advice of movement consultants and instructors at her son's preschool to develop the idea of movement "stations." Classes often break into small groups, with one group concentrating on balance activities, for instance, and another group working on climbing or jumping.

Eurhythmics and co-movement activities with parents form the core of "circle time" at Jonah's Treehouse, because Gersten feels that "there is an inherent level of musicality in every child...a part of his/her inner self that is expressed through rhythm and melody. When the parent shares this experience with the child, the result is an integration of inner and external worlds that is deeply satisfying for the child."

The program has been embraced by Gersten's Glover Park neighborhood and the surrounding communities of Georgetown, Cleveland Park, and Palisades, but many students travel from Arlington, Chevy Chase, and Capitol Hill to attend classes. She tells me, "I feel truly fortunate that, as Jonah's Treehouse is an independent program rather than a franchise, the classes can really evolve organically from our experiences as a community and the needs of the children and parents."

Class schedules, detailed descriptions, and registration are available online.



DC BABY: A Handbook for Parenting In (& Around) the Capitol City, by Sarah K. Masterson, is a 352-page encyclopedia of information and recommendations for parents and parents-to-be in the District, Northern Virginia, and suburban Maryland, covering everything from pregnancy to preschool, playgrounds and playgroups, storytimes, outings, health care, shopping, babyproofing, enrichment classes, parenting support groups, and much more.