LEARNING MADE EASY

2nd Edition

Homeschooling

for dummies®

A Wiley Brand



Select the right curriculum

Create the perfect homeschooling space

Design a schedule that works for you

Jennifer Kaufeld



Homeschooling

2nd Edition

by Jennifer Kaufeld

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Homeschooling For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

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Homeschooling For Dummies®

To view this book's Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and search for "Homeschooling For Dummies Cheat Sheet" in the Search box.

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Introduction

Welcome to the adventure called homeschooling!

Teaching your children at home is a rewarding and engaging way to spend your time. You relearn cutting and pasting skills if you teach kindergarten, and you review algebra facts right along with your high school student. No matter what age your student happens to be, you find yourself learning and relearning right along with your child. If you tutor your children all the way through high school, you look up one day to realize that you just relived the academic portion of your high school years — doing it one-on-one makes school time less stressful for everybody.

About This Book

Whether you're just about to embark on the home education journey, you already have a few years under your belt, or you're interested in learning about this home teaching thing that your family member or friend pursues, *Homeschooling For Dummies* is your hands-on guide. These pages explain the intricacies of homeschooling in plain English and show you that you can do it too, if you decide that homeschooling meets your family's needs.

For the most part, this book reads exactly like any other: Words progress from left to right, sentences begin with capital letters, and so on. No surprises there, thank goodness. You may want to be aware of a couple additional features, however, as you read. They're designed to help you get the most out of this book.

Many pages contain an icon in the margin that points to important information. Icons save you the time and energy it takes to use your handy underlining pen. (The section about icons shows you the individual icons and tells you what they mean.)

In other sections of the book, you may find words *in italics* or **in bold type**. These words tell you what to type into an Internet search engine if you want to find certain homeschooling information on the web. For example, using **homeschool magazine** as a search term should give you most (if not all) the homeschool newsletters and magazines that maintain their own websites, plus

a few miscellaneous discussions about the pros and cons of homeschooling magazines in general. (Don't you love the Internet?)

Foolish Assumptions

Knowing you picked up this book tells me who you are. You, of course, knew who you were all along. I'm the one who has to figure it out, and this is what I came up with so far:

- This phenomenon called *homeschooling* interests you and you want to find out more about it.
- You are thinking about teaching your children at home, you already teach your children at home, or you may know someone who does.
- This book is the answer to your search for an understandable guide that you can hand to concerned-but-loving grandparents, siblings, and friends because you already homeschool.
- You may have a computer at home with Internet access (because most homeschoolers around the country do). Or you may not. Either way, you can use this book because it was written with you in mind.
- Words such as *unschooling*, *classical education*, and *portfolio* reverberate in your mind like a half-understood foreign language.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, you see a collection of handy icons in the margins. While they manage to make the pages look cool as you flip through, they also perform a useful function. They mark information that you want to note for one reason or another.



Beginning homeschoolers need to know more than the basics. They want to see a working example of how homeschooling looks in real life. This icon gives you a glimpse into the daily life of a homeschooler, usually me. Browse through the paragraphs attached to these icons when

you need a reminder that teaching your kids at home isn't always a bowl of chocolate ice cream (although whatever the current crisis, you usually find yourself laughing about it later). These icons mark real life in action: the frustrating parts as well as the huggable ones.



REMEMBER This icon saves you from tying strings around your fingers to help you recall information as you read. This icon sits next to a paragraph that you may need later, and it makes the section a little easier to find the next time you need it.



TIP This icon makes your life easier. It may mark a handy resource you should be aware of, a shortcut that saves you time, or a tidbit of knowledge born of experience. These icons mark the places you may want to highlight so you can find them later.



WARNING Think: Danger, Will Robinson! When you see this icon, tread carefully. While nothing in this book causes your computer hard drive to crash or the dog to eat your brand new science textbook, these icons do remind you to pay attention. Some icons point out information that the general public doesn't know, but you need to be aware of. Other icons mark information that can change depending on which state you live in.

Beyond the Book

While *Homeschooling For Dummies* gives you a good introduction to the topic, your adventure certainly doesn't stop here. For a list of child- and family-friendly magazines and newsletters (some specifically for homeschoolers and some just for fun), take a look at the book's Cheat Sheet online at Dummies.com. In addition to possible periodical reads, the Cheat Sheet also gives you some handy website suggestions and an easy way to determine a grade point average. Find it at www.dummies.com, and then search

for “Homeschooling For Dummies Cheat Sheet.”

Where to Go from Here

Because *Homeschooling For Dummies*, like all *For Dummies* books, is divided into easily managed sections, you don’t actually have to start reading at Chapter 1 if you don’t want to. Diving into the middle of the book is great — especially if it contains the information that you need right now. How you read the book is up to you. Read it from front to back, back to front (a little more difficult, but still manageable), or start in the middle and go from there. This decision, like almost every other one in homeschooling, is entirely up to you.

No matter how you decide to digest the book, dive right in — a wealth of information, ideas, and other tidbits await you.

Part 1

Heading to Homeschooling

IN THIS PART …

Ponder the big questions related to homeschooling. How did you get here? Can you afford it? Do you know enough about everything? And how are you going to tell your mother?

Determine your own reasons for homeschooling, and look at some some interesting situations such as teaching and working another job. How and when you begin your journey is completely up to you, but this Part offers suggestions to guide you.

Find your state homeschooling law, including the number of days you need to teach each year in order to be legal. When and if you need to interact with your local school system, you'll be prepared.

Draw the entire family into the homeschool experience. If you plan to pull students from a public or private school, spend some quality time detoxing from school, or *deschooling*, before you embark on your new adventure.

Chapter 1

Answering the Big Questions

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Thinking about homeschooling**
- **Knowing it all — or not?**
- **Affording the adventure**
- **Schooling as long as you like**
- **What about socialization?**

Perhaps you just found out that your best friend intends to homeschool his children next year, and you want to know more. Maybe you're thinking of pulling your children out of the local school and want to know about your options. You may be a veteran homeschooler who always taught from the textbooks and now want to add different subjects or unique learning opportunities into your day. Maybe you've heard one particular term over and over, such as "unschooling," and want to know more about it.

Whatever your reasons for picking up this book, start here if you want to begin at the beginning. This chapter answers those big questions that are uppermost in almost every new homeschooler's mind, including a discussion about that elephant in the room, *socialization.* Find a comfortable chair, settle in, and begin your journey into the world of home education.

Getting to This Point

Stunned, you look up one morning over your cup of coffee. How did you get from being a perfectly happy public or private school parent to someone contemplating homeschooling? When did the feeling begin to dawn on you that you weren't ready to send your bundle of preschool joy out into the school world, and you also aren't entirely sure he's ready to go, either?

You may be tired of spending four hours on homework after your child

returns from a full day at school. Reteaching the skills at night to a child who passed the daytime hours at school is exhausting and frustrating for both you and your child. You're both tired, you want to get the work done and out of the way, and you may even quietly resent the intrusion into what used to be your family time.

Maybe the escalated violence in elementary, middle, and high schools worries you. You hear reports of guns and knives in school, police patrolling the halls, and you want to ensure (as best as you can) that your children remain safe. Or violence may have already touched your community, and you feel the need to react in a positive way while you still have time.

Perhaps you see your family values, traditions, or religious beliefs lessening as your child spends more and more time in an institutional setting, and this bothers you. Children function best from a strong foundation, which is hard to build when they spend six to eight hours per day outside a parent's care while they're still young. Parents see amazing changes even after bringing high school students into homeschooling from a troubled school setting, but building the foundation when they're young is easiest. In this case, homeschooling builds (or rebuilds) strong families, which in turn provides balanced adults for society.

Your child's lack of academic progress may concern you. As every parent knows, each child develops in her own time and in her own way. School materials are designed for the mythical middle-of-the-road child who learns certain skills at certain times. If your child fits outside the mold, she may fall behind in classes or show signs of stress. Pulling this child out of public or private school and teaching her at home takes the pressure off and allows you to spend as much time as necessary working through specific subjects or skills.

Perhaps family work or activity schedules clash irreparably with school schedules. Although not the most common reason for homeschooling, this is certainly as valid as any of the others. If one parent travels several months of the year or a family business or passion, such as stage or athletic performing skews your weekly schedule, then homeschooling may prove to be the optimal solution for your family. It allows you to be together, do what you need to do, and still meet your state's educational requirements.



REMEMBER No matter what your reasons are for wanting to homeschool your children, if they center around what's best for your family right now, then your reasons are valid and worth pursuing. Home education is all about meeting your child's needs. If the school no longer meets those needs, and you're willing to take the plunge and give it a try, then you may find homeschooling a perfect fit.

Knowing Not to Know It All

No one knows it all, not even the teachers in the schools. Many schools assign teachers to lead classes on subjects they were never even trained to teach. At the beginning of a school year, these teachers, scrambling as much as anyone else, read the teacher's manuals to determine what in the world fifth-grade science is all about.

You don't need to know it all. You come to homeschooling with certain strengths and specialties. The topics you love and those things you do well become natural subjects in your homeschool. If you love to cook, for example, home economics class becomes an effortless and fun way to spend close teaching time with your children in the kitchen while passing on something that excites you. There's a good chance that they'll learn to cook well, too, as they catch your excitement and internalize it.



TIP In the beginning, until you develop a support network of other families with specialties of their own, you teach what you know and use teacher's manuals or library books for the rest. If your children are older, you can even turn them loose in the library to research a subject that you know nothing about and then ask your students to report back to you after they learn about it. This way, you both learn something new.

With a good textbook in your hand or a sound idea of what you want to teach or learn and access to a decent public library or the Internet (almost every community has a good library these days), a homeschool parent learns alongside the student. Most homeschoolers, after three or so years teaching

the kids at their houses, say, “I had no idea I’d learn so much along with them!”



TIP After you meet a group of homeschool families who have children roughly the ages of yours, a natural networking begins to take place. You may offer to teach cooking to a group of kids whose parents think that the family can opener is a prized possession. In return, if you don’t know a bass clef from a quarter note, another homeschool parent may be willing to hold an introductory music class for the group. By joining together and sharing skills, nobody needs to know it all. You spend less time fussing over the teacher’s manual, and you still get it all done.

Affording It

The truth doesn’t always make good news stories. News media relies on the sensational and the bizarre, while normal, run-of-the-mill life generally doesn’t qualify as news. Homeschool media stories that tout homeschooling as expensive, elitist, and only for the wealthy are simply not true. The truth, which is that anyone can homeschool for nearly free if they need to, doesn’t make splashy headlines.



REMEMBER Many people manage to homeschool their children for about $500 per child, per year, on the average or less. Some swing it on $500 per family. A few manage to teach for nearly free, but they’re the truly dedicated bargain shoppers. Five hundred dollars per child, per year, is a good round figure for estimation because you can get a good number of books, supplies, and even a few extra goodies like field trips for that amount. Now, opting for a $500 budget means that your child won’t be using the coolest, newest whizbang textbooks for every subject, but it also means that you can provide a more-than-adequate education.

Set a budget for homeschooling supplies at the beginning of the year, but remember that you’re bound to pick up some fun stuff along the way. So include that in your estimates. Setting up a reasonable budget can give you

realistic boundaries while also letting you know that you can do this. Keep in mind that preschool and kindergarten are relatively cheap educational years. After you stockpile construction paper, glue, crayons, kiddy scissors, and some read-aloud books, you're most of the way there.

As you rise through the ranks, however, books get more and more expensive, until you reach the high school level where a new science book may cost you $90 or more. With more than one child, however, your costs go down every time the next child in line uses that $90 book. Planning a $90 purchase when three children can use the book in turn gives you a sturdy text for $30 per child in the long run.



REMEMBER When you think about pulling your child out of a private or public school system, don't forget to consider all the items that you currently pay for that will become irrelevant, such as

- Book rentals
- Club fees
- School lunches
- Tuition (for private school)

You can apply that money to the extra costs that you now have, such as textbooks and lunches at home. Even clothing costs take a dive when you realize that you can homeschool in your sweats and no longer need school-appropriate clothes for each day of the week.

If you opt for low-cost or almost-free homeschooling, you find yourself trading time and energy for the money you'd normally spend on curriculum. Trips to the library take time; you may spend hours writing math practice sheets for your first grader or searching for them on the web so you can print them out. Buying the books you need for the whole year saves you time and gas, but it means you need to fork over the money to pay for the books yourself *and* find a place to store them in your home. Chapter 21 covers cost-cutting measures in depth.

On the other hand, families can spend as much as they like on

homeschooling. I know at least one family that considers homeschooling their major spending hobby, and they have plenty of money to spend. Such a family may drop $6,000 or more per child, per year, on homeschooling, but to do that you need to purchase the most expensive curricula that you can find.



TIP Look for curriculum ideas and resources throughout this book. Also glance through Appendix A for more options. Although I could fill a 700-page book with nothing but recommendations for books and kits that you can use to teach with, I don't have that many pages. As I mention various teaching methods, age groups, and so on, I also try to throw in a few products or books that you may want to look at if you want to pursue that particular topic.



WARNING If you purchase everything mentioned in this book, you'll easily top the $2,000-per-child marker. No homeschool family does all this. For one thing, people only have 24 hours per day, and trying to follow all these systems and add-ons would take many times that.

Hanging in There

When you first jump into homeschooling, the question nags at you: How long can I keep this up? Another question that sometimes rankles is: How long will the educational establishment allow me to do this? Because these are two different questions, they need varying answers.

Signing up for the long haul

When your child spends her days in a home where she's loved, cared for, and guided to knowledge, she's in the best possible place. If you truly have her best interests at heart (and what parent doesn't?), then you'll ensure that she learns to read and add. Even if you miss something along the way, your child will grow to be a productive, useful adult. She can always pick up a community college course in the subject later if it proves to be extremely important to daily life. I know it's hard to believe, but many balanced,

rational people came from educational systems that offered no weekly art class. (If you and your child love art, then structure it as a course in your homeschool. Your child will survive, however, if he learns everything but art appreciation.)

With the energy and assurance that comes from knowing that you're doing what's best for your family, you can homeschool until and even through college. Although many parents are ready for their children to spread their wings and fly a bit after high school and encourage their fledglings to seek schooling or work outside the nest, some situations encourage you to homeschool even through college. For the 12-year-old who is ready for calculus, college at home is the best possible solution — after all, she needs to pursue some type of schooling until at least age 16. Community or online college courses meet these students' needs while allowing them to mature.



TIP Just because you *can* homeschool through high school, of course, doesn't mean that you *have* to. Many families pull their children out of school for one or two years to help them over a tough academic or social spot. Then, after the problem is corrected and the student reads at grade level again or the sticky social situation irons out, they send their child back to school. The bottom line is doing what's best for your student. If he only needs a year away from the school routine to catch up, and you're comfortable sending him back after that year is over, send him! You may find, however, that after a year or two at home, he really doesn't want to return, and you don't want him to go. That's okay, too.



AT OUR HOUSE Most families take teaching one year at a time even after they homeschool several years. Those who find that homeschooling enhances family life and family schedules tend to stick with it the longest. We spent several years homeschooling during a time that the kids' dad traveled much of the time with his job. Because of our flexibility, we could periodically pack the schoolbooks in the middle of the fall, winter, or spring and go with Daddy to a conference. After we arrived in the

conference city, I covered school in the hotel room during the early mornings, and we would take advantage of local museums, parks, city fountains, and pools for the rest of the day. My daughter still says she did math in every hotel she ever saw.

Staying at home forever



TIP The United States allows you to teach at home as many or as few years as you want to, no matter what state you live in. Although each of the 50 states publishes its own requirements for homeschoolers, none of them says that you can only teach between this year and that one. You can begin homeschooling in preschool and continue through college if you want to, although often parents pull their children out of a public or private school because something isn't working and they homeschool to bring balance back to the child. Or, if parents begin homeschooling in the preschool years, they may opt to send their children to public or private high school. Few families homeschool all the way through the first four years of college.

Look for chapters that cover various homeschooling ages in Part 2.

Breaking the News to Mom

The parents in your life, whether they are actually your parents, favorite aunts and uncles, or close friends who function in a guiding role for you, *always* have something to say when you announce a major lifestyle change. Sometimes they're for the change; other occasions tend to spark less-than-positive responses. Although they usually mean it in love, negative reactions from those around you tend to derail you if you aren't ready for them. Be prepared — when you announce that you're thinking of homeschooling your children, someone will probably give you flack.

Before you respond, take a moment to consider whether a person is having a knee-jerk reaction because you threaten to go against time-honored United States culture (at least for the past hundred years or so) or whether this person is voicing well-grounded objections. If you truly believe this is the best course for your family members today, you need to proceed forward in the

face of negative reactions.



TIP This book gives you the ammunition you need to discuss homeschooling rationally. In fact, you can even hand a copy to your mom, if you like. In 30 chapters, this book talks about all the major homeschooling movements, educational needs of children at various age levels, and even includes chapters on adding zing to your school days.

When you discuss your decision with your mom, tell her what you know. Homeschoolers do get into college if they choose to go, they aren't afraid to play outside or make friends, and today's homeschoolers have many, many activities to choose from in addition to time at home with the books. If you have already decided on a teaching approach (such as classical curriculum, unschooling, or operating as a satellite school, which are all discussed later in this book), tell her about it. Tell her why you chose this method over all the others. In short, share your enthusiasm and hope.

She may not agree with you at first, but time will probably prove your decision to be a sound one. When we began homeschooling, I worked with a nonverbal, almost-3-year-old. That child not only learned to speak his native language fluently, but he went on to graduate from college, work as a web developer, and start his own international not-for-profit dedicated to making information on the Internet accessible to everyone regardless of disability or restriction. I'd say that for this child, homeschooling worked!



AT OUR HOUSE When we announced that we planned to homeschool, even our friends — not to mention our family members — thought we'd lost it. Twenty-five years ago, homeschooling was much less common than it is today. (Some of the people who are close to us still think we're wackos, in spite of the evidence provided by two well-adjusted children. Oh well, there's no accounting for some people's opinions.)

Addressing Socialization, the Hot

Homeschooling Buzzword

It's the first question you get from strangers who discover that you homeschool. Sometimes you even hear it from well-meaning relatives. Usually, however, anyone who actually knows your children on more than an, "Isn't that Rainbow's kid?" basis, also knows better than to demand information about your child's social life. (At least, they should.)

Among veteran homeschoolers the topic is simply referred to as *The Question.* The dialog goes something like this: "Hey, guys. I met somebody at the mall today who asked me if I homeschool and then asked me The Question." At this point everyone in the room responds in unison: *What about socialization?*

How do you address The Question? Before you can answer, you need to determine the question at hand. Is the person asking about *social outlets,* the time we allot to spend with friends and do fun things together, or is he actually asking about *socialization?* These are two entirely different questions.

Social outlets

Social outlets are a no-brainer. In fact, so many opportunities exist for homeschool families to spread their social wings and meet with other homeschooling (as well as nonhomeschooling) families that a whole section later in this chapter covers the options in depth. If someone asks you how your child finds social outlets, list the myriad of activities that nearly every homeschool family involves themselves with. Lessons, sports, scouting, religious organizations, and so on fill our children's time and create excellent social opportunities.

Or do they? We think they do because we continue to sign them up for the classes and the organizations.



WARNING Do you find yourself seeking an endless roster of activities? What purpose does endless activity serve? Is it to meet an educational need or to pacify some unknown questioner who may peer over our shoulders at any minute? If not for educational purposes or to fill empty hours, why

do we feel that we need to satisfy anyone but our family with our activities? (I tried scheduling my days to pacify the family dog for a while, but that didn't work at all, so I gave it up.)

Socialization

The majority of questioners ask about something much more nebulous than scouts or Sunday school. The words are the same: *What about socialization?* However, they don't want to know what you do so much as where your children will stand when they mature.

Now when The Question is posed to you, and you truly understand the query, you are free to answer the question instead of providing a few fluffy comments or blindly running through your after-school itinerary. (Or telling the person to bug off, which is also an acceptable response.) The question is really *How will your child fit into society if he doesn't go to school?* The answer, of course, is that your child fits into society just fine.

Your child learns from you and the other adults and almost-adults in his life. He gets a much better view of how life really works because he isn't incarcerated with a selection of age-mates all day long. Your child sees wisdom at work as she watches you plan and complete tasks, interact with people in your community, and schedule your life to get (almost) everything done. She learns your values and morals as she listens to what you say and watches what you do. In the meantime, your child learns to

- Interact with the people around him, regardless of age, sex, or social class.
- Observe and join adults in conversation that includes more meaningful topics than what the latest cute junior-high boy wore to school.
- Work with others as a team for longer than an hour on the playing field. Working together becomes a way of life with homeschool students and parents.
- Spend concentrated time and effort becoming good at a skill, such as dance, engineering, or computers.

This is the kind of interaction that leads to healthy, independent citizens.

Presenting the Issue of the Year

For years socialization always appeared as the homeschooling issue of the year, no matter which year it happened to be. Although you don't hear it as often as you used to, people still raise this as The Homeschooling Issue. Of course, it's only an issue among people who don't actually teach their children at home. The veteran homeschoolers know better.

By the time a homeschool family has a couple years' experience, its members understand that the best social place for its children is the home environment. Where else can you learn to relate to people from all different age groups, strengths, and weaknesses without resorting to insanity or institutionalization?

Families pass along values, morals, and standards as they interact together. Parents teach their young ones how to interact with society, how to tell right from wrong, and why they should avoid sticking their fingers in light sockets. (Ouch! That one hurt.) In fact, parents do a fine job through about age 5, and then someone else comes along and tells them that they need to send their children to school to learn all that matters.

Take time for a quick trip back to introductory logic. If you did a great job when they were 2, and you were magnificent when they were 4, then why is it that all of a sudden you need help at 6, 8, and 10? That doesn't make sense. How is someone you don't even know more qualified to teach your children about society than you are?

You learn about society by living life. Sitting in a classroom for six hours each day while someone tells you to be quiet and listen isn't living life. Unless you happen to be a professional bank depositor for a large corporation, neither does real life consist of standing silently in a line several times per day.

So if these scenarios aren't real life in the adult world, why do we insist that our children fit a mold that we ourselves wouldn't be caught dead in? I don't know about you, but if I worked in a job where I needed to raise my hand to go to the bathroom and then marched there and back carrying a brightly colored tag that reads *Girl Bathroom Pass* in large block letters, I think I'd find another position. At home, my children don't raise their hands for permission to go to the bathroom. Do yours?

THEY WON'T FIND ONLY 25-YEAR-OLDS ON THE JOB

Imagine working for a company that only hires 25-year-old workers. Everywhere you turn you see other 25-year-olds: in the mailroom, at the computers, in the warehouse. Each person is exactly your age.

Sounds vaguely *Brave New World*-esque, doesn't it? Thankfully, it's not reality.

Homeschoolers get a jump on this whole reality thing. Because they incorporate multiple ages into learning and life from the beginning of homeschool (whenever that may be), these students cope without shock if their first manager is old enough to be a grandfather (or, conversely, young enough to pass as an older sister). Homeschoolers grow up with the idea that people come in all ages, all sizes, and all shapes. After all, that's what they see at home, in the educational co-op, and in the community.

They learn to be kind to younger people and listen to older ones. They find out that a best friend can be several years older, several years younger, or the exact same age. And they understand that they can pursue interests and hobbies different from those of a close friend yet still share some things in common. They learn to be individuals.

This carries over into the workplace. These students think through problems and suggest solutions because that's what they do at home. They tend to follow instructions even though they may ask *why* the first time or two. If I ran a retail establishment, this is the kind of student employee I'd want working at my store. How about you?

Chapter 2

Taking the Leap

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Determining why you want to homeschool**
- **Deciding what's best for your family**
- **Schooling through special situations**
- **Getting started on the journey**

So you're thinking about leaping into homeschooling. The excitement of a new life decision always brings some jitters with it. Although the idea of homeschooling intrigues you, a few questions may still nag at the back of your mind. For one thing, what exactly does an adventure like this involve? When is the best time to begin?

All these concerns work themselves out as you live home education day by day, but it's nice to receive some answers and reassurance before you begin. This chapter addresses the issues that may arise as you consider making the decision to homeschool — issues that range from why you want to homeschool in the first place to the pros and cons of homework. Look for information on more-involved issues, such as specific curriculums, in Part 3 and where to locate a copy of your state law in Chapter 3.

Realizing That Anger Is Not Enough

Why do you want to homeschool? What propels you in this decision to alter your lifestyle so drastically from that of your neighbors? People have as many reasons to homeschool their children as there are homeschoolers. Sometimes more than one main reason makes you decide to take the plunge into home education.

Homeschooling needs to be your main educational option for the right reasons. Getting mad over what the teacher said to Sonny won't give you the inner strength that you need to continue teaching on those days when

homeschooling lacks appeal. What will you do when you wake up and the anger is gone? Sending your child back to school proves that you removed him in anger. On the other hand, continuing with a program that you no longer believe in makes everybody miserable.

Ensuring educational excellence

Perhaps you aren't entirely sure that your child is getting what she needs at the local school. Maybe you watch her bring home page after page of review material that you know she mastered some time last year. She may tell tales of how boring school is, how little she learns, or the last time she corrected the teacher.

Does this mean your school system is awful? Nope. It simply means that your child happens to be beyond whatever the classroom is currently covering — even if her class is at her "correct" grade level. Look at it this way: Even the best introduction to a biology course bores someone with a doctorate in biology. It may be a good course, but the successful doctoral candidate took that class long ago and now thinks far beyond its introductory limitations.

Many parents decide to homeschool for educational excellence. They see a difference between the best private schools in their community and the public schools their children attend, and they bring their children home in an effort to bridge that gap. You can homeschool for much less than the $3,000 per year (a conservative figure) that a good private school costs, and the result can be much the same if you follow the classical curriculums most prep schools cover. (Read more about expenses in Chapter 21; see more about classical education in Chapter 11.)

Meeting your child's special needs

Sometimes the school system simply fails to meet your child's needs. If your child slips through the cracks and misses too much information, he falls farther and farther behind. Before you know it, the school wants him to undertake remedial work in an effort to make up lost time.

This situation is so frustrating for parents! You send them to school in the hope that the establishment will teach them what they need to know. By the time you find out there's a problem, though, it may be months after the issue reaches an almost critical stage.

Bringing a child like this home rescues him from the condemnation he feels

at school. This alone often relieves enough stress so that your child can concentrate and make up the work with a patient parent sitting alongside. It's not unusual for a parent and student to wing through one to two years' worth of lessons in a school year and catch the student up to his current grade level.



REMEMBER If you rescue your child from an emotionally stressful or failure-ridden school year, he may need some time to unwind and get used to his new daily surroundings. Your best bet is to relax, take it slow, and give him some time. Think of it this way: If you bring him home in December and only get a couple months' of quality learning in before the end of the year, that's two more months than he was going to get in the classroom, right?

You can read about more specific special needs in Chapter 19.

Retaining religious convictions

If your child's new language and altered values horrify you, and you see them in direct opposition to what you carefully teach at home, you certainly aren't alone. Parents of all faiths are pulling their children out of the public schools to teach them at home, precisely because they want those early foundations to stay solid. It's hard to compete when your child stays away from you for six hours a day. Bringing them home to school allows you to gently reintroduce and reinforce those values and traditions that guide your life.

Homeschooling your child for religious reasons gives you several options. You can

- **Locate tradition-specific curriculum.** You may even be able to find a complete curriculum from science to history tailored to your particular belief system. Chapter 22 points you toward religious curriculum options.
- **Incorporate religious instruction into your day as part of your class structure.** Use religious or secular materials for all subjects as you choose. If you select secular books, this means tacking an additional subject — religion — onto your day along with your state's requirements, but if you homeschool your children for religious reasons, this won't be a big deal to you.

You may find that you need to alter adult materials or group curriculum, but as more people in your tradition begin to homeschool, your community will respond with materials written for you. (Or if you are adventurous and knowledgeable, perhaps you can write them yourself.)

Accommodating family lifestyle

Sometimes lifestyle itself dictates a need to homeschool. If you work at odd times of the year and find yourself free and sitting at home alone while your children sit through classes wishing they were with you, you may find homeschool a great timesaver in the long run. It allows you to pursue family activities, such as vacations and hobbies, when work is light or concentrate your teaching time during off months and give the children a vacation while you're occupied.

Parents who follow other than nine-to-five jobs that incorporate a lot of travel, public appearances, or endless conferences may want to look at homeschooling as an option. It gives you the chance to spend time with your children no matter where you are. When you travel, the children can go with you whenever you set out and take their schoolwork along — my kids think that hotel rooms come with desks specifically for them.



My children have a mom and dad who are both professional authors. Full-time writing creates a whole different lifestyle for those who pursue it. When we work, we work long and hard. On the other hand, when we have no deadlines, we're completely free to do whatever we want with no restrictions. We can travel, spend the day at the park during the week, or go sledding at the mention of the idea. Homeschooling works perfectly for us because it gives us the flexibility to take our vacations at odd times of the year between books, teach the children (who sit at a large table right outside our office door), and live life as a family instead of as a group of individuals following their separate schedules.

Determining What's Best for Your Family

This is *your* family. These are the people you live with. The ones you love best. When you look at all the educational options available, you need to consider your family's needs. Perhaps you'll find that homeschooling is truly the best solution for your family.

Perhaps the idea of working together appeals to you. You're willing to sacrifice where you need to so that the greater need is met. You want to take control of your children's education, to watch them learn and guide them into maturity. And even more importantly, this interests you enough that you're willing to make it a long-term goal, whether "long-term" means this year or 12 years.

Okay, so you decide that homeschooling will be best for your family with child number one. What about child number two? Does it follow that you'll reach the same educational conclusions?

Not really. Even within a family, each child is completely different. What's best for one may not be best for all or even most. When you look at your family as a unit, you may find that the answers for each child differ. But that's okay.



REMEMBER You're looking for the optimal solution for your own family. Although it may seem strange, sometimes what's best actually means homeschooling one or two children and sending the rest to public or private school. That way, everybody's needs get met.

Most families who homeschool do teach all their children at home at once, but you aren't most families. You are you, with your family, your needs, and your strengths. If you look at educational options with your whole family in mind, it lowers your stress level in the long run. Then you don't have to wonder whether you made the right decision for this child or that one. You know.

Creating Solutions for Special Situations

Parents with special situations often feel trapped when they think about their children and education. Maybe you work full time and truly can't afford to quit. Perhaps you're a single parent. (If you are, I applaud your dedication and efforts!) Perchance your child is a special needs learner.

Special situations require some imagination and a little extra determination, but you can homeschool if you truly believe this is the best thing for your family. If you don't think this is best for your brood, why go through the effort? Keep things the way they are and watch for any signs of social, educational, or emotional deterioration in your children.

Working around your job

If you want to work homeschooling into your unusual situation, be aware that some of the solutions look rather unconventional. Some parents who work full time take their children with them to the office. Then everybody completes his or her tasks at the same time. The children do their schoolwork with your oversight, you do your office work, and everybody's happy. This functions especially well when the parent works out of the home.

Other parents schedule homeschooling in the evening instead of during the day. The children are usually up late, sleep in each morning, and have their free time while the parent is at work. Then the parent returns home and spends the two or so hours necessary to guide the students each evening, leaving them with any additional reading or projects to do the next day. This option really cuts into family evening free time, but parents make it happen when they need to.



TIP If your family tends to function as night owls, you may find yourself teaching at night even if everyone stays home during the day. One of the perks of homeschooling is that you can usually teach whenever your children are most alert, so if they pay attention the best between the hours of 10 p.m. and midnight, pour yourself some extra-caffeinated coffee and go for it. (In rare instances, your state law may stipulate that you need to teach between the hours of such and such, but most states do not. See Appendix B for homeschool associations to locate your state law, or visit Chapter 3.)

Dealing with special learners

Parents of special needs students rarely settle into middle ground. Instead, they generally fall into two camps:

- Those who can't wait to bring their children home because they certainly couldn't do a worse job with their child's education.
- Those who worry that taking a special needs child from the school setting would deprive her of the extra resources she needs.

One on one

If you think you couldn't do any more educational harm, then you're already on the right track. Homeschooling brings education back to one-on-one tutoring, which is what special needs education was supposed to be in the first place. In a homeschool, you have your own children, who are used to dealing with each other, and you, who is used to working with them. You can schedule your day so you work with only one at a time, or if you have more than one child, you can arrange to work with two or more at once. It's completely up to you.

Continuing therapy

If you have a special needs learner, then you're already used to the specialist roundup. Physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, resource room teacher, medical specialists — sometimes they become almost like family because you see them so often. With time, you learn the jargon and even some of the solutions.



TIP Getting special needs resources as a homeschooler often depends on the school system you belong to. Some systems provide therapists to homeschooled children as a matter of course; other systems provide the services if you fight for them. Still others deny all homeschool children special needs services even though portions of our taxes pay for those services.

