

your family

Kids nip prejudice in the bud

SEE THE WORLD | Author urges fun approach

BY MIKE THOMAS

Staff Reporter/mthomas@suntimes.com

In 1979, when Iranian-born Homa Sabet Tavangar was a junior high cheerleader in Fort Wayne, Ind., a revolution erupted in the country of her birth.

Despite the fact that she was only a year when Tavangar and her family emigrated to the United States, societal ignorance pegged her as something she wasn't.

Suddenly, she says, there was "prejudice and the misinformation and not wanting to admit that you're from this hostage-taking, flag-burning country, which had absolutely nothing to do with who my family is and our reality."

A key to nipping such uninformed denseness in the bud and broadening horizons, Tavangar says, is starting the education process early. Her new book, *Growing Up Global:*

Raising Children to Be At Home in the World (Ballantine Books, \$16), is a how-to guide. And many of the ideas put forth therein, budget-minded parents will be glad to know, can't be implemented without travelling abroad.

"Focus on the things you love first," the Philadelphia-based Tavangar says. "Don't make this feel like homework. If you love sports, for example, use that angle with your kids. If your kids are on a soccer team, go on the FIFA [International football] Web site, which has lots of fun things that draw you into the game and draw you into the world and that make you feel so connected. You can follow a player whose name you can barely pronounce. You can follow a few teams."

Tavangar also suggests devoting a weekend to one particular country, and choosing activities — art, dance, dining, music — that evoke the country's traditions. That's especially easy to accomplish in a multiethnic city like Chicago, but Tavangar claims it's possible almost anywhere if you're willing to drive a bit.

"You can almost spin the globe and say, 'Where do we want to go?' Let's go to Egypt or China or France or Lebanon or wherever it is," she says. "Maybe you go to the museum for a certain exhibit. You go to the ethnic neighborhood. You go shopping and see the stores. You definitely eat a few meals around that culture. It can be a very fun thing, like a real adventure. And you can also anchor it around special movie screening or a concert."

Just avoid making it school-like, she warns. Kids don't want to feel like you're jamming culture lessons down their throats.

"A couple of years ago, my daughters were both in middle school at the time and really getting environmentally aware and pushing recycling and environmental things," Tavangar recalls. "I was at the video store and I saw 'An Inconvenient Truth' was on sale, so I picked it up and I thought, 'Oh, this'll be great. We'll watch this at home with the kids.'"

"We'd seen it once in the movie theater, and they just rolled their eyes, like, 'Are you kidding me?' This is the movie you brought for entertainment at home for us to watch together? This is school. I don't want to watch a middle-aged man's PowerPoint presentation. My husband did a lot better when he brought home 'Fiddler on the Roof.'"

Wilmette resident Perry Yeatman, a well-travelled senior vice president at Kraft Foods, thinks Tavangar's book is a boon to those who can't haul their kids around the planet in the name of global immersion and enlightenment. "The kids we're raising today are the next generation of business leaders and politicians and doctors and scientists," says Yeatman, the mother of two — including a 5-year-old daughter with multiple passport stamps. "All of those fields need a global perspective to be successful at this point."

Tavangar's tack, she says, is geared to "the average mom or dad."

"What I love about this book is



"Spin the globe, and say 'Where do we want to go,'" said Homa Sabet Tavangar, author of a book about examining worldwide cultures. Here, she visits with kids at the Academy for Global Citizenship. | SCOTT STEWART—SUN-TIMES

TEN TIPS FOR RAISING GLOBALLY AWARE KIDS

- 1. Keep the world at your fingertips.** Purchase an up-to-date globe and keep it handy for easy reference and/or cover a wall near the kitchen table or other central location with an oversized, laminated world map.
- 2. See the world through movies.** View and compare the stories of Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, Superman, Jungle Book and many more through movie versions from other countries and eras.
- 3. Get passports.** Even if you have no intention or budget for international travel, possessing your own passports will put your family in the mindset of the possible, as a very physical reminder of your world citizenship.

- 4. Enrich your playlists and music collection.** As kids' become accustomed to musical diversity, they adjust to the various sounds, making the genres feel less "foreign."
- 5. Find beautiful books.** Vibrant coffee table and kids' picture books can bring diverse circumstances, people and emotions to life, for all ages.

- 6. Make birthday parties global.** When you're ready to move beyond the Princess, Power Ranger or Pony party themes, consider choices derived from global celebrations: Bastille Day, Cinco de Mayo, Earth Day, Chinese New Year, the World Cup, Olympics, etc.

- 7. Spice up Thanksgiving and your**

take-out choices. Look to your cultural heritage (or a guest's) or a favorite ethnic food style. Start slowly by using a new spice or herb, or add a new side dish. And don't forget variations on leftovers: turkey enchiladas, green bean and rice pilaf, dumplings and piroshkies make the next day's meal almost as exciting as traditional Thanksgiving.

8. Decorate the holidays in a new way. Decorations from Latin America, Russia, Asia and many other cultures are available in all kinds of mainstream stores. Kids might enjoy selecting an ornament from a favorite country, and then find out about what it represents.

9. Use soccer to go global. Pick an international team to follow based on your heritage, your friend's, your favorite type of food, the language you want to learn to speak, your favorite jersey, or hundreds of other reasons — get creative! The FIFA Web site includes an interactive world map to help you learn about all the teams and member countries.

10. Expose children to foreign languages. There are lots of ways to do this, but start by making the effort to learn a few words in a foreign language with your kids — even if it's learning how to say something mundane or silly like "toilet" in five languages! See if there are root similarities or other ways that languages relate.

that it is practical, it is non-judgmental. It's not saying, 'Gee, you weren't raised with a Ph.D. in international relations. How could you not be thinking about the world at large?' It takes everyday occurrences and has tons of opportunities for people that are free, that can be done from your home, that can be done in any community in America. And it makes them easy and practical and fun."

Recently, Yeatman says, a friend wondered what type of birthday party to throw for her child. Nothing seemed original. Having just read Tavangar's book, Yeatman suggested an Olympics-themed fete, complete with a parade of nations, physical challenges and a cake decorated with Olympic rings. In addition to being unique, it was relatively cheap to pull off.

Graduating to the next level of international involvement with kids is quite the opposite, admits Tavangar, who has traveled with her brood to Bolivia, Peru, West Africa and, briefly, Europe. Her 16-year-old, she says, just got back from an extended scholarship excursion to China.

"We have really made an effort. We've sacrificed financially in other ways so that we could do some travel with our kids," she says.

"And they love it. They absolutely love it. I really think it's sort of a muscle [to be used]. Most people can really enjoy what the world offers if you start getting used to it and exposed to it [early]. If you have no idea, that's when it's scary."