

# Educational Opportunities at West Marine

THE NAUTICAL MOM



Not what you think this is, to be sure. We use our visits to the boating supply stores as teaching opportunities for the kids. What a wonderful world of gadgets and gizmos to explore together! One of my fondest memories was teaching my daughter the words “thick” and “thin” without potentially offending my less-than-svelte husband by using him to illustrate the difference. We were running errands in West Marine and the array of lines formed an exquisite rainbow on the wall ahead of us.

The colors are so vibrant; my inner artist always fantasizes about creating some glorious weaves. So, similarly drawn to them, as any 2-year-old would be, Gigi did that cute little toe-run over to the ropes to begin pulling them off their spools. In truth, I envied her abandon. Then it dawned on me that she might be a tactile learner. Grabbing the 1-inch docklines, I said, “Thick.” Gigi countered with, “White.” We moved on; the woven polypropylene line was “Smooth, Gigi.” “No mommy, it’s blue.” As with learning anything new, repetition is key. “Yes, Gigi, it is a smooth, blue rope and here is a smooth, red rope. One is thick and the other is thin.” Although every fiber of my body yearned to say ‘line,’ I restrained myself recognizing that there is a limit to how much information she could take in. Finally, after scurrying from one spool to the next, and after hearing me use the adjectives repeatedly, she held a 3/16-inch line in one hand and a 3/4-inch line in the other and showed me. “This one thick, this one thin, Mommy.” What a victory!

How about the difference between a pipe, tube, hose and wire? Unless you have a well-stocked workshop and the leisure time to explore, it’s unlikely you’ll ever spend time teaching that at home. Stuck in line at a marine store, however, or waiting for a salesman to return with something from inventory, you might just take the opportunity to poke around Plumbing and Electronics. It’s challenging fun to try to come up with a verbal explanation of the distinctions, especially with visual examples to probe. See the world through their eyes and ask them what differences they see. The pipe was “hard and cold” according to our 4-year old. For the older child, electronics are their main interest. So, how about using fish finder, GPS or Radar as an opportunity to slip in a little education about the movement of sound waves, or the evolution and use of satellites? A fourth grader mentioned that killer whales actually navigate using sonar because their underwater vision is poor. By using low frequency sound waves, they can detect a feast of large schools of fish because the waves pass through any single fish. When we have time for advance planning, we look up something about these topics on the Internet, and maybe even print for ourselves a cheat-sheet to refresh our 10th grade physics class.

Needless to say, charts are wonderful. Although not as engaging to multiple senses, it can be fascinating to see the pictures that emphasize the water geography more than land-based. The planet is 70% water. It’s like the first time I saw a European map of the world...Who knew America could ever be depicted as just a small landmass off to the right?! Besides changing one’s perspective, it is a useful precursor to understanding oceanography and marine life. Georges Bank is one of the most intriguing areas for us to look at. The sheer dropoff to depths below 90 meters is awesome, and we always remember the film *The Perfect Storm*, admiringly questioning the sanity of those who earn their living on this frontier. Another fascinating chart is the New York Harbor area. The shipping lanes are clearly marked with inbound and outbound traffic. The schematic looks more like an engineer’s interpretation of airport runways, and provides the reassurance that those large tankers journeying in and out under the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge actually have well-marked paths to sea.

Is any of this necessary? No. There are times when I think the hands-on approach to life is being completely replaced by the computer screen’s virtual reality. Our children could easily survive without experiences that connect them so intimately with the real world. However, to forgo these opportunities is reprehensible. The young brain is constantly forging new neurological pathways; to leave the areas that form the triangular connection between sight, touch and language unengaged in favor of strictly a textbook education seems woefully neglectful.

*The Nautical Mom and her family live in New York City and sail their Catalina 36 Precipice out of North Shore Yacht Club in Port Washington. You can contact her at [thenauticalmom@yahoo.com](mailto:thenauticalmom@yahoo.com).*