One option when you homeschool is to continue whatever therapy sessions your child previously attended on your own. Although speech therapy functions a little differently, physical and occupational therapists usually

work on one goal for an extended period of time. Physical and occupational therapists use exercises specifically designed to reach that goal, whether it's flexibility, relaxation, or muscle toning. If you know your therapists already, they may feel comfortable working with you on a consulting basis. You work on the exercises during the week or two between consultations, and check in with them to tell them how it's going. They then redirect your exercise cycle if you need it.

Teaching a special needs learner requires creativity on your part. Whatever the need is, your job as a homeschooler is to present information so your child can understand it. Because this is *your* child, you're much more interested in stretching his mind than anyone else would be. And he usually responds better to you than he would to anyone else because he knows that you love him.

Chapter 19 discusses homeschooling students with special needs.

Beginning the Journey

Some parents agonize over the right time to start homeschooling their children. Actually, there really is no wrong time. Like most other things in homeschooling, it's totally up to you. Most families make their final decision to homeschool sometime in the late spring or early summer, when the thought of going through another year of public or private school makes them uneasy. (To get to the uneasy part, you've actually been thinking through situations and options for quite some time, although you may not realize it.)

They then spend the summer deciding on curriculum, detoxing from the school year, and reading up on homeschooling. Maybe they find other homeschoolers they know and talk to them about their decision. When August or September comes, these families begin school at home instead of sending their children on the bus. After mentally preparing themselves all summer and sketching a game plan in their minds, they're ready for the adventure.

Choosing the perfect time of year

A good number of new homeschoolers begin in January after winter break. It gives the children two weeks away from school, and they simply don't return. If a school situation deteriorates rapidly from September to December, these

children usually benefit from the release of emotional stress they feel by staying home to school.



One little guy I know had an awful second-grade year. He failed every reading comprehension test the teacher gave him. The teacher then told his mother that he couldn't read and would have to repeat second grade. His distraught mother then called me. I asked, "What are you reading to him at home?" She replied that he really enjoyed *The Lord of the Rings*. This was a child who didn't answer the comprehension questions at school because he found them boring! Now homeschooled, he does just fine.

In an extreme situation, such as a child who becomes physically ill at the thought of getting on the bus or going to school in the morning, parents sometimes take their children out that week. They then spend a few weeks allowing the child to relax and get used to being at home all day, and then gently begin working school subjects into the schedule. The child would spend that time home ill anyway; his parents simply use it productively to help him adjust to a rather abrupt change in schedule. The downtime allows the frazzled parent time to gather thoughts together, research curriculum, and deal with her own emotions of anger and frustration.

Deciding at what age to begin

Many parents start homeschooling their children in kindergarten, but it's not unusual for a family to begin homeschooling a ninth grader. Some parents begin with an idea of homeschooling long before the first child arrives on the scene. They research the idea, talk to other parents, find out what materials are currently available, and make the decision before they even have children. Then, when their family becomes bigger, they raise the toddlers and preschoolers with an expectation that they'll be homeschooled until further notice.

Not all parents are this focused, however, and many begin to think of teaching their own children when they look into that sweet 5-year-old face and think of it being away from home all day. Perhaps kindergarten left a bad taste in your mouth and you want to look into other options. You suddenly realize you

taught your child almost everything he knows to this point, so you may be qualified to continue the trend. Good for you!

Some families find out further along the line that public or private school doesn't work for their children. You may be one of these parents. Perhaps your child comes home bored each day because she isn't challenged. Maybe social or educational issues arise that make it difficult for your child to learn. Or perhaps your child learns things from other children that shock you.

When situations such as these arise, and you feel like homeschooling is the best option for your family, you can start whenever you like. Even tenth and eleventh graders come home to school if social pressures and threats of violence become overwhelming.

No one should have to learn in a place that they don't feel is safe. If you were concerned that someone may attack you at work when you left the house each day, would you go? If you worked in a place where your co-workers and perhaps even your boss called you stupid and lazy, would you go? Then why do we as parents send our little ones if they experience these things?

Assigning homework

One of the main complaints parents voice about the local school system is the amount of homework. Although some repetition may be good and even necessary, four or more hours of homework each night seems a little excessive for second and third graders. As those of us who spent any time in the corporate world know, all work and no play leads to burnout.

WITNESSING YOUR CHILD'S PROGRESS

Remember those first toddler steps? Your child stood, wavered, and then plunk! Down he went. But he stood up again, wobbled a little, and took one step, and then another. You were so excited that you could cheer! Maybe you did (and soon after found yourself cuddling a crying toddler who was startled at that great big noise).

Homeschooling is like that. When you teach your child at home, you see the thrill in your child's eyes when she learns to add for the very first time. You hear the first words your child learns to read. You get to explain the wonders of the stars to wide, fascinated eyes.

And farther along, you unfold other mysteries of life to your learner. What is an atom? How do you solve this math problem for *n*, and why does anyone care what *n* might be in the first place? What happens when you forget to add salt to that bread loaf that you just made? (Oops. Saltless bread loaves aren't very tasty.)

Watching a child learn is a bit addictive, and with homeschooling, you have the opportunity to

see it all (even the frustrating I-wish-I-could-throw-my-pencil parts). No matter how old your students may be, the sparkle still comes into their eyes when they master a new skill just like it did during those first steps. One of the greatest joys of homeschooling is getting to see your children learn for the first time over and over.

Homeschooling looks at education from a different perspective. You don't need to prove that your child is learning by assigning homework for her to do after hours. You're the parent, you are the one teaching your child, and you know whether she gets it or not. If she doesn't understand the concept, you can tell by the dazed look in her eyes. If she does understand, there's no reason to spend the next four hours reteaching the same concept after dinner. You can always test the child over the material if you're not sure. Chapter 24 talks more about grades and testing.

Making homeschooling more than school at home

Homeschooling isn't really "school at home." Instead, think of it as independent tutoring sessions day after day. Most homeschooling can be done in two to four hours per day with no homework, and that includes high school. Because you teach 1 and not 20 or more, you can explain concepts in much less time than a conventional teacher. Sometimes independent reading or assigned projects fall outside that range, but the vast majority of homeschoolers find that they don't need to assign homework for their children to maintain their skills.

If a child misses a concept today, you can always reteach it tomorrow. Teacher's manuals include reteaching time nearly every day as they attempt to catch the learner who didn't quite understand the first time. If you wait until the following school day to tackle a particular skill again, you give the concept some time to settle. Within the next 24 hours you may discover a new and fresh way to present the skill, or your student may gain the extra processing time he needs to understand it.



For several years, one of my children refused to do math. Well, okay, he didn't actually refuse; he simply completed the pages as slowly as possible. After awhile, I got tired of waiting for him to finish daydreaming over his math page, and I assigned the unfinished problems

as homework. That meant he put the math page with any incomplete problems next to him on the table, and it became after-school work.

It didn't take too many months before he realized that finishing a math page within 10 to 20 minutes proved to be much more fun than staring at the math problems and thinking about all the other things he could be doing. Now he does his math quickly and well, within a decent time frame, and we move on to other things.

Using the extra time

If you opt for school without homework, what do you do with all the time you save? You suddenly have time to sit with your family and enjoy an after-dinner movie — during the week. Maybe you find the time for those volunteer opportunities that you always wanted to do. Or perhaps you may fill the hours playing board games or card games with your children.

Children think of all kinds of things to do when they find themselves free from homework. They build contraptions and coliseums in LEGOs. They grab the clay and populate a pretend town. They draw paper dolls along with stunning wardrobes. They run, ride, and skate. Once in a while, they may even grab a book and read on their own, without you prompting them. When I want my son for some miscellaneous reason, I first look on the sofa to see if he's camped there with a book. More often than not, my quick sofa search ends the quest.



WHEN YOU WANT TO CALL THE TAXI

It's 8:15 a.m., and you'd rather do anything than open that textbook one more time. These are the mornings I look over the children's heads, catch my husband's eye, and ask if he thinks the taxi could be here by 8:25 — in time to take the children to the local school. Of course, the answer is no: Who ever heard of a taxi arriving within ten minutes? But the question releases the tension, and I feel a little more ready to face the day.

Everyone has those can-I-call-the-taxi days. Sometimes the best antidote for low enthusiasm is to make yourself open the books and begin the day. The very motion of doing what you don't want to do acts as a kind of therapy, and you find that you become interested almost in spite of yourself. Sounds stoic? Perhaps, but it works.

If the taxi urge comes on you because your children wake up in a less-than-amiable mood, you may want to turn the day upside down and begin with an exercise in creativity. Pull out

the construction paper and scissors, the clay, or the recorder flutes, and have at it. Dance and wiggle to some upbeat music. After everybody spends some time creating and the juices start to flow, math looks much less reprehensible.

Once in a while, nothing settles the nerves but a day off. This is the day to play in the snow, picnic in the park, or go to the zoo. (If you visit the zoo and talk about what you see, it counts as a field trip!) After a day of rest or field tripping, you feel more refreshed and ready to hit the books again.

If you really and truly took the day off without doing anything educational, remember that you may need to teach an additional day at the end of the year to meet your school-days quota. However, when the doldrums hit in January or February, it's worth an extra day or two in late May. After all, who can put a price or time limit on sanity?

Getting used to a lack of stimuli may take your children awhile, especially if you bring your kids home after they spend several years in the school setting. Everything is programmed in a school setting. You eat at a certain time, open your math books at a specific point during the day, and place all the day's homework into your to-take-home folder.

Homeschool isn't like that. After the day's work is done, children are free to pursue new interests or continue old ones. During the first few months at home, you may find your students wandering aimlessly around the house wondering what to do with themselves. When I see that behavior in my own kids, I present them with a list of available options, such as painting, crafts, dolls, model trains, and so on, to remind them that they do have activities that they can pursue if they like. I always end the list with "… and you can always clean your room." Funny — in all this time, they have never selected the room option.

Chapter 3

Complying with Uncle Sam

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Homeschooling the legal way**
- **Finding your state law**
- **Determining the year length**
- **Interacting with school officials**

Homeschooling is legal in every state in the United States (also in Canada, if you happen to live in the northern half of North America). Really. It is.

What makes the home education process a bit sticky is that each state governs its own homeschoolers. That means that what I do in Indiana to comply with state law isn't what you may do if you live in California or North Carolina. If you live in one state and plan to stay there for a while, you learn the homeschooling ins and outs in your area and you know what you need to do. The interesting part comes if your family moves every few years or so; then you may find yourself homeschooling in a state whose requirements are radically different from the state you left.

In this chapter, you can find the ins and outs of dancing the state-law samba. Whether you need to know the number of days that your state requires you to homeschool each year or you're dying to read the educational code that pertains to you while you sip the day's last cup of coffee, this is where you begin. If you find that you still have questions after reading this chapter, those are the queries to take to your state homeschool association. (Much as I'd like to help you out, I can't take the time to memorize the laws for all 50 states plus the provinces of Canada. Like you, I have kids to educate.)

Conducting Yourself (Yes, Ma'am) in Accordance with State Law

The laws that you follow depend entirely on your state of residence. Wherever you live, that's the state legislature you listen to when you plan your school year. Because education legislation belongs to the state and not to the federal government, each state regulates homeschooling as part of its education laws.

Some homeschooling laws are relatively easy to follow and understand. They usually say something such as this: Teach your kids yourself, do it in a decent, orderly way, and we'll leave you alone if you leave us alone. (Not exactly in those words, mind you, but the gist of the content is there.)

Other states want more involvement in your homeschool. If you really corner your state officials and ask, you'll find that what truly concerns them is the almost-mythical homeschooler who removes the child from school and then sits the child in front of the television for the next five years only to return the child to school a year or so before graduation and demand that the schools "Do something with this child." With a scenario like that rolling around in my mind, I'd be a little testy, too.

Unfortunately, there's a bad apple in every large barrel, and the *almost-mythical* homeschooler is just that. Once in a while, you get a weirdo in the bunch, and that's the family that usually makes the headlines. After all, who wants to report on the well-read children who struggle once in a while with math concepts, or the homeschool family down the street whose children nearly make it to the National Little League Championships every other year or so? That's not news. It's normal. And everybody knows that what's normal isn't news.

So, in an effort to document that you truly know what you're doing (even though you already knew that to begin with), many states require some kind of proof in the form of paperwork. It may be standardized test scores, attendance records, or a small collection of worksheets and writing samples from the previous year. Like filing your income tax with the government, filing this information may seem intrusive at the beginning. Everybody grumbles about having to file it, but everybody does it.



TIP One of your state requirements may be that you name your

homeschool. In most of these states you choose the name when you file your paperwork and after that point *you cannot change it.* Give some thought to your school name. Is it a phrase or title you want gracing your child's diploma, if you homeschool all the way through high school?



AT OUR HOUSE Although our state doesn't care one way or the other, we thought a school name would be cool. It was the early '90s, and naming our little school made it sound official. We called our little institution Access Academy, because we owned a small business at the time called Access Systems. The business is long gone, but the school name remains and it's still solid after all these years.



TIP If you belong to a military family, then you follow the state homeschooling law where you *currently reside*, not the state that you declare as a residence when you file your taxes. When you're stationed overseas, talk to your local military community commander and tell this person that you plan to homeschool. For more information, visit the Department of Defense Home-School Students website at www.dodea.edu/parents/homeSchooling.cfm.



TIP Many states have legislative watchdog groups who specialize in homeschooling laws. These organizations badger (also known as *lobby*) the state legislature for various laws that they think will benefit homeschoolers. If this type of activity interests you — whether you want to join the effort yourself or you'd like the group to inform you of their work — your state homeschool organization can point you toward these friendly folks. (If you find yourself wandering around your state or local homeschool convention, look for a table that says something like Homeschooling Freedoms or Legislative Alerts. These folks usually appear at such events because they rightly reason that they may meet a few convention goers who want to join the cause.)

Locating Your State's Law

Although you probably don't need to camp outside the front door of the state legislature building, having a working knowledge of the law as it applies to homeschooling is always a good idea. First of all, a thorough knowledge of the law and how it applies to you reduces your panic quotient. If you know without hesitation, for example, that your state requires 172 school days per year, the occasional flake that insists that homeschoolers need to teach 200 days won't faze you at all.

Now that you know you need a copy of your state requirements, where do you find it? Short of calling your local department of education (which may or may not be a good idea depending on where you live), you have a couple solid resources available to you. You can contact your state homeschool association, or you can locate a copy online.



WARNING Some educational systems are still leery of homeschooling mostly because they see it as a threat. Local officials sometimes have little idea what the state law actually says and cause trouble without meaning to by requesting information or forms that they have no right to request. At the state level, most of the educators have a better idea of how homeschooling works and how it benefits the educational system as a whole. (For example, homeschooling tends to remove the "problem kids," such as the gifted, ADD, and unique learners, and leaves the students that the schools were actually designed to teach.)

You can obtain a copy of your state law through your state homeschool association. (For a list of homeschool organizations by state, see Appendix B.) This is one of the services that all statewide organizations offer, and in some cases, it's one of the main reasons the organization was formed in the first place. If the organization sends you a copy of the law, and you find it incomprehensible (because, like all laws, it will probably be written in law-speak), call them again. Most organizations take the time to explain the law to new homeschoolers, publish a what-this-law-means brochure, or keep a list of veteran homeschoolers from your state who volunteer to answer questions, such as, "What in the world is this trying to tell me?" Finding a copy of your

state law online is quick and painless — that is, unless your cable system decides to reset the routers in the middle of your search. In that case, your cable modem goes down, the web browser poofs into nothingness, and there's nothing left to do but start the kids on an art project while you wait for the cable connection to resume.



TIP After you get back online, you can locate your state law in one of these ways:

- **Hop over to your state homeschool organization website.** If the organization has a website, and most of them do, you'll find it in Appendix B of this book.

  Look for a link on the main page that leads to legal information, state homeschooling law, or the like. The link usually leads to a copy of the law on the website itself. Then you can either read it or print it out. Maybe the link leads to an Adobe Acrobat file (named *something*.pdf), which you can then save to your hard drive for later reading.

- **See the state homeschooling legislation information at the Coalition for Responsible Home Education website:** (www.responsiblehomeschooling.org). Find your state in the table of links and click it to open the information that pertains to you.

  One of the great things about this site is that it links you to your state law as it is actually written. All the laws that pertain to your state are listed by their statute numbers (Nev. Rev. Stat. 392.700 for example, if you live in Nevada). You'll also see an overview of the important parts of your law in the large Homeschool Statute block of text on each state's page.



TIP If you live in Canada or are considering moving there, you may want to check out the provincial laws listing at the Canadian Home Based Learning Resource Page (www.homebasedlearning.ca). Much like the United States, Canadian homeschoolers fall under the homeschool laws governing each individual province.

Counting Out the School Days

Just how long is a school year, anyway? Good question. And the answer (surprise!) varies based on your state of residence. Your state may call a school year 148 days, such as in Iowa, 186 days, such as in Kansas, or somewhere in between. Most of the states hover right around 180 days.

Or you may live in a state such as Ohio, which counts hours of instruction instead of days. That makes life interesting. Where would you be without your handy calculator?



TIP If you look at your state's attendance requirement and your head starts to spin, do not pass Go and do not collect $200. Turn directly to Appendix B and locate a homeschool organization for your state. Talk to someone from your state homeschool association and find out how home educators in your state manage the requirements in real life.

Table 3-1 in this chapter has a rundown of all the states and the required teaching days (or hours) required per year. Where you see *None*, no particular days are specified, but the state may have other regulations that you need to meet. Combining N with a number, as in N/180, means that your state offers a couple different homeschooling legal options. One option has no particular attendance requirement, but under the other alternative, you need to teach so many days.



WARNING These attendance requirements are current as of this book's printing. Your best bet is to locate a copy of your state law and ensure that the attendance rules remain the same — if you find it changes, feel free to alter the requirement in the book. I won't know, but you will, and that's what counts.

TABLE 3-1 Homeschool Attendance Requirements by State

State	*Requirement per Year*	*State*	*Requirement per Year*

Alabama	None	Montana	720 hrs grades 1–3 1,080 hrs grades 4–12
Alaska	None	Nebraska	1,032 hrs elementary 1,080 hrs high school
Arizona	None	Nevada	None
Arkansas	None	New Hampshire	None
California	N/175 days	New Jersey	None
Colorado	N/172 days	New Mexico	180 days
Connecticut	None	New York	180 days
Delaware	None	North Carolina	Nine months
District of Columbia	Same as schools	North Dakota	175 days
Florida	None	Ohio	900 hrs
Georgia	180 days	Oklahoma	180 days
Hawaii	None	Oregon	None
Idaho	None	Pennsylvania	180 days
Illinois	None	Rhode Island	Same as schools
Indiana	180 days	South Carolina	180 days
Iowa	N/148 days	South Dakota	Same as schools
Kansas	186 days	Tennessee	180 days
Kentucky	185 days	Texas	None
Louisiana	180 days	Utah	None
Maine	175 days	Vermont	None
Maryland	None	Virginia	N/180 days
Massachusetts	900 hrs elementary 990 hrs secondary/180 days	Washington	180 days
Michigan	None	West Virginia	180 days
Minnesota	None	Wisconsin	875 hrs
Mississippi	None	Wyoming	None
Missouri	1,000 hrs		

Calling a Truce: Interacting with Your Local School

Most of the homeschool hassles occur at the local school level. Someone

sends out a letter from the superintendent's office requesting all kinds of information that homeschoolers legally have no obligation to provide, and people get all stirred up. One person calls the state board of education, another calls the legislature, and a third calls a journalist. Before you know it, the school system has a huge mess on its hands, all because somebody got a little nosy.

Situations like this happen every single year in school systems around the country. The same school system usually doesn't do it more than once or twice (bad press is not good when you rely on the public for funds and you're seen as oppressing the poor homeschoolers), but it does occur. And it may happen in your community.

Or you may receive a phone call from your local school system demanding information or an interview. Usually the education folks leave the homeschoolers alone because they have plenty to do searching out the true truants. Once in a while, though, you may meet someone on a power trip, or an official who truly doesn't know what's going on, and that's where the misunderstandings begin. If this happens at your house, your best safeguards are well-informed and courteous answers.



WARNING This section is in no way intended to guide you legally. If you need legal advice, your best bet is to contact an education attorney in your area. There is an organization called the Home School Legal Defense Association, but they limit their protection to conservative Christian homeschoolers and a narrow list of issues.

First: Know your law

If you know what you're supposed to do and what you aren't, you're already a long way toward resolving any potential conflict. Many times school officials demand to see curriculum, attendance, report cards, testing results — that they may *or may not* be entitled to by law. In my state, for instance, no one can ask me to show the curriculum I use with my children. (I'm not sure why they'd care anyway, but that's beside the point.) If someone in an official capacity did ask, and I didn't know that person well enough to know why they were asking, I would simply parrot my state regulations: "My state law

requires this, and this, and this."

Do I have any personal reasons for not wanting to show my Greek curriculum? Not really, except that nobody outside other homeschoolers or genuinely interested persons needs to paw through my books. It's not necessary, and it tends to leave fingerprints.

If you're like most homeschoolers around the country, you know your law a heap better than your local education officials do. Some of them simply assume that because they want to see this or that, you'll willingly hand it over — they think you don't know any better. Or they don't know enough not to ask.

Many areas have so many homeschoolers, and they've worked with the homeschoolers for so many years, that the local officials already know the ropes. They're so used to seeing portfolios and paperwork year after year that they glance through it looking for obvious errors, check it off, and move on to the next one. As homeschooling continues to grow, this will hopefully become the case almost everywhere.



TIP Your goal is to become familiar enough with your state law that you know what is permissible and what isn't. Reading through the law (or even a reputable interpretation) may give you enough information to talk about it coherently. Knowing what the law says also helps when you get questions from fellow citizens. Most homeschoolers find themselves hearing all kinds of questions when they meet strangers who realize they teach their children at home. (Some of those questions can be a bit intrusive, and you have no obligation to defend yourself against random nosy or opinionated people.)

Second: Make sure your ducks are in a row

Make sure that anything the state requires is current. If your state requires an intent-to-homeschool letter or form, then you need to file it by the deadline. That way, if anybody asks, it's in. (And keep a photocopy for your own records so you know what's on it and the date that you filed it.)



WARNING A "Gee, we'd really like to see this from you" is *not* a requirement, and you are only required to do what the law says that you're required to do. If your state law says that homeschoolers need to register on request from the state education office, and nobody calls your house to ask you to register, then you don't need to do it. If your state law says that only children removed from a public school need to file form such-and-so, and you began teaching your children from the very start and they've never *seen* the inside of a public school, much less attended one, then that part of the law doesn't apply to you.

Only do what you have to do. This isn't a talent contest or a friendship contest. It's more like a small business filing the required no-I-do-not-sell-tobacco-products-in-my-store form that arrives each year. The government doesn't really care whether the small business sells tobacco products; it simply wants to know whether your shop carries cigarettes.

In much the same way, filing the required intent-to-homeschool letter or form each year enters your family into a database, and this is all your state may want from you. Sending test scores, worksheets, and art projects with the intent-to-homeschool letter tends to upset people. First of all, if your state doesn't ask for this information, *it doesn't want it.* Providing extra pieces of paper that the state officials have no means of tracking does not help. It only confuses people: They want to know why you sent the stuff, they have no place to put it, and it languishes on somebody's desk for weeks because nobody wanted it to begin with and now they can't remember whom to return it to.



WARNING Don't bother creating the portfolio to end all portfolios each year. Your goal is to meet your state requirements that prove you actually teach the kids. Adding more than you need to may raise a red flag — either you're trying to hide something or you need more to do during the day. And basically, when you give the state complete access to everything you do, you allow an invasion of privacy. Why hand over more information than anyone asks of you?

Third: Know your law

I know that I said it before, but it bears repeating here. Knowing your state law gives you both freedom and security. It gives you freedom because you know what you can and cannot do. If the law says teach 180 days, it's not a suggestion. You're free to teach more than 180 days if you want to, but not less.

In much the same way, knowing your law gives you security. When you know you're doing what you're supposed to, it releases much of the stress that comes from uncertainty. If you live in a state that requires a portfolio, for instance, and you know the portfolio days are coming, then you prepare for it by taking snapshots of field trips and projects throughout the year.

Some state laws provide several options for homeschools. If your state provides two or three legal options, choose the one that makes the most sense for your family. In some cases, for example, enrolling with a private umbrella school releases you from some of the paperwork non-enrolled families file each year.



TIP If you live in a state that prides itself on being a pain to work with (based on comments from homeschoolers around the country, a couple of states are actually a pain for homeschoolers), then you may want to enroll in a satellite school program and avoid much of the hassle. In California, you'd want a Private School Satellite Program, or PSP. Enrolling as a satellite school gives you freedom to teach whatever you want, yet you still have someone on the paperwork end of the spectrum that you can turn to. See Chapter 10 for more information about PSPs.

Chapter 4

Pulling Them Out and Starting from Scratch

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Transitioning to homeschool**
- **Working together as a family**
- **Homeschooling from the very beginning**
- **Drawing on strengths and teaching skills that you lack**

So you decided to remove your children from their brick-and-morter schools. Now what? How you begin your adventure together sets the tone for the next few months, at least. Like any new habit, starting your homeschool takes a few weeks to get into the flow.

Starting your homeschool journey with older children is a bit different than jumping into the construction-and-rounded-scissors world of the preschooler or kindergartener. The young ones exude excitement. They're ready to go, ready to learn, ready to explore. Their older siblings — not so much. This chapter gives you suggestions for those starting weeks and months, whether you are beginning with young kids who've never been to school or you're pulling older and more jaded teenagers from their classes to continue their education at home.

Making Those First Days Count

Your older kids are stressed. They've been bullied. They lag behind in schoolwork. They're depressed and ill. When you pull kids out due to any of these situations, they need time to reorient themselves. You may be excited and ready to go with a two-foot high stack of brand-new shiny textbooks, but they need a break!

Making your first days count means more than jumping headfirst into a new

curriculum and schedule before anyone is ready. It means taking the time to build a great foundation that will help you through the rest of your years together. Regardless whether Great-Grandma thinks you should pull them out on Friday and start advanced chemistry on Monday, there's more to removing a child from school than yanking them from the building and setting up school desks at home.

De-stressing the children

Especially if your kids are coming into your homeschool after emotional or physical trauma at school, they need time to chill. Childhood burnout is a real entity, and kids show it in much the same way as adults: exhaustion, indifference, anger, negative attitudes. If you think about the times you've experienced extreme stress or burnout, you know what that feels like. Do you want to jump into new projects? (I know when I face times like these, I'd rather sit and mindlessly eat enough peanut butter cups to count as dinner.)

Homeschoolers have a term for taking time out to de-stress. It's called *deschooling*. Deschooling isn't the same as spending the day staging I-can-eat-more-chocolate-than-you contests. It's not sleeping the day away in an attempt to forget about the school experience you just left. It is, however, a complete change in routine that allows your new students to regain their grasp of their own schedules and their lives.

A deschooling family explores together. You might:

- Visit local parks or hike through some trails. Exercise together is always good.
- Spend hours immersed in the literature of your choice, whether that's a graphic novel, mystery stories, science fiction, or something else. While you're at it, get to know the library and everything it has to offer, from classes to some genre you've never read.
- Watch movies together, especially those movies you always wanted to see but never had the time. This is a great time to explore comedy!
- Practice an old hobby or pick up a new one. You might opt for individual hobbies or one everyone can get their hands into (like small engine repair).
- Spend time in the kitchen cooking, developing recipes, or exploring a new

cuisine. Breadmaking is chemistry, art, and culture all rolled into one neat and tasty package.

As you can see, these are all learning activities. They are *not*, however, academic subjects per se. You can still learn while allowing the children time to relax, catch their breath, and remember who they are.



TIP Be gentle with yourselves during the transition. De-stressing from a traumatic educational experience could require several months, or more, of low-key family engagement time before the student feels like she can face formal learning again. If you end a school year intending to homeschool, three of those months occur over summer vacation, but it still may not be enough time for a middle or high schooler to feel refreshed and ready to go again.

Easing into coursework

When you do begin coursework, especially if you plan to use textbooks for your subjects, you may want to slowly work your way into a full day. (Remember that two-foot-high stack of textbooks mentioned earlier? I guarantee that all your students won't approach that stack with as much glee as you do.) Going from an easy, relaxed day to all-textbooks-all-the-time is jarring at best, and you may find that it brings out the beast in your little beauties.

You have all year to get this material into the kids. And really … do we need to do spelling Every Single Week? (I admit it — I'm a spelling class rebel.) Looking at your 36-week calendar, or however long you have until the end of the year if you're starting after a deschooling period, what strikes you as most important? What do you think would be the kids' favorite subject?

With those answers in mind, start to think out your schedule. What if you started with their favorite subject first? (Radical, I know.) Do that subject only for a few days. Then, maybe on Thursday, introduce another class and do two classes for the remaining days of that week. First week: done! The next week, you add a third subject on Monday, and if you think they're ready, a fourth on Wednesday. If not, go all week with three subjects. No one will die. No one. Not one person will swoon to the floor, never to move again, if

the kids only experience three subjects by the end of week two.

I know you want to do it all right this second — I did too, when I started. Heck, I still want to do it all every single August. I love the start of the school year! Unfortunately, I love it more than any of my kids ever did. I learned to temper my overwhelming enthusiasm after looking into very glazed eyes the the first week of school.



TIP If it really, really bothers you that you aren't doing a full day of school, then *you* continue with the school day. Wait — hear me out. Finish your two or three or four subjects for the day, send the kiddos off to relax or play or read, and you can keep going. Take out an art book and work on your drawing skills. Write a diary entry, a short story, or a letter. Dig out that dusty copy of Euclid and begin working through his proofs. Learn to write shorthand. Not only will you feel like you completed a full school day, but you'll pick up a new skill along the way that you can introduce to the children at some later time. Keeping your mind sharp is just as important as helping your kids with theirs. Add a cup of your favorite coffee or tea and this becomes Me Time.

Rebuilding Your Family Unit

Extreme stress pulls at a family's seams. It tugs holes in the fabric you created when you gathered your little ones around you and taught them how to face the world together. You may find that you need to spend some time refashioning your family fashion fabric back into that sleek, gorgeous group that you used to be, before whatever stress happened that caused you to think about homeschooling in the first place.

Setting your schedule

Some families work best with a solid, unwavering schedule. Up at 7:30, breakfast, showers, math, language arts, lunch, reading, science, social studies, art, play time. Other families prefer a loose flow to their day: They get up whenever, have a late (or early) breakfast, and start school when everyone is gathered together. Or perhaps they start with the early bird and work more children into the day as they rise and begin to move.

Your family's schedule will be your own. It may look like one of these. It probably won't. I know that our schedule falls somewhere between the two, and yours may too. The important thing isn't that you follow someone's schedule. The important thing is that you discover and follow your own schedule — the schedule that fits your family the best.

Building your schedule works well with a little family input, especially if your children are old enough to hold opinons (and what children aren't?). If you can put together a routine or daily task list that takes everyone's preferences into account, your house will be filled with much happier campers.



I have a verified night owl masquerading as a high schooler. He would much rather stay up until 2 a.m. than rise at 7 a.m. When we talked about his high school schedule, he was adamant: absolutely no French first thing in the morning. Preferably, no French before lunch. On the other hand, he happily wolfs down breakfast, grabs a very large biology-themed mug filled with hot tea or coffee, and then trots back to his room to do Algebra 2 first thing in the morning. Whose kid wants to do math first? Apparently, mine.

Working together

One of the joys of homeschooling is the ability to work together on … well, almost everything. It's fun to snuggle on the sofa and listen to someone read from this week's book. If you like to cook, many hands together put dinner on the table in less time — even if it does create a mountain of mess that has to be cleaned later.

Some subjects lend themselves to cooperative effort. Poetry reading, art, some science experiments, reading aloud, music, and learning about the world in social studies can be tackled as a family group. (You could also tie everything together in a unit study. Read about them in Chapter 15.)

Outside of school hours, bringing everybody into family projects like bush trimming and weeding, painting the garage, or redecorating the living room (okay … which one of you wanted to paint all the walls purple and black?) helps to bring the family together. It's a huge sigh of relief and

accomplishment when you all stand together and look at a job all finished and well done — even if you did pull up all my raspberry bushes by mistake. Not that I'm pointing fingers at anyone.

Dad's or Mom's role in your homeschool

Homeschooling is a whole-family adventure. It doesn't fit neatly into a Monday-through-Friday-from-8 a.m.-to-3:30 p.m. routine; instead, it becomes more of a lifestyle. Life itself becomes your classroom, and your children learn as they walk through it with you.

Much of what you teach them fits nowhere into your planning book: values, priorities, likes and dislikes — yet it's learning, all the same. If they weren't learning it from you, they'd certainly learn it from someone else. Aren't you glad they learn it from you?

In much the same way, homeschooling involves more than the primary teaching parent. It incorporates everyone in the household, and sometimes the extended family as well — parents, siblings, and maybe even grandparents or cousins, depending on your family structure. Pulling everybody together and getting it all done takes a bit of ingenuity, but the result is a family that travels together in one direction.

Generally, one parent takes the position as primary homeschool instructor or learning guide. Usually Mom fills that role, but more and more dads are stepping up to the homeschool plate and teaching their children at home. If you foresee it working best for you if Dad teaches the classes, then give it a try. Working with your children each day gives you a relationship that few men enjoy, and the homeschool dads I've talked to absolutely love what they do and wouldn't want it any other way.

Sometimes the parent who doesn't keep up with the lesson book or explain the math problems feels left out of the educational experience. Often these parents think they're unqualified to make schooling decisions because they don't do it every year and letting their partners do it is easier. However, they miss much of the excitement and learning that goes on when they divorce themselves from the day-to-day homeschooling flow.

Incorporating the non-teaching parent as often as possible can help. Although holding math class until Dad gets home from work may not be the most inclusive (or stress free) move you could make, you may schedule a school

field trip to the nearest museum on a Saturday or the working parent's day off so that you can all go together. That way, you take advantage of both parents' knowledge as you tour the exhibits. If you know science inside and out, but your partner's specialty is history, you cover both subjects in depth during a trip, which increases the trip's usefulness for all.



TIP Here are some other ideas to involve the parent who doesn't carry the primary teaching load:

- **Schedule vacation trips that involve some educational content.** This allows both parents to help with the learning, explain what the children see, and generally enjoy the experience.
- **Encourage the non-teaching parent to share what he knows about a subject dear to his heart.** If kites truly jazz him, then spend some time looking at kites, why they fly, and how they fly. You may even make a kite or two together from plans you can find at the library and spend an off-work day flying. One or two evenings a week for an extended period of time covers much ground — especially when the parent teaches what he loves.
- **Set aside an evening a week to pursue a topic you've always wanted to cover as a family, and make it part of your school time.** If you want to dive into a subject, such as gourmet cooking or amateur radio, you'll find it's much more fun when it's a whole-family adventure. And with a pastime, such as cooking, you automatically have more hands to help with cleanup when you schedule a family affair. Because parents like to learn too, this gives Mom something to look forward to after a day at the office.
- **Change your weekly school schedule once in a while to incorporate both parents.** Although it may sound kind of strange, you can schedule a Saturday School and then take a day off the next week. Holding Saturday School once a month or so keeps the nonprimary teacher in the loop with everything you teach and gives the children the benefit of working with both parents every now and then.
- **Incorporate a sharing time into your routine.** Remember "Show and Tell," when kindergarteners and first graders drag their favorite items to

school — hopefully to bring them home again without losing them in the meantime — to share with their classmates? You can do the same thing at home by setting aside some time to share each child's progress with the parent who doesn't usually teach each day. What was the neatest picture your youngest made this week? Which new fact astounded your oldest? These topics make great dinner conversation as well as after-dinner presentation time. Children love to show their progress to the people they care for the most.



WARNING Regardless which parent primarily homeschools, unless you're willing to make some additional personal-time sacrifices and perhaps follow rather unique schooling hours, one parent needs to be available during the day hours for homeschooling to be effective. If you have the freedom to take your children to work with you, that's great — but if not, and they're too young to stay home and work on their own, then you need to be at home each day with them. Chapter 2 discusses special situations that require creative homeschooling solutions.

Starting from the Very Beginning

One day you look into your 4-year-old's dewy eyes and realize there's no way you can send this baby, the delight of your life, into a cold, hard building filled with strangers. Dearest parent, you have just made the first steps toward deciding to homeschool your offspring. If you continue along this path, you will be up to your eyeballs in coloring pages and math manipulatives all too soon.

If that does happen, congratulations! When you begin with the little ones, it's not the same as pulling them from school after three or five years of public or private education. You get to start from the start and begin from the beginning. When they learn to read it's because you taught them that skill, or because they figured it out on their own before you got to it (a relatively rare occurrence, but it does happen). You get to see the delight in your child's eyes the first time he realizes that two candies plus two candies equals four candies in his mouth. Priceless. Chapter 6 gives you the subject-by-subject lowdown

of the elementary school years.

Teaching in small blocks

When you begin with littles, use small chunks of learning time. Ten or 15 minutes at a time is plenty. Ten minutes of playing with math blocks every day for a week is decidedly better than attempting to teach math to a young learner once each week for 50 minutes. Both of you will end up in tears.

Sometimes one activity can work for several things. Did you locate a great drawing of springtime or autumn for coloring? You can talk about the seasons, the flowers, the weather, and clothing changes. Taking it a bit further, you can use that page to talk about color selections, primary colors, secondary colors, and the various colors of the sky. All kinds of subject matter can fit into that one coloring page.



REMEMBER Remember that play is part of the package. Children learn through play. A good playtime will lead them to exercise and process what they've been learning at the same time. When you're finished with your coloring page and your counting blocks, your read-alouds and your letter formation, send the child to play. Young learners should spend most of their waking hours playing rather than schooling. It helps their imagination and their creativity, and you'll see the benefits of that during schooltime.

Using the objects you own

Homeschooling from the beginning doesn't have to break the bank. Want a puppet to help you tell a story? A favorite stuffed animal works just fine. Need objects to demonstrate how to count, add, or subtract? Anything you have in quantity will work: buttons, pennies, peanuts, or even your child's massive collection of little rubber ducks.

If you look around your house you probably have almost everything you need to begin homeschooling. You probably have read-aloud books; plenty of toys you can count, categorize, and use as drawing models; and scissors, tape, and construction paper and blank paper for creations. One of the biggest temptations in homeschooling is to fill the house with all the things you could possibly ever need to homeschool with. Trust me, that will happen whether

you want it to or not, if you follow homeschooling from pre-K or kindergarten all the way through high school. (My second grader needs access to a microscope? Of course I have a microscope! I've already graduated two from high school.) Chapter 21 talks about other ways to keep the costs under control.

Drawing on Your Strengths and Filling in the Gaps

Maybe you can do it all. Maybe you happen to have advanced degrees in mathematics, English, engineering, and chemistry. (If you do, I need your phone number because I could use some of your expertise.) Does that sound ludicrous? By the time we're old enough to juggle life, work, and family, plus get dinner on the table most nights, we know to the depths of our soul that nobody can do it all. I can't do it all, and you probably can't either.

Speaking to your strengths

You do, however, have some pretty great strengths. Maybe you play soccer well, exhibit a flair for flower arranging, or balance the family's financial books effortlessly. These abilities trace back to specific skills: in this case, an athletic ability, design skill, and prowess with numbers.

These are the things that you can pass on to your children. Although they may not be born with extreme athletic ability, you know enough about soccer (and probably some other team sports) to get them started in the right direction. You know that regularly moving your body for a period of time makes you feel better and enhances your general health. These are tidbits of knowledge that you share, and you don't need a textbook to do it. To you, this probably qualifies as part of life, but in the school setting they call this "education."

And if something is important enough to you that you spend the time to excel at it, you probably want your children to at least have a nodding acquaintance with the skills involved. Your child can learn to balance a checkbook and follow the stock market without needing to declare finance as a college major; there's a big difference between developing a life skill and a vocation. (Some skills and talents may develop into that vocational specialty, but they don't have to.)



TIP Sometimes it's those things you learned the hard way that you want to pass on the most — I learned to cook from my college roommates, so I make a concentrated effort to teach my children nutrition, meal planning, and basic cooking skills. On the other hand, my mother taught me to make pies, so that's important for me to pass along as well.

Teaching them what you don't know

What? You don't specialize in calculus functions and genetics? Let me tell you a secret: neither do I. Yet these are subjects I may want to cover, especially when my children reach high school. Thankfully, resources are available outside of running to the library and cramming for the calculus course that I *might* need to teach four or more years down the road.

A couple of my available resources live and breathe — maybe yours do, too. Many non-teaching homeschool parents who opt out of daily tutorial time with the children feel like they can't relate to elementary subjects, such as beginning addition and grammar. The closer you get to high-school-level courses, however, the more comfortable adult members of your family and adult friends may feel with sharing what they know with your soon-to-be-in-high-school children. They then function as some of your most valuable resources, as they help by teaching what they know (which, in turn, keeps you out of the library till the wee hours of the morning researching a subject about which you have no clue).

Use the people and organizations around you to fill in the gaps that you perceive in your own knowledge. The help may be as simple as a self-teaching textbook that guides your learner into the knowledge he needs, or it may mean locating a personal tutor. Here are a few ideas to get you started. Hopefully they'll jump-start your thinker and point you in the right direction:

- **Turn to local athletic groups such as the YMCA or parks department for courses.** These organizations teach tennis, swimming, fencing, basketball, aerobics, and a host of other sports and athletic skills.
- **Engage a volunteer homeschool parent who specializes in what you don't.** Maybe that mom across the city majored in biology, exactly the subject that you need for your ninth grader. Give her a call.

- **Trade skills and accomplishments.** Although your homeschool friend feels confident teaching advanced grammar, you love to teach various needlework techniques. If you need an English tutor and your friend wants someone to teach a home economics class, a trade is in order. Meet at one person's house and trade children for an hour or so until all the children learn the skills they lack.



COPING WITH HELP THAT YOU DON'T THINK YOU NEED

We all come up against it sometime: that well meaning yet annoying help from those around us. Generally, it comes from family members indoctrinated into the educational scene, such as your sister the public school teacher or your father the assistant superintendent. Once in a while, you hear the horror stories that come from Aunt Mathilde who just loves to pass along anything gory, and bizarre homeschool stories top her favorites list.

Helpful family members and neighbors are enough to drive you crazy, especially when they're helpful in that nonhelpful sort of way. Demeaning your choice to homeschool and privately telling your children that their parents are wrong does *not* classify as helpful. This only places a wedge between parents and the antagonistic adult.

Your best bet is to quietly stand your ground and let time speak for itself. Anytime you walk outside of someone's frame of reference, you're bound to hear interesting comments from people. The bottom line is that this is your child and your child's education, which makes it your prerogative if you want to teach them at home. As your child makes progress, others will see it. It may take several years, but eventually they have to face the truth in front of them: Your child is learning, and she does it outside a traditional classroom setting.

Be patient with family members who truly try to be helpful but consistently miss the mark. They want to support you but don't know exactly how. In this case, sometimes inviting them over to watch a day or two of your school routine helps to show them what you really do — as well as what you *don't* do — it may even show them how they can truly be of assistance. Sitting with your child and listening to him read aloud, acting as an extra pair of hands during that trip to the zoo, or showing your child how to work with wood, paint a picture, or shoot a bow all qualify as helpful assistance.

Your goal is to redirect the interested adult to projects or tasks that actually add to your learning experience. Many times you mention a specific skill, such as gardening, only to hear "Why in the world would he want to learn that?" At this point, you want to show how gardening fits into your overall school plan. (Gardening can be a science topic, and its pursuit can show a child the skills that are needed to begin and

complete a project.) At the same time, you assure this person that they're the perfect person for it. Because they are! If you find someone who wants to help you and offers skills that you don't have, it saves you time and effort to incorporate them. It also builds relationships and memories between your children and the adults in your lives.

- **Hire a tutor.** Many former teachers willingly tutor in their special areas, no matter where you live. Ask through the grapevine or check your community Facebook groups to find a local tutor.
- **Delve into a stack of library books.** If you want to learn a new skill, such as photography, take a trip to the library and pore over the books. A good local library usually contains enough resources to give you a good start.
- **Take a class.** Community colleges, studios, and private teachers offer courses in art and music if you want to pursue subjects such as these in your homeschool but feel a definite lack of talent coursing through your veins. Sign up for one and re-teach your student at home, or (especially in the case of music lessons) enroll your child and see how it goes.
- **Call a family member.** Maybe your brother or sister-in-law makes a living in the very subject you need and would be willing to tutor their niece or nephew in exchange for dinner once a week. You work out the arrangements however you like, but I know my brother and sister-in-law would *definitely* show up for hamburgers or chili, even if I asked them to help with our studies. (They may think twice about Tofu Helper, however.)

Part 2

Tackling Kids of Any Age

IN THIS PART …

Balance babies and toddlers as you teach the older children. If your toddler-now-preschooler is ready for some instruction, you can introduce some basics while instructing everyone else.

Educate your elementary students with flair. Locate some of the curricula that works well with younger students, whether you need language arts, math, or science.

Work with your middle schooler or junior-high student. If you're just starting out with a child who's not quite reached high school, this might be the perfect time to begin.

Discover the joys of teaching high schoolers, whether you start here as a new homeschooler or grow your way here after 11 or 12 years of home education. Plan your courses, complete the transcript, and add up all those credits.

Learn about life after high school and the choices available to homeschool graduates. Trade and vocational schools, a career in the military, and college or university life are all within the reach of homeschooled students.

Chapter 5

Teaching Your Toddler While You Change Your Baby

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Getting through these precious but tiring years**
- **Using quiet time to everyone's benefit**
- **Taking turns with your toddler**
- **Navigating through preschool**

Congratulations! Your home contains a new bundle of joy, and now you're trying to figure out how to educate the rest of your happy brood while taking care of the almost endless needs of the new baby. You'll enter the preschool stage soon.

Look to this chapter for hints, tips, and suggestions for making it through this tiring time of your life. This section gives you ideas for merging baby duties with the need for teaching the older children who grace your life. After you wean your little one from the bottle and diapers, also check here for preschool pointers that help you have a good time with your child and learn too.



TIP Hang in there! Although the view into your living room picture window may look bleak now (actually, it probably looks more exhausting than anything), this stage does end. You will regain your energy. They do grow up to fix their own peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches, and they even learn to use table knives safely.

Juggling Primers, Preschoolers, and Diapers

You're home from the hospital, the bambino never sleeps more than one hour at a time, and you already wish the little critter could walk. Which parent normally takes charge of the children during school time is pretty irrelevant at this point: Everybody's tired when a new baby comes to stay, and life goes on hold for awhile.

When diapers and feedings fill your life, it seems like one more thing will send you over the edge. Yet your older children need to put in a "good" school day; they need time and energy, too. You can make homeschooling work with an infant without earning your Super-Driven Parent of the Year Award or purchasing a one-way ticket to the funny farm.

Unfortunately, a new child generally doesn't choose the most convenient time to announce its arrival. If you plan to produce a child during the off-school summer months, you're dreaming or you have better planning skills than I ever did. So far, I've managed the oh-no-we're-halfway-into-fall child and the oops-it's-not-time-for-spring-vacation-what-do-we-do-now baby.



TIP Although I can't do anything about the physical toll a new baby takes, these suggestions for homeschooling survival may make your way a bit easier:

- **Turn baby care time into home economics class for an older child.** Diapering, feeding, cooing, and cuddling are all considered a part of Child Development class in the public high schools. Take advantage of your homegrown opportunity to teach the basics to your other children. Giving an older child — one who is ready for such responsibility — the baby to care for one morning a week after a period of solid training frees you for teaching, paperwork, or a long hot bath. And it gives the older sibling the training most of us wish we'd had before we found ourselves caring for our own little drooling bundles of love.
- **Take advantage of natural down times.** You have to feed the baby on and off throughout the day anyway. Babies don't do well with cereal for breakfast and nothing to eat until that cheeseburger for lunch. Because feeding becomes part of your daily routine, take advantage of it! While you're feeding, listen to emerging readers strut their stuff, pile onto the

bed together for an oral history lesson, ask an older child to read the next chapter of that book that you're working through together, or practice the foreign language you've been learning as a family. "I kiss my pig on the mouth" ("J'embrasse mon couchon sur la bouche!") may sound kind of strange in French, but if your youngsters have the vocabulary for sentences like that, such pronouncements are guaranteed to keep their interest while you feed the baby.

- **Put everybody under three feet tall down for a nap.** Then take that time to work with the older children on the subjects that require one-on-one attention or pull out the science equipment marked *Use Caution* or *Not For Use By Children Under X Years of Age* and conduct the experiments that you wanted to do for the past two months.
- **Institute quiet time for the entire household.** You don't *have* to jump up from the kitchen table and rush back to the schoolroom or computer. Sometimes, marking that hour or two after lunch as quiet time puts a little sanity back into your day. Put the tiniest family member down for a nap and distribute books to everybody who is both too old and too young to take a nap — when they reach college age, they'll appreciate naptime once again. You're allowed to lie down with a book, too! After everyone catches some well-deserved rest, *then* continue with your day. You may even find that your littlest ones (or you) face the rest of the afternoon with a better attitude.



TIP A baby's arrival is a great time to take a vacation from school. One of the wonderful things about home education is that you can take a vacation when you need it rather than when the calendar says to take a break.

Although your neighbors may not be doing it, life still continues if you take a month or two off in February — or whenever your bundle arrives at your house. Then teach through the summer days to make up for "lost" time. Even if your house lacks air conditioning, learning outside under the trees creates memories that your students keep alive forever. They treasure the memories or laugh over them — depending whether they recall the warm breeze flowing over them as they read *Lorna Doone* aloud or the ant hill they

mistakenly sat on.

You can also plan ahead and take two days off through the winter holidays instead of two weeks. That gives you eight days to play with when you need to take time off later. Drop those days into your planning schedule when you suddenly need time off or incorporate them into the infant arrival period. Those eight days give you almost two "free" weeks that you don't have to make up for later because the children already did the work.

Surviving Life with a Toddler

After a couple years, your "new arrival" is no longer quite so new. He looks a little tarnished, in fact, from the bruises and dings sustained from running through the house at full speed and occasionally into a wall or piece of furniture. (Ouch! That one hurt.) But few things are more lovable than a toddler's face. So you grab him and kiss all those boo-boos away as you wonder how in the world you're supposed to teach with this bundle of energy in tow. Not quite old enough for preschool stuff, toddlers spend most of their time getting into things and trying to elicit yet another "No" from the overseeing parental unit. Toddlerhood ranges from just walking through the terrible twos.

Grab some hot chocolate, take a deep breath, and hold on for the ride. Although the toddler years aren't the time to begin that far-reaching toothpick project you promised to your 8-year-old child, you can still keep enough hold on your schedule and your sanity to make it through the year and know that everyone came close to meeting their educational goals. Who knows? You may even surpass your wildest expectations.

Teaching with a toddler

Teaching a group of other children (or even one or two) with a toddler in the mix guarantees some interesting days for the whole group, but it can be done. Many homeschooling families survive toddlerhood each time and even go on to teach that youngest person at home when she becomes ready.



REMEMBER Forget the super-parent mentality. This may come as a shock — or a

huge stress reliever, depending on your current state of mind — but with young children in the house, you can't do it all. Even if you *could* do it all before the youngster made his appearance on the scene, little ones require too much time, effort, and love to allow you to homeschool, lead Girl Scouts, become the head volunteer at the Humane Society, *and* provide a four-course home-cooked meal every night. Enjoy the toddler years while you have them. The Humane Society will still be there next year, and I bet they'd love a new volunteer.



TIP Whew! That much said, here are some ideas to streamline your life while you live with a toddler:

- **Use videos for those times when you must have 24½ uninterrupted minutes with an older child.** If your toddler loves *Blue's Clues* or *Winnie the Pooh,* those are the videos to keep back from general family usage for the sacred teaching hour. Pop one of the most-loved videos into the player and work with the other children to the sound of the *Winnie the Pooh* theme song.
- **Keep a stash of special toys in your school area.** Maintaining a small crate of "school time only" toddler toys gives your little person something to play with that he doesn't generally have in his hands. When my kids were toddlers, I rotated toys every couple of months; with a box on the floor and a box in the closet, the kids thought they got "new" toys quite often.
- **Use naptime to its fullest.** Most toddlers still need to nap. If you resist the urge to crash along with her, the toddler naptime can function as your main teaching time with the other children. You can get a good one-on-one instruction period into each day if you concentrate on teaching new skills while the toddler happily snoozes. Then, when your recharged ball of energy reenters the scene, you can work on memorization skills, reading time, or other tasks that require less interactive attention.
- **Play "pass the toddler."** This may make your school days longer, but if everybody takes a turn playing with the toddler until naptime, you can work with the students who are left. Taking turns gives your other

children a break from school time, and it keeps the toddler occupied.

- **Hold and cuddle if you have a lovey dove.** Some babies and toddlers love to be cuddled. Nothing says you can't hold your toddler on your lap while you teach. A little bounce once in a while and a nice warm hug may be enough to keep them occupied as they watch the siblings do their thing from the comfort of a parent's arms.
- **Go to bed early once in a while.** No one will report you to the Stay Up Late Police if you turn in at 8:30 every now and then. Putting the toddler to bed and leaving the other children in the care of Parent Number Two makes total sense if you're exhausted or simply need an hour or two by yourself.

Teaching your toddler

If you have more than one child, you know how much younger siblings pick up from their older counterparts. Much of it, thankfully, is even positive! Wonder what you can teach your first toddling homeschooler? You're probably doing just fine already.

Toddlers learn best as they bounce around their world. Exploring life, getting into the mud after a rain, hiding stuffed animals in your best plants, and crashing for a nap after a hard morning's play — these are the things toddlers do best. They play hard, learn a great deal, and generally sleep pretty well (as long as you're willing to scoot over in your bed in the wee morning hours once in a while).

Incorporating your toddler into your day provides some of the best pre-homeschooling training she could receive. Talking to a little person increases her vocabulary when she's ready to use it. Letting a toddler watch you spread peanut butter onto crackers or pour the daily apple juice shows him how the world works. You teach things like beginning cause and effect (what happens to the empty glass when we tip the apple juice jar over it?) simply by living through your day.



TIP Here are some simple ways to incorporate learning into your toddler's day:

- **Announce the colors of clothing and objects as you come across them.** Not too many months will pass before your toddler knows the difference between the red jacket and the blue one.
- **Talk about clothing as you dress your toddler.** Snapping, tying, buttoning, and Velcro may be old hat to you, but to your toddler it's a whole new fastener-filled world out there.
- **Listen to different styles of music and talk about them with your toddler.** While discussing musical motifs is probably more than your toddler has in mind, saying something like "Let's listen to some Beethoven," "Want to hear some Russian folk music?" or "How about some Fleetwood Mac?" fits right into the flow of things.
- **Talk about the people who come to your house regularly.** "Here's the mail carrier!" not only identifies that person who brings such cool stuff on a daily basis, but it also gives your toddler language that helps her identify that part of her day. By the time my children were preschoolers, they could identify UPS, FedEx, DHL, and U.S. Postal carriers on sight simply because they came to our house nearly every day.
- **If you know a second language, begin identifying objects in both languages.** The younger a child learns a second (or third) language, the easier it is for her to assimilate that tongue. Of course, teaching a toddler or preschooler a second language guarantees some interesting sentences because young children use whichever word they think of first regardless of the language it comes from.

Covering the Preschool Basics

Your darling finally made it to the preschool stage. You've chosen your curriculum (see Chapters 10 through 19 for an overview of the options), painted the corner that you plan to use as a schooling area, and selected an assortment of pencils and crayons for the school adventure. Before you launch the educational adventure, step back a minute and look at your 4-year-old child again. Preschoolers barely sit through an afternoon snack without wiggling. You can't expect to plant that little body that wants to move so much. Pack up the curriculum, periodically dust your corner, and enjoy your child right now.



REMEMBER Preschoolers explore their world, and they spend an amazing amount of energy doing so. They watch bugs, dig in the dirt, and play dress-up. They create imaginative scenarios with stuffed animals and then act out their adventures. Because every child is different, individual preschoolers won't hit all the major milestones at the same time. One 3-year-old child counts to three, for example, while another may count to ten. Counting to number three is actually the three-year developmental milestone according to speech therapists. If your child counts past three, all the better! But don't stress if your preschooler seems to take her time about mastering a few things. Preschoolers relish their newfound individuality, and they tend to do things in their own time.

Teaching with a preschooler

Teaching with a preschooler around isn't as hard a task as it sounds. Although your little person may insist on individualized attention once in a while, most 3- to 5-year-old children can amuse themselves for a while if they have to. A school time box with old clothes for dress-up time, some paper and crayons, a picture book, and a few favorite toys may be all you need to keep your preschooler happy while you work with the rest of the crew.



AT OUR HOUSE At our house, the preschooler decided that she needed to be in school, too. So, we took a little desk and stocked it with primary puzzles, pencils, crayons, paper, simple dot-to-dot pages, and some felt paper dolls. While I worked with her older brother, she sat at her desk doing her "very important schoolwork." When she decided she was finished for the day, she wandered off to play with her toys. Who knows? It may work that way for you, too.

Teaching your preschooler

With individuality and exploration in mind, here are some ideas for introducing learning into your post-toddler's world. Your child may not enjoy doing all these things. Your best bet is to introduce a wide variety of activities

and see what they like. Incorporate as many of the toddler ideas from the previous section as you think your preschooler would enjoy. Music, for instance, is ageless, and a preschooler enjoys music as much as, if not more than, a toddler does.

While you don't want or need to create a structured learning environment for a preschooler, the child's energy level usually demands that you do *something* or risk finding her outside one morning jumping on all the plants in your flowerbed "just to see what they would do." A preschooler's creativity and curiosity will win out, whether you offer anything in the way of education or not. A large part of education is exposure to a wide range of experiences; offering these at the preschool level gives your little one something to do at the same time that it enlarges her horizons.

Introducing advanced concepts at too early an age does nothing but stress you and your preschooler. Instead, spend your days playing, exploring your world, and enjoying preschooler-hood. There will be plenty of time later to memorize the numbers to 100 or the color theory chart. Right now, enjoy your 3- or 4-year-old.



Observing what your preschooler doesn't like to do sometimes gives you more information than noting what he does enjoy. Watching one of my children shy away from play dough, ice cream, papier-mâché, and anything slimy told me that I had a *tactically defensive* child on my hands — a youngster who couldn't physically or emotionally handle a particular range of textures or tastes.

Here are some ideas for preschool learning. For the most part, choose the messiness level that you can tolerate and go from there. If the thought of finger paint covering your kitchen floor and your preschooler makes you cringe, try another activity altogether. If the thought only makes you cringe a little, how about finger painting with vanilla pudding? It doesn't stain quite as much. Whipped cream works, too, and while it's stickier than vanilla pudding, it hoses off nicely.



TIP To liven your day:

- **Read aloud.** Preschoolers generally love to hear stories, and this is the perfect time to introduce them to poetry, stories, folk and fairy tales from various cultures, and family history. For the most part, younger preschoolers require shorter stories, while a 4- to 5-year-old child may sit through a folk tale or two at one sitting. If you happen to have an older reader at your house, your elementary age child may enjoy reading to the toddler, and it gives them some special time together.
- **Finger paint with your preschooler.** Look for finger paint at educational stores, discount warehouses, or the local toy store. Special finger paint paper works the best, but isn't absolutely necessary if you aren't raising a budding Rembrandt. One box of finger paint paper took me through two preschoolers and I still had some left long after finger painting season.

RELAX! SHE'S 3 YEARS OLD!

You hear the horror stories of parents enrolling their children in "academically acceptable" preschools in the nation's most competitive educational districts — sometimes even before the baby's birth! Unfortunately, some of that competitive spirit sometimes rubs off on the homeschooling community as well.

Before you run out to purchase "Teach Your Baby Fifteen Languages Before He's Two" CDs, stop, take a deep breath, and mentally count the years until your preschooler reaches age 18. Write that number down and post it at the top of your lesson plan book if you need to. You have that many years to get the basics into them.

Very few children already know astrophysics before entering college. *Very* few. However, most of them know how to read and compute. Some even know the basics of calculus. Some, but not all.

During the preschool years, the most important thing that you can do is teach the child how to learn for herself. And that skill comes through — you guessed it — play. Preschoolers pretend and act out what they know in their world. They experiment with science: What happens when you throw a ball at the ceiling?

How about letting go of a raw egg as the dog passes underneath? Would the result be different if you let go of the egg without the dog there to catch it? (I'm not advocating these things, mind you. Those who live with preschoolers know that this is how the little guys *think*.) And this too develops scientific thought, regardless of the mess.

Memorizing childhood songs helps preschoolers develop memory skills. And they're much more likely to memorize *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* than the periodic table of elements. You achieve the same skill: memorization. But there are two ways to go about it. You can choose the fun way or the pulling-teeth way. Laughing through *Twinkle, Twinkle* or *John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt* gets you much farther with your preschooler than "Okay. Let's try it again: antimony, arsenic, aluminum, …"

And with a whole arsenal of fun things in their preschool repertoire, you'll be classified as the greatest dad/mom ever by your little one. What more could you want?

- **Take walks outside and explore the world.** Go outside. Look at bugs and identify them for your child. Talk about the flowers, trees, grass, cement, and sidewalks — basically anything and everything that you see is enough to spark a conversation. Big city skyscrapers are just as exciting to a 5-year-old child as the wide open spaces of farmland, and vice versa. You can use the environment to increase your child's vocabulary simply by talking about what you see.
- **Wander out into the weather if your preschooler enjoys it and if you dare.** To most 4-year-olds, spring showers occur simply for entertainment. Put on your weather wraps and take a short walk in the rain. Smell the rain-soaked air and talk about what you feel, smell, and see; go outside, catch snowflakes on your mittens, and show your child how different each flake appears; snuggle up a safe distance from the window and watch a thunderstorm. Although going outside in a thunderstorm probably isn't safe, you and your preschooler can still enjoy the show from inside.
- **Practice drawing circles, pictures, letters, and numbers if your child shows interest.** Some preschoolers think that learning to write their name is very important. Others could care less. Go with the flow — you still have several years to make sure they've got their numbers and letters down.
- **Complete puzzles.** Puzzles teach children to look at the way parts fit into a whole and they exercise a child's thinking cap. Purchasing and teaching your child to complete a few board puzzles helps her learn about project completion and strategic thinking, as well.



TIP If you have friends who recently went through the preschooler stage for the last time, they may have a few puzzles stored away in a closet and may be willing to donate them to the cause.

Chapter 6

Covering the Elementary Years

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Teaching elementary reading**
- **Exploring with math**
- **Social studies options**
- **Sniffing out science**
- **Teaching at the right time**

Crayons, paper, glue, pencils, and Cheerios fill your days. You spend more time than you thought imaginable looking at ladybugs and subtracting with chocolate chips. (Wait! Don't eat it yet. The math problem isn't finished!) You must homeschool an elementary student.

Elementary students span such a wide range of processing, skills, and interests that categorizing them is hard. Some get a concept and take off, while others require slow and steady tutoring to get them over the humps. Keeping a watchful eye on your learner steers you past many a pitfall. When you know what your child is learning and how she takes in information, an occasional lack of understanding doesn't stymie you because you see it coming.

Setting Out with Elementary Students

Students fill their elementary years with all kinds of learning. This is when your child learns the basics of living and builds the foundation of his education. He learns to make toast, read a book, multiply, and open a can of ravioli (skills we all need, right?).

A solid elementary foundation means that as your little one grows, he should tackle the upper grades with ease. Beginning with basic math, reading, history, science, and social studies, and adding on any subjects that you want

your child to learn (as well as those that your state law might require), you guide your learner into an impressive body of knowledge by the time he finishes sixth grade. Even you may be surprised at how much he knows!

Between the ages of 5 and 12, children amass an amazing amount of knowledge about all sorts of things. (Of course, some of it we wish they *didn't* pick up so readily, but who's counting?) This is the time to introduce your child to all kinds of information, be it historical, scientific, mathematical, or whatever.

Because children often learn best by doing, hands-on experiences provide the most understanding. You want to teach your child about inclines for math or science? Grab a handful of small race cars and a sheet of cardboard or a large book, and practice racing the cars down the surface when it's held at an angle or propped against something else to create a slope. Later, your child may forget what inclines are *called,* but she won't forget what they *do*. (Chapter 29 talks more about learning with toys and games.)

These are the cut-and-paste years when children make a dizzying number of things from construction paper. They learn to tie their shoes, and they happily reset the combination lock on your briefcase. Oops! That one wasn't quite on the list. Congratulations anyway.

Exploration also fills the elementary years. From the backyard to the neighborhood corner, the world provides a wealth of objects to explore. Mayflies or June bugs on the window become a reason for excitement with younger children, while older ones delight in turtles and frogs. Encouraging these interests and the excitement of discovery is one of the most important things that you do as a homeschooler. Sometimes encouragement is as simple as pointing out half-hidden denizens of the wild on a walk or steeling yourself when your 11-year-old proudly drags home a garter snake for you to appreciate. (Yes, honey. It's lovely. It really is. Can it live outside now?)

Learning through Language Arts: Reading and Grammar

Nope. You're not finished with schooling after you teach them to read. However, after you teach your first child to read, you'll feel like you can

teach her *anything*. It's not that teaching a child to read is difficult — after all, most of us learned it with or without educational assistance. It does, however, require patience and the ability to stick with a project until you see results.

Nothing beats reading to your child to interest him in books. Letting him see that you read follows as a close second, and may be even more important in the long run. As we all know too well, it's not what we say that the children catch, so often as what we do.

It's as easy as A, B, C

When do you teach a child to read? If he asks you to teach him, then do it. I made the mistake of putting my young daughter off for six months because I thought she was too young to read. Actually, all I did was underestimate her ability to trudge through a project until its completion (now I know), and deny her six months' pleasure reading time. Bad mom. No biscuit.

Many books promise to teach your child to read. All you really *need* is access to a public library and a list of the various phonics rules that you can find in the back of the book *Why Johnny Can't Read* by Rudolf Flesch. Regardless of what the educational theory of the week may declare, reading happens when you apply the sounds of words to the symbols that we call letters. Some children figure it out on their own, while others need to be shown the code.

If you want a more organized program, you probably want a reading curriculum. Here are a few tried-and-true teach-your-child-to-read programs on the market.

- **Alpha-Phonics:** Alpha-Phonics lays out what children need to know in daily lessons. When you and your child finish this book, your child can read. I used this to teach a 3-year-old to read. It worked great — when we were finished 128 days later, he could read all kinds of things, like the headlines of all the tabloids in the grocery checkout lane. Oops. Available from Amazon and booksellers.
- **Sing, Spell, Read, and Write:** A popular program among homeschoolers, Sing, Spell, Read, and Write uses a raceway game, readers, and phonics songs to teach reading. After you learn these songs along with your children, you'll never forget them. Years later, we still periodically break into rousing choruses of "a-a-apple, b-b-ball" for no apparent reason. Available from most homeschool suppliers.

- ***Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons:*** Based on the DISTAR reading approach that was popular in the 1970s, this book starts by teaching a modified alphabet that includes a symbol for each phonetic sound you hear. The student then learns to read with this alphabet, and it transitions into the normal alphabet by the end of the book. Many homeschoolers love this approach, and it works for them. Some children stress out about halfway through the book. Available from Amazon, homeschool suppliers, bookstores.
- **Ultimate Phonics Reading Program:** This program promises phonics, and it delivers phonics. With no frills or added gimmicks, this Macintosh and Windows software (as well as an IOS and Android app option for mobile devices) teaches reading in 262 lessons. Pausing the mouse over a word or letter combination reads it aloud to the student. Includes ten-day free trial; purchase from the website (www.spencerlearning.com) or your favorite app store.



I have a houseful of voracious readers. My children read two or more hours per day for pleasure if I don't find other things for them to do. What created this love of words isn't necessarily that the children's parents are authors — it's that the children's parents are *readers*. We each try to steal away for a while each day and immerse ourselves in a book, whether the book is nonfiction for interest or research, or fiction for enjoyment and escape.

When the children were little, we instituted a 7:30 p.m. bedtime rule. Bedtime occurred at 7:30 p.m. with no arguments. The only exception was if the children wanted to read in bed. Then they still had to go to bed, but their lights-out time was extended to 8:30. This gave them a fair amount of time to immerse themselves in books, relax a little before trying to drop off to sleep, and pursue our goal of building good readers.

IS IT WORTH THE WAIT?

Children who learn to read the *"Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons"* way cannot read anything else (such as library books) until they nearly complete it. DISTAR books are

long out of print. When this method was first designed, it included storybooks rewritten using the DISTAR alphabet at several reading levels so the children could actually practice their reading with additional materials. Those materials are no longer available. The book is available through bookstores, and you can download additional printout materials from the Start Reading website.

Once your child can read, she can read. Reading does *not* require eight years' worth of classroom readers to accomplish this seemingly awesome feat. Graded classroom readers are boring and they only introduce 200 to 300 new words per *year* on the average. Use your library card and practice reading for free.



TIP If your children have books in their rooms, you may want to rotate them periodically (the books, not the children). A couple times per year, I go into the bedrooms and pull out the generic reading material below their current reading levels, replacing these books with others just above their reading level. That way the handiest books, those next to the bed, are at least comparable to their understanding if not a bit challenging. The pulled books then get returned to the family library shelves so that if they *must* read Clifford one more time, he's still available. (Indiscriminately throwing out books in a family of readers is akin to mutiny.)

Beyond the basics

Once the children learn to read, you need to incorporate language, literature, grammar, writing, and the rest of the language arts panorama. This can be as simple or as complicated, as seamless or as segmented, as you choose. Several good, solid language arts curricula exist to help you build from a strong foundation. Here are a few of them.

- **Brave Writer:** (www.bravewriter.com) Homeschoolers who love this curriculum refer to "the Brave Writer lifestyle." Tuesdays mean Poetry Tea, where everyone gathers around a table with a favorite poem, a snack, and a favorite drink, hot or cold. Wednesdays bring Movie Day, when a home movie viewing leads to conversation about plot, character development, and falling action. The Brave Writer family of products goes from kindergarten all the way through twelfth grade. Jot It Down, for ages 5 to 8, starts the ball rolling with ten month-long projects (writing a

fairy tale, designing a poster, writing letters). If you want in-depth literature study, that comes in the form of monthly reading guides: You select a book guide, or subscribe to a year's worth of titles, and they lead you through teaching literary conventions, grammar, dictation, and more. The main guiding text, The Writer's Jungle, guides you in teaching the art of writing. While not for everyone, my youngest nonwriter has bloomed with this method and he sets his weekly calendar by our Poetry Teatime.

- **Core Knowledge:** (www.coreknowledge.org) This language arts curriculum draws on material from history, science, and literature. Most of the materials are available for free download from the website; be sure to download the sequence document that explains what each grade level learns in language arts (and in all other areas of the Core Knowledge curriculum). Covers K through grade 8.
- **Essentials In Writing:** (www.essentialsinwriting.com) If English really isn't your thing, this curriculum comes to your rescue. Each level teaches writing and grammar skills via a DVD or Internet streaming. Your student also gets a workbook where she practices everything she learns. These lessons are short, but they're designed that way so that the students learn in small increments. Covers grades K through 12. A literature course is available for grades 7 through 12 as well.

Going on to the heavy hitters

After your child learns to read, an entire vista of possibilities opens to her. She can pursue a topic that she loves, whether it's ballet, bonsai, or Bangkok. And even more delightfully, she now does it without you reading each article in *Bangkok Today* aloud to her. Isn't life wonderful?



WARNING You still need to keep an eye on your child as he peruses the public library because when his reading level increases through the sheer practice of reading, he finds himself drawn to adult reading material. Although all adult material isn't bad, much of it is a bit unsavory — especially for your 10- or 12-year-old. Simply because your child can read at an adult level doesn't mean that he's ready for adult language, topics, and situations.

On the other hand, he really can go beyond *Curious George* when he's ready. Here are some authors who write kid-friendly novels in advanced language:

- **Lloyd Alexander:** Known for his medieval-themed fantasies, Alexander's *The Black Cauldron* was made into a full-length animated feature by Disney. Students who enjoy the series may like *Alexander's Prydain Chronicles*, a tale that spans several volumes and begins with *The Book of Three*.
- **Daniel Defoe and Robert Louis Stevenson:** Who can forget *Robinson Crusoe* or *Treasure Island*? These books spark the imaginations of readers everywhere.
- **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle:** His *Sherlock Holmes* serial mysteries are now compiled into several volumes, and provide great deductive reading for the mystery buff. My 10-year-old reads *Sherlock Holmes* with a magnifying glass in his pocket (to add to the atmosphere, I do believe).
- **J.R.R. Tolkien:** *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy remains one of the most popular series ever written, and outside the trilogy, Tolkien's *The Hobbit* introduces many of the characters your child will meet in the *Rings* books while telling the story at a slightly lower reading level.
- **Henry Winterfeld:** Two of his books, *Detectives in Togas* and *Mystery of the Roman Ransom*, follow a group of Roman schoolboys through mystery and adventure. Household favorites, I was delighted to find these still in print.

Eating Your Way through Math

For many children, math is a pretty ethereal subject. After all, you're working with symbols that may (or may not) mean something to the child, and expecting him to take these symbols, read the code sign between them, and correctly come up with a new symbol. Is it any wonder so many children have problems with math?

You understand the symbols because you've done math for years, but if the code doesn't click with your child, he's going to have problems discerning the answers to the numbers on the page. Your goal is to make those symbols mean something. After the symbols have meaning, then true math learning

takes place.



REMEMBER Just because your child can count to 100 by rote doesn't mean that she understands what 100 may stand for. How many times did you hear the age-old ABC song before your child had any clue what those letters actually stood for? She sang the song, you applauded, and so she sang it again with even more gusto. The same can be true for counting by rote (1, 2, 3 … 98, 99, 100!).

You usually figure out your child hasn't put concept and symbol together when you try to show him how to add or subtract a few of those numbers that he's been chanting for weeks. That's when everything falls apart if it's going to — he may look at those symbols like he never saw them before. For all he knows, you may as well be teaching him to add and subtract Roman numerals.



TIP There is a way out of this dilemma. The solution is *math manipulatives*, an educational term for math help that you can get your fingers around. Math manipulatives can truly be anything that you can count or measure with, although some items function better than others:

- **Base-ten blocks:** These are counting blocks. Beginning with the one-centimeter cube and the ten-centimeter rod, a base-ten set adds a 100 block that looks like ten of the ten-centimeter rods fused together, and a large cube that represents 1,000. You can add and subtract large numbers with this set; all the blocks come in the same color so they look the same and the learner concentrates on the size instead of the color.
- **Cuisenaire rods:** These ten little rods range from one-centimeter cubes to pieces of wood that are ten centimeters long. Each rod is one centimeter longer or shorter than the others, they come in predictable colors (for example, the five-centimeter rod is *always* yellow), and you can use them to add, subtract, multiply, divide, and do fractions, among other things. One set of rods contains several of each rod length.

- **M&Ms:** You know them, you eat them, and now you can count with them, too! With a few bowls and a pile of M&Ms, you can add, subtract, multiply, divide, and have snack time all at once! (Fractions are tough with M&Ms.) Do it quickly, though; if you hold them long enough, they *do* melt in your hand.
- **Pattern blocks:** Using these little plastic tiles, your child learns about patterns, fractions, geometric shapes, and tessellations (patterns that fit into one another and arguably go on forever). Shapes include square, triangle, hexagon, rhombus, and trapezoid. If you want to play with these online before you track them down at your local educational store, visit the Math Learning Center website at `apps.mathlearningcenter.org/pattern-shapes`.
- **Pennies:** Although half-dollar coins are easier to find on the table, pennies are much cheaper if you happen to be counting to 100. These function the same as M&Ms, but you don't get the added thrill of eating the chocolate when you finish math class. To drive home the point, you can always make your own ten-count penny sticks by gluing ten pennies to a strip of light cardboard. This way, your child *knows* there are ten pennies per strip because she patiently sat and glued each one of them. (Use water-soluble glue so you can reclaim the pennies after fourth grade.)

You can use manipulatives with any math program, but some programs are specifically designed for use with hands-on helpers. One of these is Miquon Math (`www.miquonmath.com`). Miquon primarily uses the Cuisenaire rods as manipulatives. Using Miquon, the child learns how to use the rods as he learns the math concepts. Miquon is a little weak in time (clock reading) and story problems, but it's designed to lay a conceptual foundation in the first three years of elementary school. Children leave Miquon with the equivalent of a fifth- or sixth-grade math education, and they then move on to another program. Here are some other math programs that you may want to take a look at:

- **Beast Academy:** (`www.beastacademy.com/`) Who doesn't love a few monsters with their math? This program is designed for kids who like to be challenged. Designed for ages 8–13, each level includes an engaging comic book (called a Guide Book) that teaches the concepts along with a

student Practice Book filled with problems and math puzzles.

- **Key To series:** This is where you go after Miquon. The Key To books present a single concept per page, and each set of booklets covers a particular topic: decimals, fractions, percents, measurement, algebra, or geometry. These books say they're for grades 4 through 12; however, the geometry curriculum is "proofless geometry"; therefore, it doesn't qualify as regular high-school-level geometry. This curriculum is currently published by McGraw Hill; available from homeschool suppliers or Amazon.
- **Math Mammoth:** (www.mathmammoth.com) This curriculum covers grades 1 through 7, and it does it either topic by topic or in a customary progression, your choice. It's inexpensive as math curriculums go, and it's comprehensive. Available in either digital or paper format.
- **RightStart Mathematics:** (www.rightstartmath.com) This curriculum augments lessons with a ton of varied manipulatives — a math balance, measuring tools, fraction manipulatives, and their own abacus. This is a full and solid math program. Levels A through H cover grades K/1 through about grade 8. (You begin with Level A with a child who cannot add or subtract, regardless of the age.)

Going beyond "Our Community Helpers"

Every first- and second-grade social studies book that I know begins with "Our Community Helpers." If your child schools at home, however, she probably knows the mailman on a first-name basis. Nobody needs to tell her the friendly school bus driver comes through her neighborhood — she sees the bus go by her house each day while she munches her Marshmallow Wheetos.

If you want to cover community helpers in the first and second grade, be my guest. It certainly won't hurt your children, although they may be bored out of their minds. You could spend the time talking about your town or city, state, and region of the country instead. Take the children to look at the nearest river. If they've never seen a river up close before, you're sure to get a

wow reaction when they see how big it is. And a good river view gives them a basis for understanding those squiggly lines on the globe.

Social studies generally begin with the local and move out; so you start with the interesting facts about your hometown and then, as your students progress, teach about your state, your country, your world. When you throw the history aspect of social studies into the mix, you also move through time, teaching from now to the past or from the past forward. But don't worry — you have 12 or so years to cover all this stuff, and several publishers create curriculum to make the task easier.



I happened to have a second-grade social studies book on the shelf when my children were 5 and 6, so I opened it and we covered the entire book as a read-aloud in about six days. That way, I felt emotionally secure in the knowledge that I covered the material, yet the children didn't look at me with that glassy-eyed when-is-lunch stare because I attempted to stretch the book far beyond its rational limits.

Early elementary homeschoolers often take advantage of community field trips to avoid the community helper text and still introduce their children to the world. Most local homeschool support groups schedule trips such as this every year for the younger elementary students. Either join an organized field trip through a support group or organize your own. Consider asking another family or two to join you on your expedition. It adds to the fun and maximizes the company official's time.

If you decide to do your own field trip, call the establishment well ahead of time to find out the organization's rules for field trips. Some of these options are extremely popular, and you may find yourself in for a several week wait. Identify yourself as a homeschooler, and if you're available at virtually any time, be sure to tell the company official so. They appreciate it when you bend your schedule to fit theirs — especially when you visit a building whose main occupation is something other than providing field trips to students! With that in mind, you may want to

- **Drop by the main post office.** If you send packages and letters even on a semi-regular basis, you can probably explain what happens inside a post

office from your own experience. But some branches offer tours. Call your local post office for details.

- **Pick apples or pumpkins.** If you happen to live within driving distance of an apple orchard or pumpkin patch, these businesses usually welcome small batches of homeschoolers, especially when compared to the huge busloads they usually receive. Although such a field trip also counts as science — because the fruit grows — the facility often includes some information about what happens to the fruit after picking. This gives your child a frame of reference for that apple cider he sees on the store shelves.
- **Visit a local bakery.** Small bakeries often give tours — as well as fresh, yummy samples.
- **Visit the fire station.** Firefighters are used to giving tours to groups of small children, and they stress safety at the same time that they show the kids around their huge fire trucks.



TIP Older elementary students need basic information about maps, continents, rivers, hemispheres, peoples, and latitudes. An easy way to incorporate everything at one time is to pick a spot on the map and study that spot. After you settle on a country, find out everything you can about it.

- **Determine the country's longitude and latitude.**
- **Find out about its people.** Who are they? What do they do for a living?
- **List or describe the country's major produce or production — from corn to cars, almost every country produces something.**
- **Name and give examples of the language or languages spoken by the population.**
- **Name its nearest oceans and outstanding topography (mountains, valleys, and such).**
- **Locate its continent.**

This, in essence, is social studies — learning about the world and its people.

A nice portfolio or report on each country tracks your progress and proves to anyone who may be interested that you are actually covering social studies in a logical manner.

Several publishers produce social study guides, both in unit-study form (which is basically what is outlined in the preceding section) and in grade-level-textbook form, should you decide to use them. For more information on unit studies, see Chapter 15.



Instead of social studies, I teach biography, history, and culture from various time periods. I also cover geography as a separate class. More of a classical education approach (see Chapter 11 for more about classical education), it starts with history and brings it to life. Then I answer any miscellaneous social studies questions that arise along the way.

Firing Up the Bunson Burner

Science is everywhere. Especially when you're four feet tall. Gazing at the clouds counts as science, particularly if some helpful adult (that would be you) identifies them by type for your child. Watching a favorite plant grow and flower is science. It's also science when you forget to water it and the plant dies — a way of redeeming all those plants I kill.

Although you can purchase elementary science books for your child as she passes through each grade level, you may want to concentrate on the real world and its offerings for the first six years or so.

- **Go outside and explore nature.**
- **Conduct experiments with household items.** I don't know how many times we've done the old baking soda-and-vinegar-volcano project, but it's still a family favorite.
- **Create a kite from a sheet of printer paper and fly it.** You learn much about wind this way.
- **Find a plastic can or honest-to-goodness rain gauge and set it outside to measure the rainfall.** If you remember to measure and then empty it

after each good rain, you get a good idea of the precipitation in your area.

- **Hang an all-weather thermometer outside and graph each day's temperature in Fahrenheit and Celsius.**
- **Try raising an ant farm, brine shrimp, or mice.** This, of course, depends much on your general pet tolerance — your children will survive if they only see ants outdoors.



TIP Your library provides a wealth of books in the sciences. If you need a few fresh ideas, wander up and down the juvenile science section of your local library and pull books at random. (Remember to put them back when you're finished or your librarians will dislike me intensely.) You should find science biographies and books chock full of experiments as well as books about animals, plants, rocks, and so on.

Before the last few years, finding a solid, evidence-based homeschool science book was like retrieving Excalibur from your local lake. Unless you knew how to order science books from the school publishers (and had the extra money to do so), the local library was your fallback science textbook. While it's still a good source, a few publishers have risen from the foam to help elementary homeschoolers learn science. (See the sidebar to find out why that's important.) Here are some options to fill your science void.

- **Building Foundations of Scientific Understanding:** This curriculum, fondly referred to as BFSU by the homeschoolers who love it, develops an impressive understanding of science over three volumes. You use each volume for three years and the material builds on itself, so you will probably start with the first book regardless of your students' ages. This course requires some parental prep and reading time, but it uses few materials you don't already have around the house (the first lesson in Volume 1 suggests the family junk drawer). Each lesson includes introductory information, experiments and activities, explanations, additional reading options from the library, and how you know if your student gets the concept. These books cover K through grade 8. Order from www.bfsucommunity.com or www.outskirtspress.com.

- **REAL Science Odyssey:** (www.pandiapress.com/real-science-odyssey/) You can begin with REAL Science Odyssey in kindergarten and use it all the way through eighth grade. Each book covers a different topic, including earth science, chemistry, biology, and physics, and each book works for a range of grade levels. My personal favorite: They offer two astronomy courses for grades 1 through 4 and grades 6 through 10.
- **The Science of Climate Change: A Hands-On Course:** (secularecleticacademic.com) If climate change concerns you or your students, this book helps you tackle the concept head-on. Written in understandable language, the book introduces the issues and then leads students through 18 experiments and activities to show them why the science is valid. For grades 4 through 10, if the high schoolers are new to the subject.



TIP If your child loves science but doesn't yet read at the level she comprehends, you can always read the science books to her. In this manner, she satisfies her thirst for knowledge and skips the frustration of stumbling over the words that she's not ready to read on her own.

EVIDENCE-BASED AND NEUTRAL AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN, OH MY!

Science is the bugaboo of homeschooling. And it's no wonder. Long ago, in the land of education, the word science meant … science. I know, it's hard to believe. Now, however — especially in the homeschooling arena — science can mean one of several different things. Does a particular publisher sell evidence-based science, or neutral science, or intelligent design (often referred to as ID) science, or creationism science? How do you know? And why do you care?

What is *evidence-based science?* It's the new term for — you guessed it — *science*. If you buy a science book from Pearson Education or McGraw Hill, two of the big educational publishers, you are buying a book that teaches evidence-based science. (They're generally good texts, but I omit them from the recommendations due to their cost and the difficulties in procuring all the parts that make up a course.) All the recommendations in the preceding list are evidence-based science courses. They cover everything you would want in science. They are, in a word, *secular curriculum* — they have no religious undertone or leaning to them. (Okay, that was actually two words if you're counting.) You can rest assured that if you want secular curriculum, and you buy an evidence-based science curriculum, you aren't going to

have to sidestep or omit anything, nor is any fact of science omitted for you.

Neutral science, on the other hand, isn't neutral at all — at least, not how scientists understand the term. Neutral science is a term recently invented by the homeschool curriculum vendors. Any science book with "neutral" science in it omits important scientific facts and concepts necessary to the true understanding of science: evolution, climate change, and a classification system newer than the 19th century, to name only a few. If not outrightly omitted, a neutral science book might mention that "many people believe" that evolution or the Big Bang are theories, which veils their importance as basic science understandings. This then creates a foundation for other concepts that rely on these two theories to be downplayed or skewed as well. Think of neutral science as the Wizard of Oz behind the curtain, moving the controls so things fall where he wants them to.

Intelligent design and *creationism* are like neutral science, but with the curtains pulled to the side. These authors make no bones about standing at the controls. Their reason for producing a science curriculum is to convince children that the underpinnings of science aren't really there. These books flat-out teach that evolution isn't real and the Big Bang didn't happen.

Books claiming that they teach neutral science, intelligent design, or creationism are not secular books. If you opt for these you are purchasing a religious textbook, not one grounded in science. It all boils down to this: What do you want your kids to learn, and where do you want them to learn it?

Timing Is Everything

Timing is essential — especially with elementary students. When your child is ready to read, she will read. When he's ready to divide, he'll divide. No amount of coaxing, prodding, wheedling, or screaming can force your child to do something that he's not ready to do.

When timing is off

If you get the famous "huh?" reaction day after day when you attempt to present a particular skill, or you see your child's stress level rise as she tries to apply knowledge that she's supposed to have, you may need to back off a while. On the other hand, if you get boredom signals day after day, maybe you need to skip a few problems or speed up the process before your child falls asleep on you. If you realize later that you went too fast through a topic, you can always back up and reintroduce it later. (That's one of the bonuses you get from owning your own schoolbooks!)



AT OUR HOUSE We covered second-grade math for four school terms at my house — with one child. By the fourth year I didn't care anymore — I was willing to teach basic addition and multiplication through high school if that's where my student topped out. We used everything I could think of — Cuisenaire rods, M&Ms, counting chips, dots on the paper, crayons, pictures — I was out of ideas. Then one day, my child got it. The light bulb went on. She ran into my office giggling and showed her brand-new skill. And we were off!

She needed to grow to the point that multiplication and division made sense. Now they do, and my daughter flew through the second-grade math book and halfway through a third-grade book before she slowed down. Did we make it out of third-grade math? We did, and she made it all the way through high school and college, thanks to second- and third-grade math class.

While you wait

If you're waiting for a child to grow into a concept, first of all don't fret. Even with a subject such as science or math, you can do plenty to fill your school hours while you watch your child mature a bit. Put on your creativity cap and use the time constructively, and you find you're building those skills at the same time you pretend to avoid them. Here are a few ideas:



TIP

- **Explore the world.** Watch bugs crawl and leaves turn for science. Break out the math manipulatives and simply play with them. Take the dolls and create stories and play with them for language. Visit a local landmark for social studies and learn about it.
- **Incorporate those LEGOs, blocks, or other building toys.** Objects such as these sharpen thinking skills and creativity. After your child has completed his creation, ask him to tell you about it as a language arts activity. If you want to track his progress, write his story as he tells it to you.
- **Drag out those colored pencils and draw.** Draw squares. Learn about

perspective. Draw rainbows and arcs. Draw bugs and flowers and trees. Draw what you know about math or science. Although it may not seem like much, reproducing concepts like shapes on paper solidifies understanding of how those things work in the real world.



WHEN THEY DON'T FIT INTO THE BOX

Many homeschoolers find that their child doesn't fit neatly into the second-grade box. Or even the fourth-grade box. This child may be a little ahead in this subject and/or a little behind in that one. This is actually pretty normal, especially in the homeschool realm. Because these kids have no mythical standard to rise (or fall) against, they have the freedom to develop in their own time.

That development may be quick. Or it may be slow. You may have a child who is able to do math problems in her head at the same time in her life that she finds writing a chore. Or maybe your little one reads all the time but doesn't truly understand how 1½ cups of sugar fit into a one-cup measure and a half-cup measure. That's okay.

Walk with your child wherever he happens to be, and you both build a bond much stronger than you get through sharing a textbook alone. Teaching your child where she is may mean going through four years of second-grade math. Or you may find yourself flying through two years in one because your child just seems to "get it" this year. Go with the flow and it will all even out. As your child explores and experiences and follows her interests, she'll strengthen her general knowledge at the same time that she develops her favorite hobby. This may mean purchasing an extra textbook or two in a year's time, or visiting the library more than you may otherwise, but in the long run you get a fascinating young adult, and you learn a great deal about the inner workings of the *Titanic,* for example, in the meantime.

Chapter 7

Handling Junior High

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Bringing your student home**
- **Keeping track of life**
- **Posting the grades**

During adolescence, your kids' hormones go wild, and your kids fight for independence — at the same time that they still secretly sleep with teddy bears. Adolescents begin to think on a semi-adult level, and they're a joy to engage in conversation. For perhaps the first time, they not only have opinions, but they can defend those opinions with somewhat rational thought. If this is the picture that you look at over the breakfast table each morning, you have a junior high student.

Junior high school or middle school in many communities is the between time. Too old for elementary school, yet not tall enough for high school classes, junior high students spend much of their time sitting through classes that attempt to catch students up and fill in any gaps before high school. If you can grin at their quirks, appreciate a developing sense of humor, and accept some friendly criticism without losing your cool, you'll love homeschooling your middle grades students.

Beginning in the Middle

It's not unusual to begin homeschooling in the middle years, especially if behavior or less-than-expected school achievement sends up a warning flag to concerned parents. Some students jump at the chance to be removed from what they see as a no-win situation. Others may fret when you remove them from the social arena that concerns you.



TIP You may want to spend a few weeks getting used to the new schedule before you dive back into the books, especially if you remove a junior high student from the middle of a school year. Older students don't adapt quite as quickly as younger ones, and the change in programming may throw a student for a bit. Although you don't necessarily want your student spending all her free time playing video games, you may need to allow some detoxification time so that she has the emotional energy to respond to you after you begin classes at home. If you begin at the start of a school year, your student already has several weeks away from the system, so it's not as big of a deal. For ideas on how to handle a new middle-grade homeschooler those first few weeks or months, see Chapter 4.

Junior high students who school at home explore many more opportunities than their friends at school, simply because they have more time available to pursue activities. (See Chapter 26 for more information about socializing.) Although a public- or private-schooled junior high student spends the days at school and perhaps evenings at sports practice, homeschooled students can arrange their school time to

- Participate in community plays
- Volunteer at the library or local animal shelter
- Start a home business, whether it's babysitting, the gift basket biz, or another creative endeavor
- Participate in community or competitive sports (such as ice skating, which takes hours of practice for truly competitive skill)

LOCATING CURRICULUM OPTIONS

After you bring your child home, what do you teach? You have loads of options, and only time and money limit your choices. Because nobody has an endless supply of either of these (I know I wish I did!), by balancing the two, you can devise a pretty good curriculum that meets the needs of your student.

All of Part 3 looks at different ways that you can teach your child. You can purchase a full curriculum from an existing school and let that school form a protective umbrella over your

homeschool. Maybe you want to write a curriculum on your own. Perhaps you'd rather pull various books from a whole bunch of publishers like the schools do.

No matter how you think homeschooling should be done, Part 3 starts you on your way. Also look at Chapter 6, which lists elementary level curriculums — most of them go through grade 8.

And that's only a quick list. Look around your own community for opportunities for these students. They generally love to help and want to feel needed. Plugging them into some type of community effort fills both those desires with a special activity or two.

Keeping Track of It All

So now your middle schooler is at home and you realize that you need to track everything she's doing. When you start to think about the volunteering and other activities that actually carry educational worth, putting it all on paper becomes a bit overwhelming. Even if your state doesn't require it (see Chapter 3), tracking your middle schooler's courses and activities gives you great practice for the high school years, when transcripts become all important.

Start with the basics:

- **What subjects does your state require?** Math, English, science, and social studies usually begin the list.
- **What subjects do you think your student needs to learn?** Combining these subjects with the ones from the previous bullet gives you a nice, round group of classes.
- **What are your student's outside pursuits?**

  Does he participate on a traveling soccer team? Write it down under physical education or fitness. Did he set up a home business last year? Great — you have to keep track of the money, which is math, and keep the process rolling, which requires general business knowledge.

  Some activities, such as time spent at the local animal shelter, may simply fall under "volunteer activities" unless your teen gleans some animal science knowledge along the way. (Then, of course, it takes its place beside the weekly science text on your planning pages.)

If your middle schooler tackles a subject early, such as Algebra 1 in seventh or eighth grade instead of waiting for high school, it still counts as a high school course. Be sure to keep track of dates and grades for any early high school classes, even though they don't end up on the high school transcript.



TIP Although I know you want to list Every Single High School Level Class your child ever took, if those courses take place before ninth grade, transcript readers like college admissions departments don't want to see them. (I know. I'm sorry. I don't make the rules.) If your child takes Algebra 1 in grade 7 and Geometry in grade 8, then the ninth grade high school transcript will begin with Algebra 2. Earlier courses are assumed. Same with foreign language. If you do Italian 1 in middle school, then Italian 2 starts off the high school foreign language list. (Be aware, however, that if you do this, the foreign language cops do expect to see at least two years of that language on the high school transcript, preferably three.)



TIP For additional guidance in homeschool organization, turn to Chapters 23 and 24. These chapters discuss testing, portfolios, scheduling, and daily planning. You may want to consider a computer-based planning system if you want to cut down on overall paperwork and still keep a hand on planned activities.

Putting Grades to the Test

If your child moves into the middle years with some homeschool time under his belt, then he may have little experience with grades. On the other hand, if you bring your child home to school during middle school, grades may be a painful reminder of the past. Even if you never graded work before, these junior high years are a good time to start.

For one thing, grading now gets your student used to grades in high school. Going from a completely nongraded eighth year to an all-graded ninth year can be a bit of a shock. Also, if you want your child to continue past twelfth

grade, he needs some kind of transcript to take with him. That's where the grades come in.



TIP If you plan to use a distance high school program of some kind, you need eighth-grade scores and final grades to prove your student actually did the eighth-grade work. Without this "baby transcript," the school won't accept your child. Chapter 10 tells you more about teaching your child at home with complete school programs from grade school through high school.

Many homeschool parents shy away from grading because they don't really understand how the grading scales work. Chapter 24 lays out a simple and effective grading system that gives you letters the colleges can deal with while being fair to your student. Advanced schools, whether colleges, universities, trade schools, or apprenticeship programs, don't deal well with *S* for satisfactory and *E* for excellent. They need a common language.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ADD DEPTH

Although it's much easier to schedule a young teen who does nothing but traipse to the library to replenish an armful of books and then bring them home to read, the maxim that "all work and no play makes dull students" is a true one. In addition to meeting the social needs of your child (beginning with the teen years, this is no small matter), outside activities make your student much more fun to talk to. Varied activities help your teen to develop interests that make him a well-rounded individual.

One of your main goals as a homeschooler is to mold your children into creative, productive members of society — at least, I hope that's a goal. We all know people who read erudite books that make our heads swim yet cannot seem to grasp the main fundamentals of life. When your student steps outside his own "self bubble" to volunteer, joins a sports team, or learns from an expert in an area of his choosing, he takes a huge step into real life. With any luck, he also stumbles on an interest or two that remain lifelong hobbies.

Unless your student enjoys conducting experiments or building models from matchsticks that test the laws of physics, pure textbook learning only goes so far. Living life is much different than reading about it. Your child branches into the living portion when she begins to engage in extracurricular activities.

Calculating the amount of paint that she needs to help redecorate the local county fair buildings brings math skills into the daily living category. So does noting how much dog food the local animal shelter uses on a weekly basis. Think about monthly dog food consumption and the numbers get huge!

Not only does your child get to practice what she learns in the classroom, but she also learns to interact with people of all ages, abilities, and strengths. She figures out what it is to join together with others to complete a goal. And she realizes the worth in reaching out to help someone or something else — without you ever saying a word.

Chapter 8

Help! I Have a High Schooler

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Bringing your high schooler home**
- **Making it through the courses**
- **Keeping the records that you need**
- **Preparing for college**
- **Taking the entrance exams**

Congratulations on reaching the high school milestone! You finally made it — your child survived. Deciding who deserves more kudos is hard: the children, for surviving years of macaroni and cheese, or you, for remembering to feed them three times a day for umpteen years. Now comes the fun part.

Whether you've homeschooled awhile and your students are ready to leap into high school or you're thinking about beginning the journey with an older student, high school homeschooling offers plenty of benefits. You get to spend your days with thinking, sometimes-rational humans. They can finally make their macaroni and cheese all by themselves, they know where to place the spoons at the table, and they remember to feed the dog. Okay, they forget the dog. Nevertheless, they're fun to talk to and fascinating to watch as they bloom into adulthood.

Here's where you turn for the ins and outs of guiding that blooming bunch. From individual class suggestions to high school record keeping, this chapter takes a look at the final homeschool years. Buckle your seat belt and get ready for the ride (because, after all, driver's education is part of the experience, and you don't want to miss it).

Starting at the Eleventh Hour (or

Eleventh Grade)

You see the same struggles year after year, and you wonder when something's going to give (at the same time, you hope fervently that what gives won't be your precious student). Perhaps you see new behaviors, new friends, and unique attitudes that don't mesh well with your home values. You want a solution that strengthens your family and wonder if homeschooling may be the answer.

Believe it or not, beginning the homeschool journey at the high school level is a pretty normal solution. Not everybody does it, of course, but I know of several parents who brought their children home to school in ninth, tenth, or even eleventh grade. The students thrived, and the parents survived the experience, too.

Advantages of teaching at home in high school far outweigh the organizational disadvantages that you may encounter:

- **The disadvantage of beginning in high school: You have to get used to a new schedule, the tutoring process, and record keeping all at the same time.** Far from being insurmountable, the task provides that unique level of challenge that some parents thrive on. However, it does require more organization than if you begin in kindergarten and work your way up.
- **The advantages of starting at the high school level:**
    - You begin with an almost-adult that you guide, rather than a child that you lead. Kindergartners (to pick on the really little guys) have no idea what courses they want to take. Give them scissors, construction paper, and glue, and they'll happily cut and paste for hours while you assemble the rest of their academic programs.

      High schoolers, on the other hand, can tell you whether they prefer to take home economics or journalism. Because of the elective structure, you have more leeway when it comes to designing high school courses than you do at the lower grades. By sitting down together to design a program, you can discern which classes would work best for your student.
    - You don't need to know it all. (Actually, you never did, but at this

level it becomes even more important.) If you happen to schedule a class in the area that you received your doctorate in, that's great. However, you can still schedule classes that you know nothing about, and you and your student can learn together in the course of the semester.



REMEMBER The main thing to remember is that nobody knows your child like you do. Even if this child happens to be taller than you are, the truth still holds. You know your children's interests, strengths, and weaknesses better than anybody else does. When you homeschool for high school, you can create a completely customized course of study that meets your student's needs.

Switching before the Last Bell

Homeschooling high school can prove to be tricky in one regard: If you take the kids out during high school for the first time, you may or may not be able to return them to the school. Depending on your local school system and how you choose to homeschool, the high school may or may not accept your credits. Of course, if you are planning to keep them home through graduation this becomes a non-issue.

If your high schooler wants to come home to school, be sure to weigh the advantages and disadvantages before making the jump. Attending sporting events will be different as a nonstudent. Are football games that important? To some kids, they are. Think about the prom. Is this one night an I-worked-through-high-school-to-experience-this event, or does it fall into the "eh" category? Many cities and area homeschool organizations hold their own proms. Your student could attend that. Is the prospect of not seeing friends on a daily basis a relief, a sorrow, or something in between? These are concepts you want to discuss with your high schooler before removing them from public or private school, unless you are experiencing some crisis that requires immediate change.



AT OUR HOUSE I love working with high schoolers. They have opinions and state them with glee. They understand more, reason better, and generally read and write better than their younger counterparts. (Not to mention that they can reduce a refrigerator to its bare interior walls in a few hours.) I believe I enjoyed teaching high school classes a whole lot more than my first two graduates liked taking them. This time around I'm more chill. But I still love it!

Deciding your academic approach

How you view education, and how your child will experience education, is just as important in high school as it is in the lower grades, if not more so. Does a particular teaching method or philosophy ring true with you? Does one approach seem to fit your high schooler better than others? Part 3 outlines popular homeschooling philosophies, approaches, and practices.

Perhaps you simply want to get the job done with as little pain as possible. Would you like to schedule textbooks or learning sequences for every class and then guide your student through it? This chapter offers suggestions for courses in every subject area. Maybe opting for one or two online courses would relieve some anxiety or stress. Perchance an all-in-one online curriculum appeals to you for ease of delivery. Their marketing information sure sounds good.



WARNING Complete online curriculum choices range from really good to a frustrating experience that's less effective than attending a less-than-adequate local school. Several of the curriculum providers listed in this chapter offer online options. These will be solid. Others, including many of the "free" options, are no better than public-school-at-home, requiring the student to sit in front of a computer for five or more hours per day watching video streams and answering questions online. One of the most common comments I hear about these is "Yeah … we tried that … my kid burned out/got lost/got behind/couldn't review what he didn't understand. Now I'm looking for other options. Anybody have any

ideas?”

Changing courses midstream (or at winter break)

Should your situation become untenable between semesters, you can always pull a high schooler from the local establishment before semester two begins. Sometimes you only realize you need a change during vacation time or while your student struggles through the last few weeks of a semester’s workload. And that’s okay. It’s fine to remove your high school student between semesters. In many cases courses like electives are completed at the semester break anyway, so you can start fresh with a new year.



TIP If you do take the leap between semesters, remember to schedule some deschooling or de-stressing time at the beginning of your homeschool journey. Especially if the break was traumatic, your teen will need time to decompress, relax, and become mentally ready to learn again. Turn to Chapter 4 for more information about a slow start to your year (or semester).



TIP If the situation is particularly awful, or you worry for a child’s health or safety, you do not have to wait for a semester break. You can pull a child any day of the school year to homeschool them, *especially* if you are concerned for their well-being.

Dancing the High School Subject Tango

High school is a little different from the other homeschooling levels. For one thing, you cover plenty of material in very little time in ninth through twelfth grades. This is where you hit everything one more time, while introducing new concepts, to ensure that your student knows the basics plus a little more.

High school at home doesn’t have to take six to eight hours a day. It may — I know a parent or two who did it that way — but usually it takes four hours

per day or maybe six once in a while. You may find that you swing through the day in two to three hours, but you have plenty to cover with six different classes at a time. Even homeschoolers who embrace the school-without-texts unschooling approach (see Chapter 16) find that their children engage in learning activities for more than two hours per day.

Because high school at home usually requires less time than the traditional setting, students find extra hours that they can devote to outside interests. Volunteering opportunities, hobbies, skill building, apprenticeships, and part-time work all play as much a part in your high schooler's education as the two of you want them to. Schoolwork at home provides flexibility that most high schoolers don't enjoy.

If your student lands a part-time volunteering position with the local vet in the mornings, for example, he's free to pursue book studies in the afternoon after spending the morning with cuddly, fuzzy friends. On the other hand, if your friendly mechanic is up for a helper after lunch, your student can get bookwork out of the way in the mornings and be free all afternoon — unhampered by time schedules if a mechanical emergency arises around dinnertime.



REMEMBER After you have free time scheduled, what do you do for the rest of the day? Most high schools require a certain amount of math, English, science, and history, plus an extra subject or two, such as a couple years of a foreign language. The classes that you teach depend much on where you see your child ending up after high school. On the one hand, you don't want to limit your child's choices by providing nothing but fluff high school courses. However, there's no reason to force your child through pre-calculus if he has his heart set on becoming a blacksmith (a science course that specializes in the properties of metals, however, may be an excellent idea).

The following sections give you an idea of the range of curriculum and electives available to the home high schooler. While this in no way gives you all the options available — other authors spend over 600 pages trying to do just that — you can use these ideas as a starting point. For some of the subjects, such as math and science, publishers have already developed

homeschool-friendly textbooks. Other subjects, such as speech and computer science, leave you somewhat on your own to gather materials as you see fit. When in doubt, browse through the shelves of your library or local bookstore to get an idea of the materials available.



TIP If your student has interests or strengths that fall outside the usual list of courses, or if both of you want something different, take a look at the free online courses from MIT or Stanford, found online at `ocw.mit.edu/index.htm` and `online.stanford.edu/free-courses`. For a short video that covers one interesting topic, Ted Ed, located online at `ed.ted.com`, contains videos from every school subject and covering all grade levels from primary to university. When you reach the Ted Ed site, click the Educators Start Here button, and then choose Lessons from the Discover menu. Use the drop-down menu on the left side of the screen to select a particular subject, and use the Filter by drop-down menu on the right to set the student level to High School/Upper Secondary (or, really, any other level you may want to explore).

COPING WITHOUT COLLEGE

Okay. It's time for a trip to the soapbox. Not every child needs to go to college. Not every child should go to college. If your child truly wants to become a chef, then college is *not* the best way to get there. The best chefs attend one of a few select cooking schools around the country and then complete an internship under a well-known personality in the world of chefdom. They generally don't spend four years getting a bachelor's degree in French and *then* move on to cooking school.

Scientists, engineers, state-licensed teachers, computer programmers, and the like need a college degree. So do history professors, medical doctors, and business managers. Mechanics, however, receive specialized training outside the college walls. So do blacksmiths, bakers, electricians, and welders. Some occupations, such as the military, place you in a different track if you have a college degree.

If your child truly wants a career that requires a college degree, then a university or college is probably the answer for you. It may also be the answer if your child loves learning for its own sake and threatens to major in a field such as philosophy. If your student shows no interest in school beyond the required 12 years, or she wants to pursue a specialty that lies outside the scope of the university realms, then pursue the alternatives. The absolute best occupation for your child is the one that makes him happy (while still falling within the guidelines of legality, of course).

Language arts

High school language arts require four components to count: literature, writing, grammar, and public speaking. If you want to design a language arts course that focuses on sports literature, you can do that, as long as it contains literature and writing — you really can. (My high school offered it as a course option.) Grammar and public speaking can be tucked into the course along the way, as most of the following suggestions do it, or you can spend an intensive nine weeks on each and check them off for the rest of the high school adventure.

Because fewer students homeschool through high school, not as many options exist for any course as you will find for the lower grades; however, these are three very solid language arts programs.

- **Brave Writer:** (www.bravewriter.com) When you enter the Brave Writer lifestyle with your high schooler, you embrace communication, literature, and writing as a family. Tuesday afternoons become Poetry Teatimes, and that's when you discuss the sonnet, modern poetry, or anything else poetic that grabs your fancy. You may set aside one day a week to watch and dissect a movie or even a video game. And there's the writing. Writer's Jungle is the all-encompassing how-do-I-teach-this guide, and Help for High School is a self-directed book on composition. Grammar and vocabulary are taught with the literature portion of the program, Arrow and Boomerang literature guides.
- **Essentials in Writing:** (www.essentialsinwriting.com) Students who prefer live examples may enjoy this course, which is a workbook or literature combined with instruction via DVD or internet streaming. The writing course covers both high-school-level grammar and writing, along with checklists to ensure the student covers everything necessary for a specific writing format. The literature course discusses plot, character, climax, falling action, irony — all the things you would expect from a good literature class. Both are available for grades 7 through 12.
- **Oak Meadow:** (www.oakmeadow.com) Oak Meadow offers everything you need for a high school English sequence: literature, composition, and poetry courses. Grammar and vocabulary are addressed within each

option. Students choose from Literature and Composition I and II, Composition I, Poetry I, American Lit, British Lit, World Lit, American Literature: Westward Expansion, and Women's Literature: Science Fiction and Fantasy. Literature and Composition I follows the Hero's Quest for two ninth-grade semesters; the rest are one-semester courses.

Math

Most high schools require two to three years of math. College-bound students often take four years of math, especially if they want to major in a field such as engineering or medicine after they get to the university. Although most high schools offer first-year algebra and geometry as the required two math courses, they don't have to be.

If your student does not excel in math or finds math truly difficult, homeschoolers have options other than algebra and geometry. You can start with a different subject altogether, such as Mathematics of Budgeting, and work your way into algebra by the end of high school. The options are completely up to you. Here are a few of the better (and better-known) math programs available for high-school-level math.

- **Art of Problem Solving (AoPS):** (www.artofproblemsolving.com/store) This is the big brother to Beast Academy math, featured in Chapter 6. If your child loves math, she may like this. Each section opens with a problem for the student to solve and then it breaks down the problem to show how it's done. Designed for strong math students, this series starts at the junior high math level and goes through calculus. They also offer an online option.
- **Math Without Borders:** (www.mathwithoutborders.com) This is a companion instruction series to accompany some classic math textbooks, like *Foerster's Algebra 1*. *Math Without Borders* offers whiteboard instructions that explain the textbook and how to do the math. It also includes video solution guides to the assigned problems in each section so your student knows how to get the answer. All math courses are available, from Algebra 1 through Calculus (plus a new physics course). You will need a copy of the required textbook plus the videos.
- **Free options:** If you want to dip into the math pool and see how your student does with very low-cost options, take a look at **Khan Academy**

(www.khanacademy.com) and **CK-12** (www.ck12.org). Khan Academy offers middle-school math through pre-calculus in self-paced video format, and CK-12 online textbooks also offer courses through pre-calculus.



TIP If you find that your student needs extra practice, search online for worksheets. Google "algebra 1 worksheets" or whatever the current math class might be, and you should find several options that you can download and print.



TIP The math class lineup you generally see during the high school years goes like this, in order: Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, Trigonometry, First Year Calculus (in some book series, called Pre-calculus). The reason for this is so that students who opt out of math after the first two years get exposure to both algebra and geometry before they quit the math cycle.



AT OUR HOUSE My current high schooler used *Foerster's Algebra 1*, which was written by an engineer and is a high school classic. It went well, but I certainly could have used *Math Without Borders.* Then we moved to Art of Problem Solving and haven't looked back. When he gets a new AoPS math set, he disappears with it into his room to "read up a bit." I don't know about you, but I don't read math books like novels. I'm glad he does.

Science

Science at the high school level should be part hands-on and part theory. Although you aren't going to construct all the possibilities that you read about in chemistry class, it's a bit of a shame to spend an entire semester reading about chemical reactions and never completing one yourself. Think of the smell — er, experience — you miss if you read a book on biology and never

cut open a fish cadaver.

Thoughts of formaldehyde and dissection instruments aside, science is an experimental subject by nature. Sometimes you have to get your hands dirty. And if your student plans to continue education past twelfth grade, colleges and other higher institutions of learning want to see evidence of doing along with reading.

Here are some science options that are robust enough to be college-entrance worthy:

- **CK-12:** (www.ck12.org) From earth science through physics, CK-12 offers free online textbooks with built-in definitions, videos, and more. See a word in colored text you don't know? Click it and it opens a browser tab where you can explore the definition, simulations, and real-world examples of the concept. Includes practice questions to check understanding after each reading section.
- **Learn Science Academy:** (www.learnscience.academy) The Conceptual Science series: Conceptual Chemistry, Conceptual Integrated Science, Conceptual Physical Science, and Conceptual Physics, have a dedicated website where the authors provide explanatory videos, worksheets, quizzes, and lab manuals to make the textbook a complete full-credit course for homeschoolers. If this approach works for you, here's everything you need but high school biology. Available from the website; requires a copy of the textbook.
- **Miller-Levine Biology:** (www.biology.com) Much like Foerster's algebra courses mentioned earlier, this is a classic. This book has been through multiple revisions, and the authors offer chapter by chapter resources at www.millerandlevine.com. You can easily find used copies online if you don't want to purchase the new version. Check Amazon and eBay in addition to the website for copies.
- **Oak Meadow:** (www.oakmeadow.com) Oak Meadow offers all the science courses you need for high school. You find the standards: biology, chemistry, and physics, plus options for anatomy and physiology, environmental science, and forensic science. Biology and chemistry courses include lab kits. Available from the website.

How do you accomplish this as a homeschooler without spending thousands

of dollars on equipment and a home science lab? You have a few options:

- **Hire a tutor.** If your brother-in-law majored in biology in college, see if he'd be interested in tutoring his fine, upstanding nephews and nieces for dinner once in a while (or, barring that, for a fee). You buy the textbooks, and he teaches the class. (May I suggest a really nice cake for his birthday?)
- **Join a co-op.** Some homeschool organizations offer high school level sciences as part of the weekly class list. The co-op tells you what text to buy, assesses a materials fee, and then a volunteer parent with experience or a hired tutor proceeds to teach the class.
- **Use online videos to help.** If you get stuck or need some extra umph to get you through a science topic, you can turn here for videos, simulations, and explanations:
  - **HippoCampus Science Courses:** (www.hippocampus.org) This site offers a plethora of science videos on practically any topic you can think of in a biology, chemistry, physics, or earth science textbook. You can browse by topic, or click a tab that correlates videos to the sections of your particular textbook.
  - **Khan Academy:** (www.khanacademy.org) Check into Khan Academy Science if you want explanations for biology, chemistry, physics, electrical engineering, anatomy and physiology, or cosmology and astronomy. Videos include calculations, full-color illustrations, and animations where appropriate.
  - **M.I.T. Blossoms library:** (blossoms.mit.edu) This collection of videos from biology, chemistry, physics (and mathematics) helps to add spice or understanding to your class. Unlike some other sites, the Blossoms library offers a 25–30 minute video plus learning activities to solidify or expand the concept taught. Not all videos are in English; these include a downloadable transcript in the original language plus English so you can follow along. Links at the bottom of each video page lead to teacher resources like lesson plans and handouts as well as online resources.

History and social studies

U.S. History. World History. Geography. Government and Economics. If you insert one course per year, leaving government and econ for the senior year (because that's when the schools teach it), you have a four-year spread of social studies courses. If you feel like you have a good handle on these subjects, or at least a good familiarity with the local library, you can do all of them without reading textbooks cover to cover.

Parents who teach using a classical education model (see Chapter 11) alter this a bit, and generally begin the world history survey again in ninth grade, hitting ancient civilizations, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Middle Ages, China, the explorers, and the New World (all 200+ years of it) one more time before college. They sometimes incorporate the government curriculum into the history of the United States as they cover it. This ties everything together, and you still cover government during the twelfth grade.

If you want to opt for a ready-made curriculum for these courses (and who doesn't?) you have plenty of choices. Here are some tried-and-true favorites:

- **Big History Project:** (https://school.bighistoryproject.com/) I try not to gush, but I can't say enough about the Big History Project. It's science and history combined, as it traces life from The Big Bang to modern times in ten jam-packed sections. The students immerse themselves in astronomy, geology, biology, and history via reading selections, graphics, videos, and writing assignments. You can use it to cover one semester or a year, and it contains much more material than you can ever use for one course. And it's free. Did I mention that it's free? Be sure to take the nine-hour instructor course before you try to teach it. It helps a lot.
- **BuildYourLibrary:** (www.buildyourlibrary.com): This literature-based curriculum's Level 12 includes government, economics, and American History, with a photography elective included. Levels 10 and 11 include World History parts I and II and geography. If your child enjoys reading, this is an easy way to cover everything.
- **iCivics:** (www.icivics.org) Founded by Justice Sandra Day O'Conner, iCivics provides lessons and games to lead your students through government/civics class. Free to use, you download the lessons and go. Be sure to look at the scope and sequence document; it offers two different tracks, one for high school and one for younger students.

- **World History Project:** (http://whp.oerproject.com/) The follow-up course to the Big History Project, this course gives you two options. You can begin at the beginning, with a discussion on history stories, historical thinking, and early humans, or you can begin at 1750 and move forward. Or do both (not at the same time, unless your student lives and breathes history). This course includes readings, videos, vocabulary, and writing exercises. Like the Big History Project, this is also free online. Sign up with a teacher account and then add your students by email invitation.

Languages

If you plan to continue your schooling after high school, then taking two years of a foreign language is a must. (It's also a good idea if you want to communicate with a broad range of people in your own community.) Although you can take two years of any foreign language, colleges expect to see the most common ones: French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, or Spanish. Chapter 27 goes into more detail about foreign languages in your homeschool.



TIP Although spending two years learning one language and then two years learning another may be more fun, you get more out of your language studies if you stick with one language long enough to read simple passages and ask where to find the bathroom in that language. Although I can identify the word "sale" in several different languages, for example, I lack the proficiency to determine the best route to the store in question. Thus, the usefulness of my multilingual sale-finding ability is limited. Spending more than two years with one language gives you a good chance of locating the store before I do.

Driver education

Whether you consider driver training to be a must or an elective depends mostly on your student's desire to drive. For some parents, it's a when-we-get-around-to-it kind of class, while others consider it a must at age 15½. At my house, we'll probably end up with one of each. This isn't that abnormal either.

You have a couple options for driver education, and your choice may hinge

on your state of residence. One alternative is to sign your child up with a private driving course in your community. Alternatively, your school system may allow local homeschoolers to attend driver education courses through the school.



TIP Another option may be to use a planned curriculum designed for parents to teach their drivers at home. A company called Driver Ed in a Box sends you a package that includes a parent manual, traffic safety videos, student access to online instruction modules, guidelines for 50 hours of behind-the-wheel training, and more. This is what we used for our two drivers, and what I'll use for Driver Number 3, should he ever decide that he wants to learn to operate a vehicle. Find them at www.driveredinabox.com.

Electives

Electives make high school worth attending. Unless your student lives for prepositions or completes calculus problems in his sleep, electives add that spice and variety to the day that make you glad you're a junior. Just as all work and no play make a dull homeschooler, all high school core classes and no electives make for a disgruntled student.

Plug in a class here and there to add life and lightheartedness to an otherwise heavy schedule. If you were taking world history, government, trigonometry, and The Rise and Fall of the English Term Paper all in one semester, you'd be glad for a break, too. Although all the electives in this section certainly don't qualify as fluffy (take logic, for example), they do give your student a break from the core four: math, English, history, and social studies.

Art

Although art isn't required at any high school I know, it gives your student the chance to be creative and it qualifies as a fine arts credit, which may be required by your state. Spending weeks on a really good drawing or painting produces a sense of accomplishment as few other things do, and if your student enjoys this type of endeavor, then art class may be a good option.

You can go to the library and come home with a stack of books that cover all different types of art instruction, focusing on drawing, painting, or sculpture.

This is a perfectly valid way to construct a course. If you take this option, be sure to check YouTube for instructional videos on your technique of the week.

Another option is to purchase a curriculum from a company like Artistic Pursuits, www.artisticpursuits.com. This company has two high-school-level books. Book one concentrates on the elements of art while book two investigates color.

Computing

This class can be as simple or as in-depth as you want to make it. You can use the time to help your student learn the essentials of word processing and spreadsheets, or you can take a computer apart and put it back together. These are two entirely different computing skills.

Students who want to learn computer programming can work through online coursework with Code Academy, online at www.codeacademy.com. Learn Java, Python, and HTML. Or follow a skill path such as Create Video Games with Phaser. Even more adventuresome, dive into a career path learning sequence for Code Foundations, Computer Science, or Web Development. When your student finishes one of the course sequences, you can open the syllabus list for the course and it shows how your student scored on all the sessions. Print that out and you have a record of learning.



TIP If you want a readable introduction to computer information, may I suggest the *For Dummies* series. As a rule, they're written well, and they cover the basics without drowning you in data. (I recommended the *For Dummies* series to others long before I wrote one.)

Home economics

Home economics class can be as easy as accumulating various books on home skills from your public library. Throw in a book or two on budgeting and buying and you're there. Nutrition, cooking, sewing, needlework, light home repair, housekeeping, childcare, and household money management can all qualify as home economics. However, trying to cover all these topics in one or two semesters will stress both you and your student. Pick one or two and go from there.

Music

High school music usually means choir, orchestra, band, or theater. You can do all this as a homeschooler, but it means thinking outside the box a bit. A search for high-school-level choir, orchestra, and band may lead you to private instrument lessons and either a homeschool co-op or community singing or playing group. Theater, on the other hand, could mean a group of homeschoolers or the community theater troupe. Although you can offer these classes at home yourself, group synergy definitely makes these activities more than the sum of their individual parts.

Track the hours that your student spends in these environments, and then record them as elective coursework. More participation than book learning goes on here, as your student learns to function seamlessly as part of an assembly. He may discover a new talent or interest at the same time, especially if he joins a theater troupe to work on sets but becomes enamored with the art of stage lighting. (And pyrotechnics for the stage is a whole different discussion altogether!)



TIP Turn to Chapter 12 for additional ideas on bringing music into your home.

Speech

Although the idea of speech class may scare the words right out of you, taking a speech course at the high school level is a good idea. For one thing, public speaking is part of everyday life. Whether you talk in front of co-workers or present a project to your college business class, you find yourself in front of people more than you think.



TIP One option for high school speech is to join a local homeschool co-op. These families often offer speech and debate class as part of their lineup, and they get a parent with speech training to teach it. Another alternative is to purchase the speech guidebooks from a public speaking organization, such as Toastmasters International, online at `www.toastmasters.org`, and work through those.

Other electives

Although you may have some trouble locating a homeschool philosophy text that you like, if you think philosophy is important, then cover it in high school. The same goes for home maintenance, small engine repair, electronics, or anything else that catches your student's interest (or that you feel is necessary for a well-rounded education).

The only caveat is that you need to fill a semester's worth of work or more with the course so that you can include it as an elective on the high school transcript (more about records and transcripts later). Otherwise, it goes under the "Interests" section of the transcript, and all that work counts as playtime instead of education. Well, if not playtime, at least as interest and volunteering accruement.



When one of my children reached his senior year, we looked up and realized he had 400 hours of video production volunteer work. So I gave him three years' worth of elective credit in video production. When he got to college, one of his roommates was a telecommunications major. The conversation went something like this: "Dude! You learned all that before you got here? That's stuff I learned in my sophomore level T-COM classes!" These experiences count.

Planning for the Tidy Transcript

High school is the first time you really need to keep records of schoolwork for The Permanent Record. (Remember that threat from grade school? *This will go on your permanent record.* Yeah. Right.) The records you keep now become the information that goes on a transcript later.

Before you panic, you don't need to mark down every time your lovely student sneezes. High school records mainly require that you start a folder that you can keep track of for four to six years without misplacing it somewhere. At our house, that's a trick in itself, but maybe you're more organized than I am.



REMEMBER Every semester, write down your student's

- Courses
- Final course grade
- Textbooks or materials for that course

Title your courses reasonably. At home you may call the class, "FruFru Elizabethan Poetry and Prose," but the transcript needs to say something like, "English Literature 1 and 2." College admissions officers have no frame of reference for FruFru Poetry and Prose from any time period, and you don't want to confuse them.



TIP When you finish all four years, you have a list of course names and final grades, along with a grade-point average. (Chapter 24 goes into detail on how to figure grades.) To determine a grade-point average, do the following:

1. **Assign a point value to the final grade.**

   Generally, *A* = 4, *B* = 3, *C* = 2, *D* = 1, and *F* = 0.

2. **Multiply the grade value by the amount of credit for that particular course. This gives you the number of grade points for the course in question.**

   Course credits, also known as Carnegie Units, are covered in the next section. To make it easy for everyone, most courses equal one unit. This gives a two-semester course that was worth one credit a final point value of 4 (assuming your stellar student got an A).

3. **Add up all the grade points for the semester, year, or four years, depending on the span of time that you want the grade average to reflect.**

   This gives you a total number of grade points. If our mythical stellar student takes two courses and gets an *A* and a *B*, the total grade points

would be 7.

4. **Divide the grade point total by the total number of classes.**

   This gives you a grade-point average, otherwise known as GPA. Stellar student receives a GPA of 3.5 because 7 (the total grade points) divided by 2 (the number of classes taken) equals 3.5.

Keep the materials list in a file just in case anyone wants to see it. Some schools may want to see your list, but most of them probably won't. Also, keep a list of the extra activities your student immersed himself in for the past four years: volunteer work, part-time jobs, the save-the-plants committee, and so on. This list generally goes on your college application forms. Colleges want to see leadership potential as well as activity. For some reason, bookworms who do nothing but sit at home and read physics texts interest them little.



TIP It's not unusual for a university to request a list of all courses taken, along with texts used, who taught the course, and a bit about the methodology (or what you did in the course). When I compiled my document for the colleges, it was 14 pages long and listed instructor qualifications if applicable, volunteer work, and extra fine arts experiences.

Check your state's requirements

In order to tabulate a grade point average, however, you need grades. Before the grades, of course, you need classes. Otherwise, how is your Bunny Boo going to take over the world after graduation? The teen needs to be edu-ma-cated! And that's where course selection comes in.

Finding out what your state requires for high school graduation is a good start. If your child wants to continue to university, community college, or trade school, all of these destinations hold a core expectation that your child knows pretty much what every other child graduate of a local or regional high school knows. While Basket Weaving in the Renaissance may be an extremely cool class, and one I'd like to take myself, it can't take the place of English or math on your child's transcript. Even when state laws don't spell

out individual high school courses for homeschoolers (and most do not), they assume a generally equal educational level with their state graduates. Chapter 3 gives you the basics on state laws and where you may find yours.

Start at the end and work backwards

Your high school is probably going to need four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science, and two years of a foreign language. That's the bare minimum. In some states, foreign language is optional, or only necessary for students headed to college. Given all that, how do you set up a course of study for high school, and where do you begin?

First, take a deep breath. Where do you want to be at the end of this? You want a tight grip on sanity, and your child wants a high school diploma. Great. That's a good place to start. Once you get an idea of the big picture — which is what I mean by starting at the end — you can fill in the details.

Your big picture is the diploma. In order to get there you need:

- Your state's required number of credits. Say you need 20 credits, with one full year's work equaling one credit and 0.5 credits per semester. California gives 10 credits to a year and 5 credits to one semester; some states give one credit per semester and two credits for a year, which would equal 40 credits. Your state may vary.
- You now need courses to fill those 20 credit slots. You know you need English, for four years or four credits.
- Math gives you three credits. Does your state require four years, or your child wants to continue to college? Then let's set aside four credits for math. One more credit won't hurt anybody but your student, who may or may not die if required to take one more math class.
- Social studies requires three credits, but it's broken up into required courses. For now we will call it three credits and move on.
- Two years of science gives us biology and chemistry for a non-science major. For a child wanting to go into the sciences, you would double that and probably cover a science every year. For now, let's say we have a normal history-loving kid, and give her two credits in science.
- Let's stop to tabulate. We have English + math + social studies + science = 13 credits. (Remember, we added another math course above to make

four.) Those are all the absolutely required courses. Let's keep going.

- Your daughter has fallen in love with Italian, and you found a great curriculum or a personal tutor somewhere. Or she wants to attend a university that requires two years of a world language. Add 2 credits for two years of Italian. We are now at 15 of our 20 credits.
- What shall we do with the last five? These are called electives (you remember that from high school, right?) and they can be anything you want unless your state decides they have to fall into particular areas, like my state does.
- Be sure to check your state requirements for odd classes like physical education. My high schooler needs one fine arts credit. And half a wellness credit, also known as health class. After that he can take anything he wants.
- Electives can be photography, fashion design, art, music, computer science, small engine mechanics, childcare, home economics, or something else of your choosing. They can be more English, math, science, social studies, or foreign language courses. An elective can be anything that interests your child that can fill about 120 hours of instruction. That's the amount of time needed in a subject to provide credit for a full year. If you want a one-semester course, you need to fill 60 hours of instruction, which really isn't that hard to do with an engrossing topic.

There you go. It looks complicated, but if you fill out a sheet of paper like this, you will know exactly which courses your student needs for high school, plus electives which you can either plan all at once or choose on the fly. Sometimes selecting electives at the beginning of each year is one of the best parts of planning. Sit down with your high schooler, a cup of coffee or two (one for each of you, not two for yourself) and plan out the year. It's fun. And the coffee is good.

Choosing courses that count

You have your framework now. Next we need to fill in the framework with courses so you know exactly where you're going for the next four years. They fly so fast that even if you change things down the road it's good to develop a general four-year plan. Ready? And go!

Whew. We can slow down and take a breath. It seems stressful to plan out the course list, but it's also quite a bit of fun. Say you begin with English. You know your student needs four years of English. How are you going to break that up? Here are some options:

- **English 9/10/11/12 that contains a little of everything each year:** A bit of grammar, literature, poetry, writing, and public speaking.
- **Grammar Review/American Literature/World Literature/Composition:** This breaks it down by year, starting with grammar in Grade 9 (usually with some short stories thrown in), and then moving up one topic each year.
- **The Victorian Novel/Science Fiction as Literature/Classic Greek and Roman Poetry and Prose/Class Struggle in Literature:** These are … deep. I made up all these titles to show you what can be done, and a couple of these I wouldn't think about teaching, but I bet you might do great. Is your student interested in Russian literature, mythology and culture, or the short story during World War I? You can certainly turn any of these topics into a one-semester English course.

Talk it over with your student. Check out the curriculum suggestions earlier in the chapter. What sounds interesting? Write it down.

Now move on to math. Mathematics in high school is more programmed and provides fewer options for creativity on the transcript. You follow a sequence of courses in the U.S. (or a variation of that sequence), and everyone ends at or near the same place. The math progression is usually as follows:

- Algebra 1 in Grade 9
- Geometry in Grade 10
- Algebra 2 in Grade 11
- Trigonometry or Pre-calculus in Grade 12

Your student can always double up on a course, taking Algebra 1 and Geometry the same year if she wants to. Sometimes students begin the math sequence early so they can fit calculus into the mix. Your ninth-grade class then begins wherever you are and moves up course by course until you have your required credits. If your student took Algebra 1 and Geometry in middle

school, she still needs three courses in high school unless you have a good reason for stopping early. That's how these things work.

Math wasn't hard at all. Now tackle science. Some states require two science semesters, while others prefer three years. Our previous list slated two years, which are usually biology and chemistry. There you go. Science is finished.

On to social studies. This subject is only tricky because certain courses are usually taken at certain times. This is the flow for three years of courses:

- **Grade 9:** Social studies courses are optional.
- **Grade 10:** Two semesters of world history or one semester of world history and one semester of geography.
- **Grade 11:** American history all year.
- **Grade 12:** One semester of government and one semester of economics.

As always, your state may vary, but this is a normal progression of social studies courses. If your child really likes history and geography, add more courses to the list.

Now add a list of other required courses that may appear on your student's transcript, from foreign language to physical education. This is the time to make sure you have everything so that no essential course gets left out by mistake. I don't know about your house, but my graduating seniors don't think it's funny to schedule freshman health class the summer of their senior year because Mom forgot.

Here are some of the extra requirements in many states:

- Physical education, one or two semesters
- Health and wellness, one semester
- Foreign language, four semesters, years one and two
- Fine arts, two semesters

Now you are down to electives, which is truly the fun part. Decide what extras your student wants or needs on the transcript, and then set about findng or designing those.



TIP When you sit down to put all this together, using a blank sheet of paper divided into four sections helps keep things organized. Put all the required courses into each year's block (up to six per semester) and then decide where you want your extra fun classes to go.

Prepping for College

A college-prep curriculum really isn't high school on steroids. Think of it more like a well-planned recipe. If you follow the ingredient list using the right quantities and order, you end up with a tastier product than if you throw everything into a bowl, stir it together, and plunk it on the table. (Ewww …)

Colleges generally require that homeschool students show the same work as the other incoming freshmen they see. They want to see a common group of classes from all students that total 20 Carnegie Units (or in some areas of the country, you double each 0.5 Carnegie Unit to get a total of 40 for graduation).



TIP A *Carnegie Unit* is a method of measuring a year's worth of work. At the high school level, each Carnegie unit is worth a point. Twenty of these year-long courses total the 20 Carnegie Units that most schools require for graduation. (One-semester courses equal 0.5 credit.) Therefore, these are the classes most colleges scour the transcripts to see.

A normal lineup of college-prep high school courses looks like this:

- **Computer Technology:** One year for 1 Carnegie Unit. Some colleges require an Intro to Computers course these days. If your student doesn't know the basics of keyboarding and word processing, now is a great time to start.
- **English:** Four years or 4 Carnegie Units. One of these courses, usually a semester of senior-level English, should be a research-based course.

- **Foreign Language:** Three to four years. Most colleges want to see two or more consecutive years with the same language for 2+ Carnegie Units.
- **Math:** Four years or 4 Carnegie Units. Usually college prep math includes Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, Trigonometry or Pre-calculus, and Calculus. Students who manage all this usually begin the math sequence in middle school. This makes colleges look upon the transcript kindly.
- **Physical Education:** Many schools require one year of physical education for 1 Carnegie Unit.
- **Sciences:** Three years for 3 Carnegie Units. At least one year must be a lab science, such as biology, chemistry, or physics. Generally, college prep science includes at least biology and one year of chemistry with a year of physics if you can manage it.
- **Social Studies:** Three years or 3 Carnegie Units. Include one year of American history for 1 Carnegie Unit and a semester of government and a semester of economics to total 1 Carnegie Unit. Throw in a third year of world history or a semester of geography and an elective, and you're there. All these courses add up to 19 Carnegie Units. Generally, the basic requirement is 20 Carnegie Units; if your student carries a full load of seven courses for four years (which would be about six hours of instruction each day if every course lasted for 50 minutes), your student achieves 28 Carnegie Units.

Add extra courses to fill out the basic 20 Carnegie Unit requirement: journalism, health, additional foreign language, home economics, art or music appreciation, or a speech class. In addition to filling the transcript roster, electives like these broaden your student's horizons. They make your student a more well-rounded individual. (Who knows? She may discover a new love when she takes that speech class.)



TIP Generally, a Carnegie Unit equals 120 hours of instruction, in case you care. This number helps you to convert other activities into educational terms for your transcript, such as the time your student apprentices with a friendly accountant.

ACTing on Your InSATiable Desire for Standardized Tests

The ACT and SAT are the tests that you take to get into college. They are offered at schools all over the country several times each year. To take the test, you register in advance, selecting a testing location when you register. On the date of the test, you show up with your registration confirmation in hand, take the exam, and hope for the best.



TIP Take the exam in the fall of your senior year (or earlier) so that the results are processed and available when you begin the college admissions process. Waiting for your test scores to finish an application is, at the very least, a bummer. (If your score qualifies as a bummer after you receive it, you can retake both the SAT and ACT. Giving the exam an extra try before college is yet another reason to take the test early.)

SAT

The SAT, otherwise known as the Scholastic Achievement Test, gauges how well you take tests (visit online at www.collegeboard.com). It also ranks you on your answers to multiple-choice questions about math and language, but mostly it tells how well you take tests. Because colleges need some kind of scale to compare incoming freshmen, the SAT and ACT exams give them a benchmark of comparison.

Some colleges require that students take the SAT, while others prefer ACT (American College Testing) scores. Check with the institutions that your student has in mind to determine which test the school wants to see. If you take the SAT and find yourself applying to an ACT-accepting school, don’t fret. Every college admissions department I’ve talked to has access to a handy conversion chart in the office.

ACT

The ACT Assessment covers math, English, reading, and science — it’s a completely different test from the SAT, and your favorite college may not accept both. Visit the ACT online at www.act.org for information on

registering for the test and locating a center near you.

If you want to practice before diving into the real thing, *The Official ACT Prep Guide* book, published by Wiley, gives you tips and tricks and past tests for honing your test-taking skills.

DO I NEED TO TAKE THE GED?

Deciding whether or not to take the GED is an "it depends" kind of thing. Contrary to popular belief, GED does *not* stand for General Equivalency Diploma. It stands for General Education Development and tests whether you possess what the test considers to be high-school-level competencies in language arts, math, science, and social studies.

If you plan to go to college, most colleges don't care whether you have a GED. As long as you produce SAT or ACT scores and an official-looking transcript, the college will be happy. Check with the college for any special admissions requirements. If you need a GED, the school can tell you.

Some employers may require a GED before they will hire a prospective employee. Most employers do consider a GED to be equivalent to a high school diploma. Stating that you are a graduate and that you were homeschooled may do the trick. In all the jobs that I've ever held, no one asked me to drag my high school diploma into the office to prove that I graduated. Plus, times are changing; not too long ago, homeschoolers were members of a rare breed, but now, so many balanced homeschool graduates precede your children that they may find no difficulty at all.

Chapter 9

Completing Twelfth Grade Doesn't Mean It's Over

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Identifying your options**
- **Learning a skill**
- **Going to college**

Celebrations are always the same no matter where you hold them. A homeschool graduation brings mist to your eyes when your child stands among the few dozen graduating students just as it would if she stood with hundreds. Actually, there's a good chance your eyes will be even mistier because you know every hurdle your child jumped, every barrier she crossed, and every project she completed along the way. You were there.

As a homeschool parent, graduation brings a bittersweet day to your life. On the one hand, you're glad it's over! All the assignments, teaching, and educational oversight can now come to an end. But you also stand at the end of something precious, that amazing opportunity and privilege that you enjoyed when you took your child's hand and you learned through the school years together.

Now that the first 12 years are complete, where does your student go? These are the pages to turn to when those nagging questions nip at your heels, and you wonder what your student will do after the school years. Whether you're at that brink now or you have many years to go, look here for ideas and post-homeschool options.

Spreading Their Wings and Earning Their Keep

Homeschooled students have just as many avenues open to them as other students after they finish their high school years — maybe even more! Because homeschool students tend to be independent thinkers by the time they finish their educational track, they often opt for some unusual alternatives. Although many homeschool students move on to college after 12 years of schooling, certainly not all do. Homeschool is no more a guarantee that your child will attend (or even want to attend) a college than any other type of education.



AT OUR HOUSE I have a child who fluctuates between wanting to work as an engineer and as a blacksmith. Both are full-time positions. One requires a college degree, while the other requires a relatively intensive apprenticeship. What will he decide? Only time will tell. I hope that by homeschooling him I prepare him for both.

Continuing to college

Homeschoolers generally do well at their colleges. Some colleges and universities welcome homeschooled students more than others. Even the colleges who welcome homeschoolers, however, often require that they take additional entrance examinations to get into the school. A college that requires the SAT may also insist that a student take one or more of the SAT Subject Tests, which are specific exams in writing, history, sciences, or foreign languages.



REMEMBER You can only take a maximum of three SAT Subject Tests at a time, so most colleges who require the tests only ask you to take up to three. The reason that they require them at all is so your student can prove that she knows what she says she knows. Although singling out homeschoolers may not seem fair, admissions offices want to ensure that they accept truly qualified candidates — especially if scholarship money is involved.

Marching in the military

If your student wants to join the military after homeschooling, he needs an official high school diploma. You can issue that yourself from one of the diploma manufacturers that cater to homeschool families.

COLLEGE ACCREDITATION. IT MATTERS.

I want to take a moment and talk about the elephant in the room. Yes, that one — big, furry, long trunk, munching on peanuts in the corner? You found him. That's the elephant. In higher education the elephant in the room is known as *college accreditation*. Everybody inside the hallowed walls knows the difference, but in the name of "let's all be nice in the sandbox," nobody wants to talk about it when you visit colleges. I'm going to talk about it. Because it's important. And you need to know.

When you attend a college, you may be making a really smart financial decision, or you may find out ten years down the road that you threw away thousands of dollars. What's the difference between those two results? Accreditation is the difference. Accreditation is the sticker that a college wears on its institutional self that says *I matter.* It's the seal of approval that says their courses are good quality. And frankly, some accrediting agencies are completely fabricated to make you feel like you're making a good monetary and educational decision when … you aren't.

Why does it matter, if you have the degree? Well, as far as getting that first job out of school, it probably doesn't matter. Many employers don't care where you went to school, and if you start your own business, no one usually cares. It matters when you decide you want to get a master's degree from the local state university and they laugh at you. Not really. They don't actually laugh. Actually, they sigh, get a tear in their eyes, and try to explain to you that *you don't have a real degree.* That's right. If your school isn't accredited by the correct agency, other schools may diss them by not accepting their graduates for advanced degrees. (See why everyone avoids this topic? It's just messy.)

You want your kids to attend a school that says it is a *regionally accredited institution.* That means that one of six governing bodies visited and corresponded and harangued and reviewed this institution's departments until it determined that it was teaching what it says it teaches, and that it teaches it in a sound and thorough manner. There are only six of these groups in the U.S. They are the Higher Learning Commission, Middle States Commission on Higher Education, New England Commission on Higher Education, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges, and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. That's it. Which one visits the college in your area depends entirely on where you live. Each of these groups has very specific state jurisdictions.

If a school insists that it has a national accreditation, run away as fast as you can unless accreditation isn't important to you. The only exceptions are for individual programs *after* the institution has a regional accreditation. For example, an art school at a university may be accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design. That's a good thing. That group knows what they're doing. The university that manages this department, however, received the *institutional accreditation* from one of the regional agencies. If the school only offers bogus-sounding or national accreditations, however, run.

To apply for acceptance into a military academy, your student needs to complete a college-prep or honors course list, score well on the SAT or ACT, and demonstrate leadership. The Air Force Academy would like to see a study of modern foreign languages on the transcript. Visit the website of the school that interests your teen to learn more.

Studying at a trade/vocational school

Going into a trade or vocational school after completing high school gives your student the best of both worlds. She gets the extra training that she needs to step into a skilled position after she leaves the classroom, and yet she's not tied up for four years (or more) at the local university. If your student has her heart set on working as a mechanic, computer troubleshooter, or electronics specialist, then a program specifically designed to teach those skills saves her plenty of time.

My local technical college offers programs in interior design, machine tool technology, medical assistantship, and accounting — plus a whole range of programs that fall in between those broad categories. Maybe your area school does, too. Look them up in your phone book and give them a call. They'll be more than happy to send your student a brochure or direct you to the official school website.

Entering the workforce

Part of productive citizenship is moving into the working public to provide for self and family. Although you don't particularly want your 10-year-old hawking hot dogs on the corner, when your child reaches age 18 or older, wage earning should probably be a topic of conversation.

Many homeschoolers move directly into the workforce. If this is the case, they basically have two options: They work for someone else, or they begin their own enterprise.

Working for someone else

Homeschoolers prove to be popular hires in the workplace because they know how to work independently. This is a huge boon for supervisors and managers who would much rather get the job done than baby-sit a new hire. Some national companies and restaurant chains actively recruit homeschoolers because of their work ethics and independence.

Taking a job right after high school ensures that your student has some money in her possession right away. If your student opts for this route, don't overlook community colleges as a place to get extra training when needed. Relatively inexpensive in the huge scheme of things, these local institutions (sometimes called state vocational or technical schools) teach everything from algebra to computer programming.

Starting a business

A second option in the work realm is to begin your own business. What kind of business? The best options for small business are those jobs that no one else wants to do or that no one gets around to completing even though they should. Computer backups, fish tank cleaning, and outdoor window washing are examples of jobs that often get pushed to the back burner. Another good option is to capitalize on strengths. If you love dogs more than anyone else you know, a dog-sitting service sounds like a small endeavor but in some areas of the country you can make a killing. Devising and starting a small business while still in school allows your student to test the waters with her idea before making it a full-time occupation.



REMEMBER Small businesses don't have to require huge bankrolls to get started. My husband began four or five different small businesses in the past several years, and not one of them needed a business loan to get it going. With a little research and an abundance of ingenuity, your student can start a profitable business with very little cash in hand. When you do it this way, the money you earn goes to your Uncle Sam and into your pocket instead of back to the banker who really owns it to begin with.

Strapping on the Tool Belt

One movement gaining momentum in the homeschooling arena is the internship or apprenticeship as a training tool. Usually, an *internship* takes a semi-trained student for a specific period of time, such as the university internships that engineering students pursue, while an *apprenticeship* trains a learner from the ground up. These options don't get much press, and you probably won't hear much about them. The truth is, though, that a few people

are looking up and realizing that the teenagers aren't getting the training they need.

Business people and others are taking notice of the problem, and they quietly offer a solution. You aren't going to enter the medical field as a doctor through an apprenticeship program. That is neither realistic nor wise. If you want to learn how to run a retail shop without losing your mind, however, that's another matter.



AT OUR HOUSE A friend of ours currently works with one 14-year-old homeschooled boy and a 15-year-old homeschooled boy as interns. He works with one of them in web design and graphics while he trains the other in programming skills. He looked at their interests and skill sets, and is quietly helping to refine those skills so they can go on to excel in their fields. This arrangement gives the teens some spending money and much experience.

This is only one example of how an internship can work. Poke around the Internet or ask friends of friends. They may know of someone doing this in your community. Is your child an animal lover but unsure about going to college? See about an internship with your favorite vet to test the waters.

The point of an apprenticeship is to hone skills and interests already present. If your child shows a fanatical interest in something that doesn't require a college degree, ask around and see if someone would be interested in taking your child as a learner. Experts love to spend time with people who love their field of work, so an apprenticeship is often a good match for someone with a mature skill set and a younger student.



TIP If you do a web search, the term *homeschool internship* gives you more positive results than *homeschool apprenticeship,* but you may check both to get it all.

Here are a few endeavors that benefit from apprenticeship programs:

- **Baking or the restaurant biz:** If your student is interested in foods for sale — whether as a baker or confectionery expert (also known as candy maker), a cake decorator, or a restaurant staff member — an internship introduces him to the basics of the business along with some of the necessary details (such as contracting with the nightly cleaning crew).
- **Blacksmithing and related occupations:** Some skills, such as blacksmithing and pottery, are best taught one-on-one. These jobs are tailor-made for an apprenticeship program, and many working experts use internships to train the next generation of skilled workers.
- **Electricity and welding:** These occupations often have formal internship programs that allow the kids to earn while they learn. They work underneath a licensed electrician or welder while taking part-time classes and then graduate with a certificate and are ready to take their own licensing test. Check your local program for age and eligibility requirements.
- **Retail:** There's much more to retail than standing behind the counter. A retail apprenticeship teaches your student about keeping the books, ordering, supplies, stock, overhead, and the myriad of other details that keep a shop running.
- **Service and hospitality:** If your child wants to work with guests or loves hospitality, perhaps you could find a bed-and-breakfast interested in taking an intern. This would give her hands-on experience before she goes into the world to seek her fortune in the hotel industry.



TIP A while ago, I met a student who worked at our local grocery store. She was taking a class in hotel management at the local college, and as part of her class she arranged an internal internship with the grocery store where she already worked. For two-week rotations, she worked *every* department in the store, just as the management trainees did before taking their final positions. I thought this was a great idea. Not only did it introduce this student to all the areas required to keep a grocery up and running, but it also gave the management a chance to see if she truly excelled in a department she normally didn't inhabit.

Continuing Homeschool through College

With a tear in your eye, you wave goodbye while your recent graduate pulls out of the driveway. Car packed to the brim, she's on her way to college for that exciting freshman year. Or maybe not.

Although many homeschool students take the opportunity to attend college away from home, a few decide to stay near the nest even when the option to leave presents itself. College at home presents quite a few advantages:

- A familiar living environment
- Friends you find comfortable
- People you know who care

Staying at home

You or your teen may opt for college at home for several different reasons. These include, but certainly aren't limited to, the following:

- **The age or emotional development of the student dictates that they really should stay at home for college.** Most colleges don't know what to do with 12-year-olds, for example. Although a school may be delighted to teach an exceptionally bright pre-teen, the institution knows that it has no place where it can guide that child's emotional or physical development.

  Even if a student should be old enough chronologically to attend college, if that child still shows emotional development well below his years, then keeping him home for a year or two while the emotions catch up may be a good idea. If you wouldn't send a 14-year-old to college, and your student still functions at a 14-year-old level emotionally (regardless of book knowledge and aptitude), you may want to re-evaluate the decision to send her halfway across the country to a university.

- **The student decides to stay close to home.** He has no desire to live on campus. He enjoys the town he lives in and wants to stay there. He has access to a full university program close to home, and it offers what he

wants.

- **You can save plenty of money if your student lives at home instead of residing on campus.** Housing and meal costs are high; add to that the weekly (sometimes daily) dinners out, and you may have a hefty bill on your hands. College is a good time for a student to spread her wings and start to fly on her own, but if she's not ready, you can certainly find a college program to pursue from home.

Finding a suitable program

If you live in a community that offers one or more local colleges or universities, you're already well on your way to solving the problem. Your student may want to take classes at a local college while living at home. This gets her out of the house and onto campus during the school hours (whatever those may be this semester), but at home for nights and weekends.

Many colleges offer distance or online programs these days. Some of them offer complete programs where you never need to set foot on the university campus, while others expect to see your student's sunny face for a week or two each year. Requirements depend entirely on each school and its setup. When you read about a school's distance education requirements, they tell you the amount of time (if any) that the school requires bodily student attendance.



TIP To determine the best distance program fit for your student, you may want to do a web-based search or visit the Guide to Online Schools website at www.guidetoonlineschools.com and browse through the list of schools or degree programs.



REMEMBER

LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD

What will your children need in the future to survive in the work world — or even in the real world? Some individual skills, such as touch keyboarding, become more and more important every year. Although a company may provide a computer to a new hire, it certainly won't take the time to teach that person to type. In fact, a lack of keyboarding skill may keep your child

out of various segments of the job market.

One of the benefits of homeschooling is that parents with foresight can guide their children into that place where they can become the most productive adults. When you think of where your child wants to go and what he desires to do after he graduates, keep in mind that being is much more important than doing. You *do* many different tasks throughout your working years — how many people do you know who work in the fields they were trained for? I know very few, including the adults in my own household.

When you expose your students to many different experiences and learning opportunities within the homeschool framework, you enable them to become a person worth knowing. You also allow them to pursue any avenue they want — both interior decorating and a career with the Navy are possible for the student who explores his world to the fullest. Guiding your student into pastimes and occupations that develop skills and interests while you still teach him gives him the freedom to spread his wings and become the person he's meant to be after he leaves the fold.

Part 3

Choosing Your Cornerstone: Basic Curriculum Options

IN THIS PART …

Determine whether a distance learning program (and online option or something else) meets your needs.

Explore the possibilities within classical education. Learn Latin, play an instrument, read the classics, and appreciate the arts.

Discover the concept of learning from real books (as opposed to textbooks) with a Charlotte Mason education.

Watch your children learn through exploration in your own Montessori classroom.

As a Waldorf-style homeschooler, spend time outdoors and teach an in-depth main lesson that changes every four to six weeks.

Develop a project that allows for deep learning. Or perhaps opt instead for unit studies that teach several subjects together under one topic.

Enter the world of the unschooler. Throw textbooks to the wind and teach nearly everything you need through the process of your day.

Pack your bags, load up the kids, and take to the road for an adventure in worldschooling.

Select your materials from various publishers, assemble your own curriculum, and teach it your own way as an eclectic homeschooler.

Guide your exceptional learner to success, whether you teach a child who needs extra academic support or who is a gifted learner.

Chapter 10

Orbiting as a Satellite School under the Umbrella

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Making curriculum choices easy: Satellites**
- **Giving yourself more leeway: Independent study programs**
- **Making sure the program fits your needs**
- **Locating satellite or umbrella programs**

During one of your springtime romps outside in the neighborhood, your neighbor announces that he's decided to enroll as a satellite homeschool next year. You smile blankly and nod, all the while wondering what in the world space travel has to do with education.

Relax — you probably won't see your neighbor's kids building actual-size rockets in the back yard. As a satellite school, your friend may purchase an entire curriculum package from a private school that also promises to help with testing, lesson plans, and general teaching information should he need it. Instead of launching out with nothing but a teacher's manual and workbook to guide him, your neighbor decided to pay a little extra and get the whole package, which includes a human on the other end of the phone or email system if he needs one. Think of it as technical support for homeschooling.



PSPING IT

A private school satellite program, or PSP, can be much like a satellite school. Generally, PSPs are accredited schools that function as paperwork clearinghouses for homeschools. ISPs file required state forms, collect grades, and generally keep your homeschool paperwork organized in case the state or local education department wants to know what you're teaching. Often an ISP goes to bat for you if the state or county educational gurus try to

challenge your right to homeschool.

A PSP may, or may not, provide curriculum for the homeschool, so if you register with one, you may still be responsible for gathering your own curriculum. Most PSPs, though, give you ideas of where to look even if they tell you that you're on your own. Many homeschoolers in California use a private school satellite program because it meets the California state requirements and frees the family to teach the children rather than spend time filing forms for the state. Most other states, however, enjoy less restrictive laws than California, so while a family may opt to enroll as a satellite program for a year, they don't actually need the help of a PSP.

Riding the Satellite

A *satellite* homeschool (also called an *umbrella program*) functions as a tiny one-room schoolhouse under an established, usually private, school's oversight. You choose which school you want to use, pay your fee for the year, and the school files your attendance paperwork, grades, and any other paperwork you may need to prove you are homeschooling legally. Many of them also provide transcripts and a diploma at the end of the journey. Sometimes these groups provide curriculum, but most often they provide guidance in teaching and you buy the books.

Opting for a Complete Curriculum across the Distance

Distance education programs used to be known as satellite or umbrella programs as well as the true umbrella programs that keep track of your paperwork for you, which caused a lot of confusion. You may still see everything lumped together under one term. If you want or need a solution like this for your homeschool, be sure to take your time to read everything that an organization does — or does not — include.

Distance education is exactly what it sounds like, education at a distance. When you enroll as a member of a distance school, you receive the established school's complete curriculum for the grade you need. Math, science, language arts, social studies, history, spelling, art, and sometimes music and foreign language — the complete curriculum comes to your house ready to use. Sometimes, depending on the program and the age of the

student, the school offers everything, including pencils, paper, drawing paper, crayons, and whatever else the student should need for the school year. The school keeps the records, too.



WARNING Prepare thyself. Wondering whether you get all this stuff at once? How long it takes to get it all? How far in advance you should plan to participate in such a school? If you have to return anything? In what format do you usually have to send your records (scanned email, paper)? The unfortunate answer is that each school does it differently.

The textbooks and lesson plans that you receive should carry you from September through the end of May or the number of teaching days required by your state. At least, that's how it works in the best of worlds. Because each family is different, some families take a little longer than two semesters to go through one year's materials while other families may finish the year's work early and fill the week or two left in the school year with various educational field trips.



TIP A little-known fact, even among veteran homeschoolers, is that you don't *have* to finish all the textbooks every year. Some texts, such as spelling books, are designed for one-unit-per-week use, and these texts include 34 to 36 lessons so that you finish the book by the end of the year.

Other texts, such as math, give you more material than you could probably use in two school semesters. Finish the book if you want to, but if you run out of days before the last page of the text, don't stress. The review pages at the front of next year's math book are designed to take up the slack. Think about it for a minute: What would happen in a class of 25 third graders if they finished all the books with a week of school still to go? Textbook authors envision the anarchy, too — so they include a little more material than the amount needed to fit into a regular year.

Pinpointing a Program

Now that you know these schools exist, and you think you may be interested in finding out more, where do you turn? If you have an Internet connection, you can always search on the terms *homeschool distance education, umbrella program,* or *homeschool independent study program.*

Or take a look at the schools listed in this chapter. If a school that's listed in this chapter specifically offers courses through high school, then it also provides your child with an actual diploma when she graduates.



REMEMBER To qualify for the diploma, however, you generally need to work with the school at least three of the four high school years.

Elementary through junior high and beyond

Some schools cover the entire range from kindergarten through high school, while others offer programs for only a portion of that time. Each school's requirements, fees, and offerings vary from the others. These schools all base their curriculum on different educational theories, yet I've heard various homeschool parents give almost every one of them rave reviews.

Take the time to look at several of the schools. If a complete curriculum and some teaching oversight interests you, give them a call if you have any questions. All these schools offer websites, so you can peek at them that way too.

The following list provides only a few of the full curriculum providers out there, but they give a good picture of the available range of services, curriculum, and prices.

- **Global Village School:** P.O. Box 480, Ojai, CA 93024; phone 805-646-9792; website www.globalvillageschool.org. Global Village has been around since 1999, and they offer full enrollment or curriculum only without oversight. It's an accredited school that offers courses that you would expect, like language arts, math, and science, plus some optional ones you may not expect to find in the K–Grade 8 range: Current Events, Life Skills, and Psychology. Covers K through Grade 12.
- **Christian Liberty Academy School System (CLASS):** 502 W. Euclid Ave., Arlington Heights, IL 60004-5495; phone 800-348-0899; website

www.homeschools.org. CLASS is an evangelical Christian distance school that offers several options for students from kindergarten through Grade 12, including enrollment as a full satellite school. CLASS assembles an appropriate curriculum based on your child's current achievement levels. CLASS also offers parents assistance when and if they need it, and the program intervenes with local school officials if necessary.

- **Laurel Springs School:** 1615 West Chester Pike, West Chester, PA 19382; phone 800-377-5890; website www.laurelsprings.com. Laurel Springs School offers online learning for kindergarten students through 12th grade. A project-based curriculum is available for kindergarten through eighth graders, and Laurel Springs also offers optional programs for special learners, honors students, and college prep.
- **Oak Meadow:** P.O. Box 1346, Brattleboro, VT 05302; phone 802-251-7250; website www.oakmeadow.com. Oak Meadow offers a curriculum that integrates various subjects as much as possible, so that students experience learning rather than simply work through a textbook. Lessons are divided into 36 weekly components, and students may work on one concept or many related concepts throughout a given week. Oak Meadow serves children from kindergarten through 12th grade and bases its primary curriculum on the education theory that guides *Waldorf* schools (see Chapter 14).
- **SeaScape Center and Malibu Cove Private School:** 235 Moorpark Rd., Ste. A1014, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360; phone 805-267-4818; website www.seascapecenter.com. This is two schools in one. SeaScape Center serves students from kindergarten through eighth grade, while Malibu Cove Private School offers high school courses. Both schools use curriculum from a variety of standard publishers, and they tailor each student's curriculum set to her needs. If your student performs two grades above grade level in one subject and one grade level below in another, this school accommodates your child as a matter of course. SeaScape Center also offers a specialized curriculum for hearing impaired or visually impaired students, as well as other special learning needs. The school sends you all the curriculum and forms you need, plus supplies to start off the school year.

High schools

You say that you don't want to wing it when it comes to high school? In addition to the multigrade options listed earlier, you also may want to look at the full curriculum programs that these schools offer. Each one organizes its program a bit differently, but all of them offer diplomas to qualifying graduating seniors. These schools also qualify as accredited institutions.

Although you can find many more correspondence high schools on the Internet, and you can probably locate some really good ones, the following listing shows a few of the tried-and-true.

- **American School:** 2200 E. 170th St., Lansing, IL 60438; phone 708-418-2800; website americanschoolofcorr.org. American School has been around since 1897 and has granted over 200,000 diplomas within the past 50 years — a pretty high number for any high school. American School provides correspondence courses for grades 9 through 12 and offers both a general high school curriculum and college prep track. They offer an impressive number of different courses, from Astronomy to Culinary Arts.



KEEP YOUR OWN RECORDS AND SAVE MONEY

Sometimes a school that offers a satellite program also allows parents to purchase the books and materials without buying into the entire program. If you feel comfortable keeping track of assignments and grades, this may be an option to pursue with your curriculum provider. Basically you follow the school's program, but you don't get the same level of support as a true satellite homeschool.

You assign the work, grade the papers, give the tests, grade the tests, and post the grades in your own grade book or computerized grading system. Then at the end of the quarter, semester, or year — however you decide to assign grades — you record final grades for those courses, which go onto a report card form that you can often purchase from the school as well.

Keeping your own records offers a few benefits:

- You save quite a bit over the full distance education tuition price. Because you're only buying the textbooks and not all the teaching support that goes with them, you see monetary savings that are

directly related.

- You can tackle the books at your child's pace rather than setting your pace to match the school's calendar. For some families, this means taking a school year and a half to get through the material. Other families may have a child who finishes two years' work in one school term.

On the other hand, purchasing only the materials and keeping the records yourself can pose some challenges. For one thing, some states require that you register as a satellite school or deal with increased state involvement or paperwork. In addition, when you purchase only the books and not the support, you're pretty much going out on your own. If you don't understand something in the teacher's manual, for example, no one sits patiently on the other end of the phone to talk you through it as they would if you registered as a full satellite school.

Also, if the school offers some type of formal school graduation from its high school program, and you only purchase the books and not the whole box of goods, then your child doesn't qualify as a distance school graduate. This means no diploma from said institution.

If the freedom and savings mean more to you than full accountability and a certificate, and your state gives no limitations to homeschools, then purchasing the materials and completely teaching the courses yourself may be a viable option.

- **Indiana University High School:** IU High School, 919 E. 13th St., Bloomington, IN 47408; phone 800-334-1011; website http://iuhighschool.iu.edu. Indiana University High School allows students to take as many or as few individual courses as they need, enrolling as either a full-time or supplemental student. The high school offers three diploma options, based on courses taken: General, Academic Honors, or College Prep.
- **The Keystone School:** 920 Central Rd., Bloomsburg, PA 17815; phone 800-255-4937; website www.keystoneschoolonline.com. Delivers almost all its courses either through correspondence or the Internet. Enrollment options include taking a single course, taking several courses at one time, or enrolling in the full diploma program. Keystone now offers kindergarten through Grade 8 as well as high school, but enrolling a first-grader for math, languge arts, science, social studies, and art — if you took all the first-grade options available for a solid first-grade year — would cost you $2,500 just for first grade. Other options in this list are much less expensive for the younger grades.
- **University of Nebraska High School:** 206 S. 13th St., Ste. 800, P.O. Box

880206, Lincoln, NE 68588-0226; phone 866-700-4747; website http://highschool.nebraska.edu/. Dating back to 1929, this university-sponsored high school offers a college prep education with dual enrollment credit options.

Matching Your Needs with Their Offerings

If you locate the greatest program in the world and it doesn't match your child's needs, then it may as well be written in a completely foreign language for all the good it will do you. Children thrive when they feel loved, cared for, and challenged at their level. Unfortunately, for some families this means selecting different curriculums — maybe even totally separate programs — to teach individual children in the ways they learn best. Lest you throw this chapter down in stark terror, I need to tell you that this doesn't happen very often. But it does happen.



REMEMBER Before you plunk down your money on a complete program, take a good look at the school's offerings.

- Do the subjects match what your child needs to learn?
- Does the school offer a placement test to ensure that your child is placed with the right grade-level materials?
- Is the school willing to give you textbooks from multiple grades if your child shows different ability levels for various subjects?
- Does the school have a history of being flexible with ending dates if something should come up during the year and you find yourself teaching past June?

If you have a child who whizzes through math but can't write a complete sentence by fourth grade because language just isn't his strong point, plopping him into fourth-grade curriculum across the board will hurt both his language skills *and* his math, unless you're willing to do some extra work in

both subjects.



TIP If you really, really like what the school offers and the school seems inflexible in its grade requirements, you always have the option to be flexible in yours. Whip through the math as quickly as your child wants to do the work, for example, and spend twice as much time on the language, grammar, and spelling to try to even out the skills.

Chapter 11

Does Classical Education Mean Teaching Vivaldi?

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Grasping the idea of a classical education**
- **Putting together your classical curriculum**
- **Getting further information**

Virtually every homeschool book and website these days mentions the virtues of a classical education. If visions of togas dance through your head at the mention of the word classical, you certainly aren't alone. When my first two were little, I used a variation of a classical curriculum with them, and the dancing toga sometimes crossed my mind, too. Then I focused on the day's tasks, and we worked through our Greek vocabulary words one more time.

Tailor-made for the homeschool, classical studies focus on presenting education much as it was taught during the classical period of history — the way England and other European countries trained their scholars from the Middle Ages and Renaissance onward. Some (albeit few) private schools do provide a classical education, but it waxes strong in homeschool households. A classical education requires much work, much thinking, and exposure to a broad range of historical, scientific, and mathematical ideas.

If this information doesn't click with you the first time through, then we're in this together. Classical education is completely different than any other homeschool method, and it took me a good length of time — plus reading several different authors — before I figured it out.

Classifying It Classical

When people talk about classical education, they're talking about both a way of presenting information and the nuggets of knowledge offered. Classical

education seeks to unearth the questions that have stumped humanity since the beginning of the ages — beyond the ever-present, "What's for dinner tonight?" Classical education studies both the questions and the various answers to those queries.

Classical learning looks at the education of ancient Greece and Rome, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, and models a modern liberal arts education after these. It divides information and learning into three stages. All together called the *trivium*, these stages give information to students in a way they can handle it. The stages are

- Grammar
- Logic
- Rhetoric

Trying the trivium

The trivium's three stages of learning are called the *grammar*, the *logic*, and the *rhetoric* stages. Each stage focuses on learning in a different way as a child's mind matures and he can think more clearly and more abstractly. The complete trivium covers the entire range of elementary and high school.

Grammar stage

Generally, the grammar stage covers the beginning of school through grade 4 or 5. It concentrates on exposing children to a wide range of information, even if they don't yet understand how it all fits together. Later, with the data in their memory, they pull it out when they need it and assemble the puzzle pieces.

Little children usually memorize facts well — how many children at your house *don't* know the words to "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" or "The Alphabet Song"? Yet when your child memorized the letters of the alphabet in song, she didn't understand why those individual letters held meaning. It was simply a great song with a cool tune, and the older people in her life seemed to really enjoy listening to her sing it.

When your child needs to use the alphabet later for arranging books or words in an a-b-c order, that information is hardwired into her brain. She simply retrieves it and uses the alphabet to accomplish the task. This is the idea

behind the grammar stage of learning. Students learn various pieces of information while they're young, and to do that you introduce them to history, literature, geography, science, mathematics, and foreign language. Then when they need it later, the information comes to the surface.

Logic stage

Children who function in the logic stage are usually in fifth or sixth grade through eighth grade. (Sometimes you see this stage listed as the *dialectic* stage, but *logic* is much easier to say.) Asking questions along the way, these children take the information that they know and begin to fit it together.

For example, they know that Julius Caesar met his end on the Ides of March 44 BC. They also know that one of the reasons behind Caesar's assassination was the Roman people's fear of change. Taking all this in, the child in the logic state of reasoning can then ask or answer these questions: What kind of a ruler was Julius Caesar from the people's viewpoint? How did he rank on the ruler scale from history's viewpoint? How do we see him today?



REMEMBER Like all the stages, movement into, through, and from the logic stage depends much more on the child's thoughts and mental development than on ages. Some children may be ready to move into the logic stage a bit early, and they ask questions as they assimilate the information they've stored away. Others may not move into the logic stage until sixth grade or so, when they're ready to put the pieces together.



TIP Asking logical questions when your children are still in the grammar stage gets you nothing but really blank stares. It took me awhile to figure out the difference. I needed to step back a little and ask them to retell the story I just finished relating rather than draw any deep and meaningful conclusions for me. When I asked for deep and meaningful, the question that usually arose was, "Mom, is it time for lunch yet? I'm getting hungry."

Rhetoric stage

From ninth grade and beyond, your student should function at the rhetoric

stage. Your student learns to communicate in an expressive and persuasive manner when your student tells you and anyone else who may be listening what's on his mind, thus putting all those years of memorization and thinking to good use. The rhetoric stage also gives your student the time and freedom to pursue the subjects he loves.

After spending the first eight years exploring a broad variety of subjects, such as math, science, language arts, foreign language, art, music, and the like, the rhetoric level student can finally focus on what he enjoys. If he shows little skill for foreign languages, for example, then there's really no reason to continue advanced study in Latin, French, and Greek. The student who excels at languages, however, finds joy and purpose in continuing forward with these subjects. He may even decide to concentrate on them in college.

Students fill their rhetoric years with debate, writing, speaking, and conversation as they continue down the road toward a liberal arts education. Taking a look back at Caesar and his times, this student may articulate a well-designed argument for Caesar's unintentional role in the demise of the Roman Empire. After all these years of study, classically trained students generally function well at the college level after they arrive. Many find the first couple years of college a breeze compared to their high school studies!

Forming the foundation with literature

Classical education looks at the philosophers of the ages and the classic books that stand the test of time. These create the curriculum's written foundation. Students read from the collection of literature known as great books to spark their minds and show them how other people thought.

What are the great books? That's a really good question, and almost anyone you ask will give you a different answer. Mortimer J. Adler, a professor at Columbia who coined the term "great books" in the first place, put his own list together. You may agree with his list, or you may not, and that's okay. If you want to take a look at what Adler called the great books, you can find it in *Encyclopaedia Britannica's Great Books of the Western World* collection (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Books_of_the_Western_World). This article lists all the authors included in the collection, so you can re-create it for your own shelves if you like, using individual copies.

By reading the works of the past, the student wrestles with the same problems

the original writer contended with. The material world, the questions of philosophy, the beauty of mathematics, and the order of science all find their place in a classical curriculum. Students often explore these subjects through the literature created by the mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers as they grappled with their problems and reported their discoveries. One popular way to approach these writers with older students is to read an author's works as you study the time period in which they lived; thus, students studying ancient Rome read Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and so on.



WARNING Classical education focuses entirely on the history and literature of Western civilization. Think Greece, then Rome, then Europe, and culuminating with either England or the United States. If this concentration doesn't match your desire for your children's education, then the classical method isn't for you. Read through the rest of Part 3 to find a philosophy that makes your heart flutter.

Assembling Your Classical Curriculum Components

A classical curriculum covers all subjects for the child's entire 12 years of school: language arts, math, science, history, geography, art, music, and … um … Latin. Okay. So you don't actually start Latin in first grade. You usually wait until third grade or beyond to begin Latin. But Latin composes part of a classical curriculum, and some families also add Greek and one or two modern foreign languages, such as French, Spanish, or German, to add variety to the mix.



TIP Keep in mind as you read through these recommendations that they are only suggestions. This is your child and your curriculum. If the all-out classical curriculum doesn't work with your child, but parts of the system jazz you, go with what works. (Excuse me while I dodge flaming arrows from the diehard classicists over there.)

Language arts

Read. Write. Spell. Conjugate … er … explore grammar. The classical curriculum puts a huge emphasis on the written word — primarily because Socrates and Plato didn't have access to video recorders, I think. Teaching your child to read becomes your primary language arts goal. After she masters reading at a second- or third-grade level, you can begin to explore good books with abandon. (For ideas on what to use to teach her to read, please turn to Chapter 6.)

Reading

Everything your child reads doesn't have to display "Classical" in gold letters on its cover. Because your goal is to teach your child to think, however, it helps if the books are decent literature to begin with. Introducing your child to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, Sherlock Holmes mysteries, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, or the Greek myths opens new worlds to them.



TIP If your child isn't quite ready for the unabridged version of whatever book you want her to read, most classics are available in children's versions from various publishers. A trip to the library or local bookstore should unearth plenty of options. Although many parents disagree with me, I made these children's versions readily available to my kids. By age 8, they both declared Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* one of the best books they ever read, and their exposure to the classics rivals that of many college graduates. (The third child, however, hated *The Call of the Wild* and determined to never read anything else by Jack London by the age of 8. So there you are.)

A trip through the 800 section of your local library (if your library follows the Dewey Decimal System — if it doesn't, you can search for the 800s for days and never find them) unearths tons of classic literature. Find an author you love or recognize, or try someone new to you.



TIP Many (if not most) classics are available for free online from sites like The Internet Archive at www.archive.org; Google Books, which

you'll find at books.google.com; or Project Gutenberg, housed at www.gutenberg.org. Search and download until your hard drive groans under the weight of the volumes.

Writing

Although your final goal is to teach your child to write the well-organized persuasive essay or research document, getting there takes some time and perseverance. Beginning with sentences, your child then progresses to one paragraph, and then puts paragraphs together with meaning. Before you know it (several years later), he's writing for a specific purpose, and you realize he learned to write after all.

Unless you find yourself (or your child) permanently chained to a computer keyboard with red licorice, an actual handwriting program is in order. As with everything else in homeschooling, you have a choice of curriculums.

Spelling

Although some children hate spelling and others love it, most parents agonize over *the* spelling curriculum to introduce to their homeschool. Before the angst hits you too, take a deep breath, step back a moment, and ask yourself these questions:

- What are you actually trying to teach with spelling?
- Do you want your children to actually learn to *spell*?
- If that is the case, what words do you want them to spell?
- Should they spell words from their world and their reading?

Then assemble your own spelling lists each week from life as you live it and use those words.



TIP If you want your children to learn to spell almost any word (and you have dreams of your Myrtle becoming the next International Spelling Champ), then look at a curriculum such as All About Spelling (www.allaboutlearningpress.com). Your student learns skills, strategies, and spelling rules that help them master spelling.

Math

Your classical math program teaches the flow and structure of mathematics. Beginning with the easy stuff, such as addition, your student climbs the mathematical ladder as far as he can go before the end of 12th grade. Classical students usually go beyond second-year algebra, although your student's math progress is up to him.

To begin your progression, you can use any math program that teaches solid concepts. Chapters 6 and 8 suggest several math curricula that may work for your child. Early focus in math, as a classical homeschooler, needs to be on fact memorization (such as multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction facts) as well as a good knowledge of how math *works* in addition/subtraction, multiplication/division, fractions, geometry, and algebra concepts. With a good base, your student can then tackle higher math courses more easily.

Although they may begin in the low grades with another math curriculum, most classical homeschoolers switch to Saxon Math and follow Saxon's recommendations at age 10 or 12 through the end of high school (find it online at `www.hmhco.com/programs/saxon-math`). Saxon contains plenty of review in every single lesson. (For some children, I'd go so far as to call it math busywork.) But it does seem to get the job done. And you don't have to assign all the problems each day if your child doesn't need to do them all.

Science

Classical science places an emphasis on the traditional sciences: biology, chemistry, and physics. But you can't start there with a first grader. Your goal is to build a scientific basis so that when your child gets to formal biology age, she'll be ready for the challenge.

Explore nature. Watch the stars. If you want a manual to guide you, many in-print science books explain the basics of astronomy, the earth, and nature. For a one-volume guide, you may want to look at Anna Botsford Comstock's *Handbook of Nature Study,* covered in detail in Chapter 18.

After you get to high school science, in the best of all possible classical schools, your student reads the original treatises by scientists such as Galileo, Copernicus, and Aristotle. (I know that Aristotle is usually considered a philosopher. But because he's the author of *Physics* and *On the Parts of*

Animals, he's a scientist, too.) At the same time, your child works through high school textbooks on biology, chemistry, and physics, continuing on that foundation she built through elementary school.

History

The best way to explore history in the classical tradition is to read the stories of the men and women who made it. Beginning with ancient civilizations, the student progresses through ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Vikings, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Explorers, and finally the New World. (Of course, if you want to cover ancient China, Japan, Africa, Aztecs, Maya, or any other civilization, go ahead and slip them in wherever you want to emphasize them, but a classical history curriculum generally follows the history of Western Civilization.)

Reading biographies and writings of explorers, statesmen, philosophers, artists, leaders, and inventors gives your student a well-rounded feel for the time. Of course, no one could possibly cover it all! Even college professors limit their expertise to one portion of history rather than trying to be an expert in everything.



TIP Here are a few resources you may want to consider when you chart your history curriculum. Like every other subject listed, this gives you a small sampling of the resources out there:

- ***Cobblestone, Dig into History* magazines:** The brainchild of Cricket Media (shop.cricketmedia.com; phone 800-821-0115), *Cobblestone* presents American history while *Dig into History* focuses on world history and archaeology. Both magazines are designed for readers ages 9 through 14. These magazines are topical, and the publisher keeps most, if not all, back issues in print. When you want to teach a subject, see if *Cobblestone* offers a back (or current) issue on that topic. (*Dig into History* recently ceased monthly publication, but Cricket Media plans to keep all the back issues available for individual purchase.)
- **History coloring books:** Although these are primarily for the younger scholars, history coloring books provide something for little hands to do while you read aloud and they give your child a visual impression of the

time. For history coloring books in all time periods, look at Dover Publications (www.doverpublications.com; 31 East 2nd Street, Mineola, NY 11501), which you should find samples of at any bookstore.

- **The Story of the World:** Subtitled History for the Classical Child, this set tells classical history in four volumes, beginning with the ancient world. Although the first book is not entirely secular, both Christian and secular homeschoolers have used it happily. Find it online at www.welltrainedmind.com.

Geography

Geography can be as simple as sitting down with a globe or good atlas or as complicated as purchasing a full geography curriculum. You decide. If you want to go the globe-and-atlas route, you can spend some intensive time studying each region as you cover it in history. On the other hand, if a curriculum interests you, check out some of the ideas in Chapter 18.

A classical curriculum usually incorporates geography into history rather than teaching it as a stand-alone subject. Introducing your grammar-stage student to maps, globes, and the measurement mystique that surrounds them both (as in latitude and scale) is a good way to get the rudiments of geography into your child during the memorization stage. After he has the basics down, you can introduce the geography of a place as you introduce the time you plan to study.

Any quality local education store should carry introductory workbooks on maps, longitude, and the like. I spent a year covering American Education Publishing's *Maps and Geography* workbook with my elementary-age children, which laid the foundation well enough that we can now move on to more interesting topics than isolated physical maps and room layouts.

Art

Classical art instruction takes two forms: art creation and art appreciation. As part of a liberal arts course, students learn the *doing* part of art as well as the *looking* part. After all, looking at an impressionistic painting is much more fun when you understand the method because you experimented with impressionism yourself at one point.

In some countries, such as the United Kingdom, learning to draw and paint

still marks you as an educated individual. Talent has nothing to do with it. Every child learns basic drawing skills in a classical school in the same way that each child learns to read and write. And just as every student who ever took piano lessons doesn't turn out to be a concert pianist, so each child in art lessons doesn't become another Picasso. (And the world is grateful. After all, how many Picassos do you need in one world?)

When you teach a child to draw, you are teaching them to *see* — to look at the world around them with new eyes. That's the goal of art instruction. Art appreciation, on the other hand, teaches them to see the effects of culture on art, and art on culture, as they study art history through the years.



TIP To enhance your art curriculum, you may want to look into

- **Free Online Art Classses:** This website (www.free-online-art-classes.com) offers more art techniques than I knew were available, taught through videos by a veteran art teacher. If you prefer a book approach, check out the grade-level art books from Artistic Pursuits, online at www.artisticpursuits.com.
- **Your local library:** Libraries generally carry a nice selection of juvenile and adult art books. Select one or two and work through them as a basis for your art curriculum.
- **Local art lessons:** Does your community offer continuing education courses through the local high school or community college? A class or two in drawing, painting, or perspective may entice your older learner into a love of art. They generally aren't expensive and give your student a different perspective on art than working through lessons at home.



REMEMBER Keep in mind that your finished product is only as good as your materials. Although you don't need to run out and spend hundreds of dollars on art materials, starting with a few decent drawing pencils and perhaps a small box of Berol PrismaColors (if you plan to do colored pencil drawings as well) can make the difference between joy and

drudgery.

Music

Most classical homeschoolers use private piano or violin lessons as part of their curriculum. If they find that their children absolutely hate lessons after a year or two, they — get ready … radical thought here — *stop* the lessons. That's right. They stop. End. Finis.

Some children really love music and music lessons. Those kids generally continue in lessons for years. But everybody isn't born with a perfect ear and rhythm. (Unfortunately, I know this because I was one of those children. Even as an adult, I am rhythm-challenged.)



TIP Music doesn't *have* to consist of private lessons. You can teach a love of music without teaching all the theory and practice behind it. Composer biographies and classical and folk music selections can function as an add-on to your history curriculum (call it *culture* if you want) in addition to stand-alone music lessons. Turn to Chapter 27 for even more discussion of music and its appreciation.

Latin

Ah, Latin. The language of love … or is that Italian? The language of wonderful food … nope, that's French. The language of — hey, why *do* we study Latin, anyway?

Scholars (that includes your child if she follows a classical curriculum) study Latin because it forms the basis of so many languages, including a hefty portion of English. They also study Latin because many of the philosophers wrote their original thoughts in that language, especially if they happened to be Romans. Rumor also has it that many classical educators of the past — the way past — taught in Latin, but I'm not sure that's enough reason to run out and learn a new language.

In a pure classical curriculum, Latin takes one of the prime subject spots. When you begin Latin is up to you. You can find curriculum for students as young as third grade if you want to start Latin that early, or you can wait until your students grow a bit taller before you begin reciting the beloved Latin

conjugations of yore.



TIP You may want to consider these Latin resources in your planning:

- **Minimus Latinus:** Hailing from the U.K., this Latin course uses stories about Minimus the mouse to teach the language. Good for Grades 2 through 8, and available from Rainbow Resource (www.rainbowresource.com).
- **First Form Latin:** This popular Latin curriculum starts at Grade 4 or 5, and continues through Grade 8 with Second Form, Third Form, and Fourth Form. Although this is not a secular curriculum, it does seem to be comprehensive. Fourth Form students use *Henle Latin*, which is a Roman Catholic high school Latin curriculm from the 1940s, and then move fully into *Henle Latin* for the four years of high school. Available from Memoria Press (www.memoriapress.com).
- **The Latin Library:** This online library (www.thelatinlibrary.com) groups a collection of Latin texts for your reading pleasure. This site contains everything from commentaries by Caesar to a Latin translation of Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*.
- ***Wheelock's Latin:*** Originally written in 1956, this hefty little volume contains grammar, Latin reading selections, and (in the newest sixth edition) maps to help you orient your learning. Written for college-level instruction, homeschoolers use it from high school level on up.

Foreign language

Contrary to popular opinion, children who learn more than one foreign language will not die. In fact, they live even if you go so far as to introduce a new language while they're yet young. Preschool language learners actually provide quite a bit of merriment because they select whichever word means what they want to say, regardless of the language.

French and Spanish make good companion languages for a classical curriculum because your child is already learning Latin, and Latin forms the root for these languages. Foreign language is foreign language, however, and if you have your heart set on another one, the Classical Cops won't show up

at your door next Saturday demanding to know

1. Why you aren't doing school on a perfectly fine day; and
2. Why you think you must teach Russian to your youngster instead of French.

Chapter 27 goes into more detail about foreign language programs available to homeschoolers.



CERTIFIED CLASSICALLY CRAZED

If you like the idea of classical education but reading the information presented in this chapter makes your head swim, take a chocolate break and try it again later. The words still look blurry? Then you may want to enroll in a school that puts the parts together for you.

Great Books Academy (www.greatbooksacademy.org) is a school that offers a classical liberal arts education. Serving students from preschool through grade 12, Great Books Academy offers lesson plans, end-of-the-year grading, and access to a human if you have questions with the course of study. The school also provides eighth grade and high school diplomas to graduating students. Contact them at The Great Books Academy, P.O. Box 25777, Colorado Springs, CO 80936; phone 410-282-6215.

Even if you don't enroll your child in the Great Books Academy as a student, the school's online bookstore sells a wonderful assortment of solid classical curriculum for various subjects. Anyone can purchase books online from the academy.

Gathering More Information

Although classical education generates much interest, not many people write books about it these days. The best all-around book in print today is probably *The Well-Trained Mind, A Guide to Classical Education at Home*, by Jessie Wise and Susan Wise Bauer. A mother and daughter team, they tell how Jessie created and implemented a classical curriculum in her homeschool. The book gives you a framework for creating a classical curriculum yourself. At the same time, the authors tell you what works in a classical setting and what doesn't.

BUT MOM, I DON'T *WANT* TO LEARN LATIN!

Sometimes opposition comes from the most interesting corners. First your mother isn't too sure about this foreign language thing. Then your child announces that Latin is a dead language and she is *not* going to learn Latin this year!

You don't absolutely have to study Latin, but it sure helps. For one thing, spending some time with Latin and Greek now means that you don't have to exert as much effort mastering Greek and Latin derivatives later. Besides, what better secret language could the teen homeschool club find than Latin or Greek? They're practically undecipherable — the prime goal of teen and pre-teen gatherings everywhere.

Of all the ancient languages, Latin is one of the easiest to learn. Unlike Sumerian, Egyptian Hieroglyphics, Hebrew, or Greek, you don't need to learn an entirely new alphabet to master it. This alone saves you weeks of time! Plus, much of the English language traces its roots to Latin words. So Latin looks at least vaguely familiar. How many Sumerian-based nouns do you know off the top of your head?

Plus, after you get into the swing of things, you can pick up some Latin leisure reading. Honestly, I do not jest. *Cattus Petasatus, Winnie Ille Pu,* and *Quomodo Invidiosulus Nomine Grinchus* are all available for your reading pleasure. Who'd a thought? (For your pre-first-year Latin readers out there, these books are Latin translations of *The Cat in the Hat, Winnie the Pooh,* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas.*)

Chapter 12

Reading Real Living Books with Charlotte

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Learning with living literature**
- **Exploring nature and narration**
- **Appreciating art**
- **Musing through music**

If the idea of buying a textbook for every school subject for each of your children really turns you off, but you belong to a book-loving household, then the Charlotte Mason method may help you create your perfect homeschool experience. This is a method that conjures up thoughts of everyone snuggled together on the sofa while Mom or Dad reads aloud. Charlotte Mason's educational philosophy sends you out among the flowers and to the library book stacks.

Calling Charlotte Mason

Who was Charlotte Mason and why do homeschoolers flock to her educational shrine? She was an educator at the turn of the 19th to 20th century. She was also an education reformer. She suggested teaching short lessons, reading aloud to students, and letting them learn grammar from their exposure to good quality reading material.

She wrote six books on her educational philosophy, which are available both online and in print if you want to read through them. Mason was a devout Christian, and this comes through clearly in her writing. The volume titles are *Home Education; Parents and Children; School Education; Ourselves; Formation of Character;* and *An Essay Towards a Philosophy of Character.* These books completely spell out her philosophy of childhood, development,

and education.

Leaping through living books

A Charlotte Mason education means reading a lot of books. But not just any books — what Charlotte called living books. These were books written by one author, that cover one subject, rather than a textbook written by a committee. Biographies, histories, sciences, and novels can all be living books. The difference is between reading a four-paragraph textbook blurb about Japan and reading a novel set in Japan of a certain time period, a science book on the propagation of Japanese flowering cherry trees, and a history of Japan's greatest dynasties written by a passionate author. If you read the four paragraphs, you will have some idea about Japan. If you read the other three books it will take much longer, but when you finish you will know Japan much better: The culture, the people, the history will all seem more alive. Throw in a diary or memoir from someone who lived in Japan or grew up there, and you couldn't get a better introduction to a country.

Nuzzling up to nature studies

Charlotte Mason educators emphasize nature study as a first science. It's all around, so it's available and very inexpensive; the children experience it firsthand, so they are familiar with it; and it contains live things, growing things, and nonliving things. With that kind of selection, you're sure to find something that interests your student, whether it's bugs, birds, flowers, or rocks.

Putting Together Your Package

When you decide to teach with a Charlotte Mason philosophy, you have the option to figure everything out on your own or to use a company or resource that assembles it for you. Either way you go is perfectly fine. I spent several years incorporating Charlotte Mason ideas into my homeschool, and I always put my curriculum together book by book. But then, a lot of these companies didn't exist in the dark ages of homeschooling when I started.

Before we dive into the specifics of individual courses and how to handle them, I want to offer a few options for Charlotte Mason–style curriculum providers. All these options are secular.

- **Blossom and Root:** (www.blossomandroot.com) One of the newcomers to the field, Blossom and Root has already gained a passionate following (I know that sounds like an advertisement, but it's true). This curriculum covers literature, language arts, history, math through art, nature science, and science for grades K through Grade 3 with further grade levels in development. Blossom and Root's parent guides give you several options for how to teach each lesson, depending on your style and the student's age level/interest.
- **Build Your Library:** (www.buildyourlibrary.com) Another popular option among homeschoolers, this is a teacher's manual that organizes that stack of books in the corner into a useful daily format. Although you are buying a history title (such as *The Modern World* for Grade 4), that book contains notations for history, literature, reading, science, art, maps, and more. Covers K through Grade 12.
- **Wildwood Curriculum: (**www.wildwoodcurriculum.org) This is a free online resource that tells you what you can use for various ages, ranging from age 6 (Grade 1) to age 12 (Grade 6 or 7). Select your child's age range, and then click through the options to locate suggestions for book use and links for every conceivable subject. Many of the resources themselves are free online, and others may be available from your local library.



TIP Turn to Chapter 22 for an excellent Christian Charlotte Mason option.

Language arts

Language arts shine in Charlotte Mason homeschooling. The entire environment is literature-rich, so the students get plenty of exposure to stories, novels, biographies, and poetry. They read, or are read to, every day. In her schools, Charlotte even scheduled what she called Sunday Readings, which was a list of optional extra reading material that didn't fit into the school days the rest of the week!

These literature arts classes focus on reading, retelling, and copying portions of the books and stories that the students read. It starts with whole books and living books, but with Charlotte Mason language arts that's only the

beginning.

Whole books and living books

Living books appear at every reading level. Early readers can read about bees, or silk, or autos with books written to their level just as older students read books devoted to their learning topics. Good fiction books for young readers abound.

Whole books are simply what they sound like. Many times, children's textbooks consist of selections, or short snippets of longer novels. Charlotte Mason homeschoolers eschew such particles and always go for the entire book. Think about it: Which is more interesting, all of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (which is a very short book to begin with) or only the first chapter? Reading whole books allows the child time to enter into the story and experience all of it.

Narration as a tool

Beginning in first grade, a Charlotte Mason homeschooler learns how to narrate a story back to the parent. You read a story, such as one of Aesop's fables. The child then tells the story back to you with as many details as he remembers. This teaches him to listen closely, and while the whole exercise may start off a bit shakily, you'll see that he gets much better at this with practice as he grows.

Copywork and dictation

Once students can write well enough that letters come relatively easily to the end of their pencils, they start copywork. Usually this begins in Grade 1 or after. With copywork, a child physically copies a quote from her reading. This helps her to learn correct grammar and punctuation, as well as good diction (choice of words).

Dictation is listening to someone reading a passage and then writing down what they say. It requires that a child can write well enough to easily make any letters in any word you may read. Taking dictation also requires that you as the reader learn to pause at the appropriate time so the child can get the words down. For example: I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree (Joyce Kilmer, *Trees*, 1914) becomes: I think/ that I/ shall never see/ a poem/ lovely as/ a tree. You pause at the slash marks to give the child time to catch up and get everything onto the page.

Grammar

Grammar often appears in Charlotte Mason materials in third grade and not before. Sometimes parents even wait until fourth grade to introduce it. Children who read good literature soak up grammar — and vocabulary — simply from being exposed to the written page hour after hour. When you do begin grammar studies, they are usually very gentle, such as looking at a famous painting and discussing it, and then incorporating that discussion into the grammar lesson.



TIP Wildwood Curriculum recommends *A Short Grammar of the English Tongue*, from 1897. You may also want to look at *Primary Language Lessons* and *Intermediate Language Lessons* by Emma Serl, from 1911 and 1914. You can find the Serl books at Google Books for free download. Keep in mind that these resources were written over 100 years ago. You may need to modify or skip a lesson or two due to perspective or content.

Math

Math Charlotte Mason style is filled with manipulatives and hands-on activity. The children learn about math in a concrete way before attempting the same thing on the page. That said, you can use any math curriculum you like.



TIP Turn to Chapter 6 or Chapter 8 for math curriculum options.

Nature science

Charlotte Mason digs into nature science. Investigating flora and fauna, marking the changing of seasons, tramping into the light rains — these are the things that make homeschoolers happy. Students learn about nature in the classroom, in their reading, and sometimes through their grammar curriculum as well, depending what you choose to use. They also go outside and experience the nature they study. Children conduct nature study outdoors in two ways: through nature walks and with science notebooks.

Nature walks

The weekly nature walk allows children to observe nature in its natural habitat. They tromp outside with you and look at bare trees in the winter, budding trees in the spring, and golden trees in the fall. Any science experiments take place inside, along with any heavy-duty instruction. (It's a lot easier to talk about the massiveness of an old oak tree while you're looking at it, and that thing will resist all attempts to drag it into the classroom.) The children tramp outside to experience nature and to record that experience in their nature notebooks.

Nature notebooks

Each child creates her own nature notebook from her outdoor experiences. When the children leave for their walk, they are armed with pencils (graphite or colored, or both) and a blank drawing notebook. When the year begins, the notebook is empty (unless, of course, you continue it from a previous year). Its pages are blank. The child creates the notebook from the objects and experiences she meets outdoors. Did a bird just land on that bird feeder? Sketch it. What about that plantain leaf she discovered? You've been studying that all week. Draw it!

Each page forms a memory of an outdoor experience. The child dates it, writes a little about where she found these wonders and what they are. Then at the end of the year you have a nice tidy compilation of your nature walks and how they tie into your nature study.

History

History consists of reading biographies and books on culture and time periods. No stuffy dates here! The goal of Charlotte Mason–style history is to make it come alive for the students. They remember much more if dates and events appear within the framework of a story. Someone's life is memorable. People remember how things existed during a specific time period. That life is what Charlotte Mason studies bring to history, and it's one of the greatest strengths of the educational philosophy.

While you can purchase a set history curriculum, you can also opt to select a time frame or geographic area and visit the library to comb its shelves. Your history study can include events, home life, fashion, cuisine, geography, people, amusement (entertainment), fiction from the area or time, and representative architecture, music, and art. This not only generates a huge

stack of books at the checkout counter, but it also gives you an extremely well-rounded literature-based history lesson on whatever topic you choose.

Geography

Geography appears within the context of history, literature, and experience. What is distance? Students realize that on their nature walks. Where is Italy? That's where Leonardo da Vinci lived. He was a famous painter and inventor. Here … let's look on the map and I'll show you. Here's Italy, and this is the town where da Vinci worked… .

Geography becomes important to the child when it's connected with experience. You still teach geographical information, but since it occurs around something the child knows, he associates it with knowledge rather than letting it float inside his brain, unattached to anything relevant in his life.

Art

Art appreciation and art creation both take their place in a Charlotte Mason homeschool. Picture studies introduce children to famous artists and their works. You choose an artist with a good portfolio and introduce that artist over a number of weeks. Each week you study a different work. Look at it. Talk about it. What stands out to you? What does it remind you of? This only takes 15 to 20 minutes, but over time it introduces children to a large wealth of artistic styles and artists.

Art creation includes drawing and painting. If you do some searching, you will find many resources on picture studies, but not much on making art. Yet a child cannot create a nature journal if he has no idea how to reproduce an object by drawing. Spend some afternoons on watercolors and drawing. Draw with chalks. Sketch with charcoal. Make a masterpiece with oil pastels. You don't need an art curriculum, unless you want one. Then hunt up a good beginning drawing book and work through it with your kids. You can draw, too.

Music

Like art, Charlotte Mason homeschoolers spend time with both appreciation and creation. For music appreciation, explore the many genres and styles of music from a capella to zydeco. Study individual composers. Your family will find some favorites along the way, I know.

If you want to explore music creation, then taking piano lessons or lessons on another instrument is the classic way to go. Depending where you live, in-person lessons may not be feasible, so here are a couple options:

- **Faber Piano Adventures:** (www.pianoadventures.com) If you or a willing person in your life knows how to play piano, you can use the Piano Adventures book series to teach your children how to play. Each level's set includes five books: lessons, sight reading, theory, technique and artistry, and a performance book (which can be performance pieces, Christmas songs, or popular music, your choice). It also includes books to introduce the child to many different music genres, from classical to rock, in each level. I looked at almost everything on the market, and this is what I use to teach my youngest to play.
- **Hoffman Academy:** (www.hoffmanacademy.com) Piano teacher Joseph Hoffman posts lessons on YouTube that lead the learner through how to play the piano. The lessons are free to view, and he offers additional support such as worksheets, sheet music, and music games on his website for a fee.



TIP Buckwheat Zydeco did a children's album called *Choo Choo Boogaloo: Zydeco Music for Families* if you want to introduce zydeco in a family-friendly fashion.

Foreign language

In her original books, Mason suggested that children start learning another language by the age of 3. Her method was simple, and because she was British in the 19th century, her introductory language of choice was French. She suggested that parents gently introduce children to a language by identifying objects as they proceed through a nature walk. Using this method, and the suggested French, you would identify a tree *(arbre),* flower *(fleur),* and small rock *(caillou)* as you walk with your young child.

LIVING THE CHARLOTTE MASON LIFESTYLE

As you can imagine, if you incorporate all this into your homeschool, you will find that it

becomes a way of life. Much like Montessori or Waldorf, Charlotte Mason's educational theory changes how you see the world. If you decide this is your homeschool path (at least for now), it influences the books you put on your shelves. It influences how you see art. It influences how you see nature.

Charlotte believed that *education is a discipline, an atmosphere, a life.* You will find yourself surrounding your children with worthwhile educational things: books, handcraft tools, art, music. Along the way you may find your own interactions changing a bit. Watching a movie together becomes an opportunity for discussion. Reading a book together may lead to a deep dive into other works by an author, or from a time period, or about a region of the world. Learning becomes an expansive adventure, and you undertake it together. As a family.

Of course, you can use any language you like. Already bilingual at home with Spanish and English? You could either make it a game to name every other object in one of the two languages or start learning a new language.



This concept resonated with me, so I began teaching French to my children at age 3. The language choice wasn't due to Charlotte Mason's preference; it was the language I took in high school so I already had some vocabulary. Then we kept with the language all the way through their high school years, doing a little bit more each year. How did it work? One of my college graduates got her degree in linguistics with a minor in French.

Chapter 13

Mining the Montessori Method

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Guiding your children as they explore**
- **Designing your learning space**
- **Taking a look at your day**
- **Jumping into Culture and Practical Life classes**

The Montessori homeschool is a busy, yet peaceful place. One small child sits at a table, engrossed in dividing a small stack of pictures into two piles, of living and nonliving things. Another, older child also has a stack of cards, but hers feature geological forms: mountain, hill, valley, along with names and definitions. When they finish their activities, each child returns the cards to a shelf and walks into the kitchen to retrieve child-size pitchers and glasses so they can assemble the morning snack.

Montessori education is all about giving children the tools to excel on their own, but with guidance. The child may decide to work with landforms for science today, and those cards sit available on a learning tray, waiting to be used. The selection of items for the learning shelves, how the material is presented, and the order of presentation all fall to the parent in charge. (You would not, for instance, teach biomes as a science topic if a child had yet to learn the difference between a mountain and a valley.) Timing is up to the teacher.

Exploring at Their Own Pace

Once a child is taught how to do something according to the Montessori method, the child can then revisit that lesson whenever the mood strikes. If the lesson is stacking blocks so they don’t fall, and the child grasps what to do, then he is free to take the blocks and work with them as much as he likes. The parent guides the student through the concept the first time or three to

make sure of understanding, and then the child plays with the concept at will.

Guiding your children

You are the guide in Montessori education. You decide what to teach, and it generally follows a plan or curriculum guide. The guide may or may not tell you how to teach it, depending what kind of curriculum you opt to use. True Montessori teaching guides are called *albums.* They tell how to present a skill, like adding numbers up to 9, but they don't tell you how to know when to present it. As the teacher, you know that from working with the students. And sometimes the original guides don't seem to give a lot of information on how to present something. Montessori thought that giving too much information took the creativity from the teacher.

Thankfully, you don't have to do it on your own. Montessori-style curriculums exist, and they guide you in teaching the Montessori way. Here are some options:

- **Montessori for Everyone:** (www.montessoriforeveryone.com) While not a full purchasable curriculum per se, this site offers individual learning packs you can download and print out. Interested in learning about famous artists or ancient civilizations? You can find both here. This site also incorporates a blog of useful information and many free downloads you can print and use in your Montessori homeschool.
- **NAMC Montessori Program:** (www.montessoritraining.net) The North American Montessori Center (NAMC) designed an at-home program for ages 3 to 6. It includes six different manuals (a guide to theory, plus mathematics, language arts, sensorial, culture and science, and practical life), manipulatives, and two CD-ROMs you can use to print additional learning materials.
- **ShillerLearning:** (www.shillerlearning.com) This is your option for open-the-box-and-go Montessori. Shiller offers math and language arts for ages 3 to 9, and all lessons are scripted: You lead your child through the lesson by reading from the lesson page. "How many animals do you see? How many rabbits? How many squirrels?" Each learning kit provides the manipulatives you need to guide your child through Montessori-style math and language arts. What about the other aspects of Montessori education? Lessons in culture, manners, and more are

available as free downloads from the site.

Combining academics and life

Montessori teaches more than language arts and math. A well-rounded Montessori program teaches children how to care for themselves. They learn how to be polite. They learn how to help around the house, how to garden, how to make things with their hands. You may find yourself learning right along with them.

Setting Up Your Space

A home arranged for Montessori education looks different. The space is organized and clean. Low shelves line the walls where the children can see the contents. Each shelf contains learning materials, simply arranged so the children can reach them, use them, and return them to the shelf. You will probably see a child-size table and chair set. At snack time, the children pour their own drinks from a child-size glass or porcelain pitcher.

Is this even achievable? It is, if Montessori education is your goal. In order for the children to be independent, they need to be able to reach things. Montessori curriculums also teach that if you want a child to take care of her materials, give her good materials, items made from wood, glass, pottery, and cloth.

You don’t need an entire room set up as a Montessori classroom, although if you have the extra space you can certainly do so. A portion of the main room in your home should be plenty of space for a low bookshelf, a small table and chairs, and some artwork. Your learning centers, or work trays, go on the shelves with enough space on each side that a child can move each tray to the child-size table for working. Seeing an obvious space on the shelf makes it much easier to return the materials after using them.

You will be moving objects on and off the shelves as the children work. One day they may find a seasonal tray, with items that represent the current season arranged for counting, organizing, or simply exploring. Another day they may discover new math materials that you show them how to use. The shelves are the heart of your Montessori area. This is where the children will go to explore, learn, practice, and interact.

Walking through the Day

Every Montessori homeschool looks a little different. Do you want to start the day with a circle time activity, where everyone gathers for an introduction to the day? (My 15-year-old son asked me just this week what “circle time” was. Obviously, this is one area I’ve failed as a homeschooler.)

Because the Montessori method includes so much life-skills learning, the curriculum setup looks a bit different. Courses like Practical Life and Culture continue through middle school and beyond. Not only for the little guys, in Practical Life a middle school student may learn to execute a formal dinner, while a high school student may design a business plan for an entrepreneurial venture.

Mathematics

Montessori approaches mathematics through manipulatives. Everything is learned hands-on before applying it to the page. Want to learn how to count to nine? Grab those manipulatives. Need to know about fractions? The math rods can show you. How about determining what equals $x2 + 11x + 30$? Math manipulatives to the rescue once again.

Only when the child understands what he is doing with concrete objects does he then move on to working math on paper. Once the child understands what he’s doing, he may do some work without the manipulatives if he finds that they slow him down. (This isn’t pure Montessori technique; this is from experience using math manipulatives with children.) However, when they reach a new concept, even if they are middle school or above, they often try it with the math materials first.



My youngest decided to be a math whiz, unlike his older brother and sister. When he was 5 years old, I invested in a Montessori math curriculum and materials, and by the time he was 6 the kid could factor algebraic expressions using the manipulatives. This was all well and good until we got to a traditional Algebra 1 text in middle school. I asked him if he was having trouble. His answer: “Mom! I’ve been doing this since I was *6!*”

The program I used was called Mortensen Math, and it was developed by a Montessori teacher in the 1970s. You can find information online at Anna's Math Page, www.annasmathpage.com. (Anna is a math tutor who uses and sells these materials.) If you pore over the site, you'll find it's filled with videos, tidbits of information, and how to order.

Language arts

Montessori language arts includes stories about the history of language and communication, along with the amazing results of those efforts: stories, poems, literature. Language arts also includes the mechanics of language, such as parts of speech (nouns, verbs) and how those words are put together into sentences and clauses. All of this material is presented within the Montessori framework. In teaching about nouns, for example, you and the child interact with objects. This method makes the abstract concept of language more concrete.

Practical Life

Practical Life is one of the unique parts of the Montessori education experience. Instead of expecting you to teach academics and then life skills on top in your free time, life preparation is built right into the program. Beginning with age 3, a child learns how to sweep the floor, pour water from a glass pitcher, or plant a seedling. She learns how to care for herself and others, including pets.

Although you would think this area might phase out after preschool, Practical Life continues all the way through Montessori education. If you think about it, learning about life skills doesn't end at age 12. How to purchase a home, maintain a car, plan and conduct a business, and make or shop for clothing are all life skills that students need to learn.

Sensorial

The Montessori classroom is designed to appeal to students through their senses. They touch objects and math manipulatives; they smell the apples at harvest time. They look at reproductions of beautiful paintings. They listen to music and sing songs.

In addition to this, the youngest class of 3- to 5-year-old children explores the world through the sensorial portion of Montessori. This is where they

investigate the concepts of physics, matter, and space. They stack blocks and round pegs to investigate balance. Does that peg fit into that hole? Why not?

They also experience lessons on the senses of smell, taste, and hearing. They explore color and fabric. And they solve tactile mysteries by identifying objects simply by their feel. Sensorial instruction is the area of Montessori that expands the child's awareness of his physical world.

Culture

Culture in Montessori includes science, geography, social studies, and more. Young students explore the globe, animals, land and water forms, nations' flags, their own continent, and their own country — and that's just a small portion of what they learn from ages 3 to 6.

When the student becomes older, culture branches out into its various subtopics: botany, science (these are sometimes two different subjects), geography, and history. Whatever would contribute to a people's culture, to humanity's culture, those are the topics you find within Culture class.

MAKING YOUR LIFESTYLE MONTESSORI

Child-led learning, multi-age classes, and a room filled with educational manipulatives sound like a garden of wonders. But can the time-honored Montessori method be duplicated at home? Well, in a way it can. A true Montessori classroom is led by a Montessori-trained teacher and *only* a Montessori-trained teacher. And true Montessori classrooms are filled with multi-age children, teaching 3- to 6-year-old children in one class, 6- to 9-year-old children in another, and 9- to 12-year-olds in a third. As a homeschooler you can take the best of the Montessori method and re-create it with your children.

You may already have the multi-age part down, and if so, great! The Montessori method guides the older children to teach the younger ones, thus strengthening the child's knowledge. But even if you are homeschooling an only, Montessori education can work beautifully into your lifestyle and your relationship with your learner.

Maria Montessori was a medical doctor who worked with disadvantaged students in Italy, many of whom had learning difficulties. Because a Montessori education was built around different learners, it shines with the outside-the-box students. Each lesson is broken into small segments, and it can be repeated as many times as necessary until the student understands. On the other hand, once the child masters a lesson, she can move on. You're also not tied to a particular grade with Montessori materials, since everything is designed for an age range (a developmental stage, actually) rather than individual grades. Your student moves at her own pace.

Chapter 14

Wandering through Nature with Waldorf

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Nurturing your children's love of nature**
- **Creating with their hands**
- **Finding your best Waldorf options**
- **Seeking similar ideals**

If you've never heard of Waldorf education, you're not alone. It's an education philosophy that appeared on the homeschooling horizon several years ago. Like the Montessori method, Waldorf began in small private schools, the brainchild of a man named Rudolf Steiner. Waldorf teachers who became homeschoolers and Waldorf-interested parents modified the system for use at home, but even so it progressed slowly into the homeschooling arena.

When you meet people who talk about Waldorf, they speak of Steiner and his method with passion. Either they love this method, often called the Steiner-Waldorf method, or they hate it. Very few people seem to stand in the middle. Looking at it from the outside, there's a lot to like about Waldorf. Classes incorporate stories. Students play with cute dolls that have minimalist faces. The curriculum emphasizes spending time in nature.

Working Together with Head, Hands, and Heart

Waldorf strives to teach the whole child. Its motto is "head, hands, and heart," meaning that the child's education incorporates physical movement and skills at the same time that it teaches knowledge. Invented by Steiner, the physical

movement is called *eurhythmy,* and it combines art, music, and movement. Eurhythmy is a performance art that Waldorf kids learn when they're little and continue all the way through their education.

This learning philosophy emphasizes teaching skills to a child only when she is developmentally ready for them. This is one of the reasons for its popularity among homeschooling families. Instead of feeling like they push little learners in order to keep to someone else's timetable or to finish pages in a workbook, Waldorf parents revel in taking a much slower approach to education.

For instance, Steiner believed that children should not learn to read until they had their first adult tooth. Because of this, most Waldorf areas for younger learners have no words posted where children can see them. Kindergarten children learn the uppercase letters, and first graders concentrate on learning lowercase letters. When the curriculum directs the homeschooler to teach a fairy tale or story, these are told rather than read to the child. This requires a fair amount of preparation on the part of parents unless they already know most of the stories they plan to tell.

Enjoying the outdoors

One of the biggest draws to Waldorf education is its emphasis on nature. Beginning as a preschooler or kindergartner, Waldorf-educated students spend a large part of their days outdoors. Even the language arts lessons of kindergartners and first graders center around tales of woodland fairies and gnomes. Whether using the outdoors as a classroom or for free play, time outside forms a large part of Waldorf education. As they get older, students study nature as a science.

When students outgrow the outdoor free-play stage, they still engage in nature walks. They go outside every day. They observe nature. They note the changes in the seasons. They look at the trees, the plants, and any wildlife they may find. The walk, however, is the point. They don't necessarily go outside to collect rocks or leaves, but to experience and observe nature in a peaceful setting.

Waldorf curriculum also provides outdoor activities. If the children spend a year or six months studying farming or gardening, then they go outside and learn about preparing the soil, starting plants, and the importance of weeding.

As often as possible, the Waldorf curriculum is a hands-on, activity-based experience.

Making things by hand

Another enticing aspect of the Waldorf curriculum is its emphasis on handwork. Whether a child is learning to knit in first grade or weaving a complicated basket in twelfth, learning hand skills is important to the Waldorf child. He knits in first or second grade, learns to weave in third grade, and crochets by fourth grade. She draws from first grade on, her drawings getting more and more precise as she matures. She learns to make models from clay, to paint, and to create with felt and paper.

All this activity teaches useful skills, but as part of a Waldorf curriculum it does more. It provides the "hands" part of the educational process. It also helps the child develop intellectually, emotionally, and creatively. Anyone who has learned to knit — or who has taught someone else — can attest to the intellectual and emotional workout. The string tangles. Sometimes it knots. It requires a quick mind and a calm heart to keep going, especially when that mind and heart are only 7 years old when they begin.

Flowing with the day

A Waldorf homeschool flows through the day like your breath. You breathe in … and out. Waldorf curriculum considers some activities to be breathing-out activities. They consist of times when the student interacts with his world: taking a nature walk, creating with clay, or movement exercises. Other times of the day the student interacts with himself. Activities like rest time, free play, and snack time count as breathing-in parts of the day. These times alternate so that the child is interacting with others or his world, and then taking a step back to focus on a more internal project.

Another breathing-in time of the day is when the child takes in information. Each Waldorf teaching day builds a block of learning time when the student focuses on one particular topic, like history or literature, for an extended period of time. Children explore nine to ten different lesson blocks per year, each one lasting four to six weeks. At the beginning a block might only last for 20 or 30 minutes, but by the time a child reaches middle school, he could focus for up to two hours on the day's in-depth learning. Although the topic for a month may be history, other subjects like literature, geography, art

history, grammar, and writing may be folded into that topic study. These topical lessons are called Blocks or *Block Lessons* in Waldorf education, and they are a hallmark of the system.



WARNING Keep in mind that the children are studying one topic for four to six weeks *whether they want to or not.* If you have a child who masters a topic in a week and then wants to move on to something new, Waldorf may not be a good fit.

When a block lesson begins for the day, children don't take out their textbooks and begin to read. The teaching time is arranged by the teacher, who is considered a guide, and the teacher leads the student through a lesson using stories and art. The same is true for the homeschooler. The child learns about ancient cultures and history, for example, by listening to fables and fairy tales from those times. These stories are recited to the children, rather than read aloud from a book, even with older grade levels. This increases the interaction between homeschool parent and child, but it also increases prep time for Dad, Mom, or the teaching grandparent.

Locating a Waldorf-Style Curriculum

If learning outdoors, communing with nature, creating with your hands, and telling stories to your children sounds like the best thing since chocolate cake, where do you find something like this? Well, you could read all of Rudolph Steiner's work and create a curriculum on your own, but I wouldn't advise that (and I enjoy writing curriculum!). Steiner's books and articles are freely available if you search for them on the Internet, but they're filled with dense, 1920-ish style academic writing.

Thankfully, several companies have done the hard work for you. I found five comprehensive Waldorf or Waldorf-style curriculums that may fit your needs as a new Waldorf homeschooler. Take a look and see what you think; each one has its own strengths that you will want to weigh against your Waldorf wish list.

Picking favorites

Five curriculum providers may not sound like a lot of choice, but if you are interested in Waldorf homeschooling, you will probably resonate with one of these. Each one has its own tone and its own personality. Some of these allow you to pick and choose sections of their curriculum, and only purchase what you want or need. Others offer only a full-curriculum package for each grade level.

- **Christopherus Homeschool Resources:** (www.christopherushomeschool.com) Developed by a longtime Waldorf student and instructor, this curriculum follows the traditional Waldorf schedule. Covers Pre-K through Grade 8.
- **Earthschooling:** (www.earthschooling.info) You can purchase this curriculum as a grade-specific unit, as a lifetime family purchase, or in individual parts. If you want to purchase only the first and third blocks of first grade, the eurhythmy lessons, and musical recorder instructions, for example, you can do that to try out the curriculum before you invest wholly. Currently available: Pre-K through Grade 9, with Grades 10 to 12 in development.
- **Lavender's Blue:** (www.lavendersbluehomeschool.com) Lavender's Blue is a relative newcomer to the Waldorf homeschool world, and one of the only curricula *not* written by a former Waldorf teacher. The author's attitude is warm and welcoming. If you did the research yourself and wrote a Waldorf curriculum from scratch, this is what it might look like. Currently available: K to Grade 3, with Grade 4 in process.
- **Oak Meadow:** (www.oakmeadow.com) This curriculum classifies as Waldorf-inspired rather than a true Waldorf curriculum. The classes are divided into sections like Language Arts/Math/Science for each grade level, but it retains the inquisitive and whole-child learning approach of Waldorf. Oak Meadow is the only truly secular option in the list. For why this may be important to you, see the sidebar "Waldorf's religious underpinnings." Offers materials for K through Grade 12.
- **Waldorf Essentials:** (http://melisa-nielsen.mykajabi.com/) This is another curriculum written by a Waldorf researcher (as opposed to a trained Waldorf teacher). Perhaps because of that, the materials seem to be very thorough in explaining *why* a Waldorf homeschooler would want to do something. Covers Pre-K through Grade 8.

Opting for similar goals

Perhaps you like some of the ideas of Waldorf education, but you don't want to commit to the entire educational system. Maybe you want to incorporate a few of the practices without following the prescribed schedule. Can you still benefit?

Of course you can. If your interest lies in nature studies, take a look at the Charlotte Mason method in Chapter 12. If you like the idea of self-directed learning that incorporates the child's developmental age, you may enjoy the Montessori method in Chapter 13. If the idea of handiwork or long-term musical development intrigues you, you can chart out what you want your child to learn and tackle the projects one at a time or purchase a soprano recorder and a couple beginner books. (We used the hot pink and bright blue *Let's Play Recorder Instruction Books* by Hal Leonard, if you're overwhelmed with choices.) Once your child knows how to read music and play the recorder, you can move on to Disney tunes and continue through recorder music of the Renaissance as your child grows. (It's a thing. Honest.)

WALDORF'S RELIGIOUS UNDERPINNINGS

Rudolf Steiner, the Waldorf school creator and muse, believed in reincarnation, astrology, clairvoyance, and gnomes, among other things. He developed a "philosophy" he called *anthroposophy,* anthropo- meaning *human* and -sophy meaning *science of*. Anthroposophy included all these things and more. If you read Steiner's writings, you'll see he sometimes refers to anthroposophy as a spirit-science, which we would call a religion.

Steiner referred to the teachers in his schools as undercover priests, who were sent to guide the children in the ways of anthroposophy without actually calling it that. You will find the term nowhere in the materials for the children, although it may be referred to in the teaching manuals (also known as teaching guides). However, you will find the practice of anthroposophy in the Waldorf curriculum itself.

For example, children are categorized by temperament according to one of the medieval humors, which Steiner also believed and wrote into the Waldorf curriculum. The *theory of the humors* (or humours) began in ancient Greece and became popular in medieval medicine. Your child can be sanguine (sociable, spring, air), choleric (active, summer, fire), melancholic (listless, winter, earth), or phlegmatic (thoughtful, autumn, water). While this was disproven in the 19th century in science, it continues in the Waldorf curriculum.

Waldorf considers teaching more of an art than a science. The concept that children should not read until they show their first adult tooth isn't science. Steiner believed that early reading damaged a child's spiritual self. Whether or not your child is ready to read before age 7 or 8, you won't find it in the traditional Waldorf curriculum.

If the idea of Waldorf appeals to you, but you don't want the anthroposophy underpinnings of

reincarnation and belief in gnomes that live under the ground, check out a Waldorf-inspired curriculum like Oak Meadow. If you like the idea of Waldorf as it was originally conceived and executed, then any of the curriculum providers listed in this chapter should work well.

Chapter 15

Teaching Them What They Want to Learn

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Defining the unit study**
- **Using unit studies as the basis for your curriculum**
- **Exploring project-based learning**
- **Creating your own unit study**

According to your 9-year-old son, weather is the most important subject in the world. He tracks the phases of the moon. You have a handmade monthly rainfall chart tacked to the refrigerator door — always complete by the end of the month because he studiously empties the rain gauge into the flowerbed after marking the current water level. He reads books about tornadoes, monsoons, and other natural disasters with relish and waxes poetic about his favorite topic at the slightest invitation.

What do you *do* with a child like him? Well, you could present him with a brand-new stack of textbooks each year and insist that he work through them. That is one option. Another, perhaps more palatable, idea is to take what he loves and what he's good at and build from there. This type of learning is called *unit study* or *theme-based* education.

Unit studies take a topic — virtually any topic will do, as long as your students show some interest in it — and build a whole curriculum around the topic, rather than treat each subject as an individual, stand-alone entity. If you build on interests the students already have and teach one large topic at a time rather than isolated subjects, then teaching becomes easier for you as the parent and your children generally become more involved in the learning.

Unveiling the Integrated Unit Study

A well-designed unit study takes pieces of information from all subjects and fits them together like the pieces of a puzzle. Going back to the weather example, the child writes a story about a spectacular thunderstorm for language arts, draws cloud formations for art, and calculates the differences in wind velocities for math. For social studies, he looks at the way in which different cultures experience storms, and the science portion of the unit study allows him to read about antique and modern weather instruments and their inventors. Spelling and vocabulary both focus on weather words, and if you sing or play songs about weather, you include music as well. (Think "It's Raining, It's Pouring" and "Stormy Weather.")

When you take a step back and look at the whole package, you have a complete curriculum for a week or two — or even longer — that highlights one particular subject. While you learn about one subject in depth, you also hit the other required subjects along the way. The main subject could be almost anything: Art, music, reading, math, science, and social studies all make great jumping-off points for unit studies. To do a whole unit study on a topic such as grammar, however, requires a diehard little grammar lover. And to date, I've never met one. My kids roll their eyes when I begin to extol the virtues of the prepositional phrase; they'd think that I had lost my mind if I suggested studying every subject through the lens of grammar for two whole weeks!



TIP Unit studies are spectacular for teaching children whose ages vary widely. The 4-year-old and the high school student can both study a topic such as weather as long as you include information, tasks, and projects appropriate to both learning levels.

All unit studies, all the time

Many homeschool families opt to build their entire curriculum around the unit-study concept. Most unit studies are designed to be completed in a week or two, so they select 18 or 36 different topics to fill a year and go from there. Or a family may choose the first six units or so and see how the year goes. If the kids really get into one particular subject, such as horses, you can track down additional information at the library or visit a horse breeder. Or watch a movie or two that feature horses as main characters and talk about the

movie's plot and special effects. With additions like these, you could easily take a unit study designed for two weeks and stretch it for a month or so.

One option is to locate a curriculum that's designed as a unit study and use that. This of more of an open-the-book-and-go method than trying to piece it all together on the fly or actually sitting down to write a well-rounded unit study on your own. (If the idea of writing your own unit studies jazzes you, check out this chapter's section titled "Designing Unit Studies.") A good unit study will contain most of these subjects: language arts, math, social studies, science, art, art appreciation, music, physical education, and community interaction. Will it contain all of these? Nope. Not unless you write it yourself.

Comprehensive math is very difficult to include in a unit study. What if you find the perfect fourth-grade unit study, and it contains fourth-grade math, but your child is still working through third-grade math? Or what if she aced fourth-grade math last year and is working on fifth-grade math? Because math is so individual, it's difficult to write solid day-by-day math instruction into unit studies. If a unit study has a math portion you can use, great! You can incorporate that as one of your math days for the week (or more, depending on the math content) and save your own math for later.

Even with the best unit studies, you may need to pick up a couple things on your own. Like math class. You can either purchase a math curriculum or use your unit study as a foundation and, armed with a *scope and sequence* (a list of what children need to know per grade level), you can integrate necessary math skills into your unit study. The Montessori method does a tremendous job of this, especially for younger learners. Turn to Chapter 13 for more information.



I used a unit study curriculum with my youngest from the beginning through seventh grade, and we enjoyed it tremendously. Transitions between subjects became almost seamless as we moved from science to social studies to literature to creative writing to art, all within the scope of one overarching topic for the week. Because I never announced that we were changing subjects, especially in the younger years, it all seemed

to be one large study of the topic at hand. With certain learners, this can reduce much frustration if they struggle to disengage and re-engage between subjects.

Locating unit studies

You decide to try the unit-study route, and you have no idea where to track these elusive books down. Unit studies aren't too hard to find if you know what you're looking for. This section gives you a starting point by listing some of the better-known and more prolific unit-study publishers available, along with an idea of the subjects they cover.



TIP Look for words such as *unit*, *theme*, or *integrated* in the title or subtitle of a unit study when you browse through the local education store or search the Internet.

Almost all unit studies these days contain *reproducible black line masters*, which is education-speak for, "Buy one book and make as many copies as you need." If your purchased unit study comes in the form of a printable PDF, then *printable* takes the place of *reproducible black line masters*. Where homeschooling is concerned, you can make the number of copies that you need to teach the children in your homeschool. And if you find yourself visiting that unit study again, perhaps to cover the topic more deeply than you did the first time or to teach younger children, you have permission to copy the pages all over again.



WARNING Making copies of your new unit study for all your homeschooling friends is *not* what the curriculum designers had in mind. In fact, to do that is an infringement of the copyright laws. Tell your best friends where you got the book so they can purchase copies, too.

On the other hand, if you volunteer to teach the unit study to a group of homeschool children — homeschoolers all volunteer for this kind of thing sooner or later — you're perfectly within the copyright laws to photocopy the unit-study pages for each child in your class. Because you purchased the

book, you're teaching the unit study, and you plan to teach this whole cadre of children, that makes photocopying the unit-study pages okay.

Here are some pre-written unit-study options.

Build Your Library

This curriculum builds everything around history, in a Charlotte Mason approach (see Chapter 12). Each year explores a different historical period, beginning with the ancient world in Grade 1 and continuing all the way through American history in Grade 12. Each grade stands independently, and it covers history, literature (reading), poetry, science, art, and in high school, an elective like survival skills or mythology. If your kids are a year or two apart, you can use one level and teach everyone at once. This curriculum does not include math, and if you want to include grammar study or phonics (reading) instruction, you'll want to find those as well. Beginning with Level (Grade) 3, reading suggestions appear in the program, but before that everything is read aloud. (It's a way to get good literature into the offspring before they can read such words themselves.) Build Your Library also offers stand-alone unit studies on several topics if you want a several-week unit study instead of one that lasts the entire school year. Available from the website, `www.buildyourlibrary.com`.

Magic Forest Academy, Stage 2

If your kids are into nature, they will love this unit study curriculum. Somewhat unusual in the current curriculum world, but very inline with unit studies, this curriculum spans ages 7 through 12 and includes 52 weeks of study — an entire year's worth. Each week's topic gets its own booklet for you to follow. Each topic begins with an introduction, one or two recommended books on the topic (often a fiction and nonfiction title), a math activity, science, arts and crafts or a famous artist to study, a game, a recipe, and a full page of additional activities that add depth to the week. Over the year, children explore ten different artists as well as the cultural influence of more than 50 indigenous North American tribes. Each week also provides two quotes that you can use for memorization, exploration, or copywork. Child-led in focus, much of the content can be completed independently by an older child. You can teach this at an introductory level to a younger child, and then go through the material again at a higher level the following year, making this a unit study that lasts two or more years.

Unless you want to teach math topic by topic (which is a perfectly valid way to do it), you'll need a grade-level math program to go along with this study. You will also need grammar if you want to teach it, although you can use the weekly reading books to teach grammar if you like. If you want even more activities and resources, visit the Magic Forest Academy on the Internet at www.magicforestacademy.com. Clicking on "A-Z Nature Resources" and then on an individual topic will open a page filled with additional websites as well as book, video, and game options. Stage 1 of the curriculum, for ages 3 to 6, and Stage 3 for ages 13 to 17 are currently in development.

Torchlight

Torchlight is a Socratic-based education, meaning you learn through asking questions and then discovering the answers to those questions. Each year has a theme, so kindergartners explore the lands and culture in Worldly Wisdom and first-graders delve into Myth and Magic (learning the difference between fact and fiction, among other things). Second-graders explore the medieval world in Logic and Legends, while third-graders enter the modern era while focusing on Inquiry and Innovation. Torchlight includes literature, poetry, language arts, writing, art, music, geography, social studies, history, and science. Again, you're on your own for math. One "subject" for each year's study consists of delving into the year's topic. While this isn't a traditional unit study such as Magic Forest Academy, Torchlight takes an innovative approach in structuring traditional subjects around the year's theme. Currently levels Pre-K through Grade 3 are available, with higher grade levels in development. Purchase from the website, found at www.torchlightcurriculum.com.

Making them last

All of the unit studies previously listed are year-long programs. But what if you want to try some of the shorter options from Build Your Library, or only a few topics from Magic Forest Academy? What if you find a short two-week unit study on Our Winter Holidays or Science in the Medieval World? You can finish most small unit studies within a two-week time period — unless the subject matter has so enamored you that you extend the time that you spend on it. Extending a unit study is easy as long as you keep integrating math and language arts along with the fun. Some topics lend themselves easily to math problems (such as figuring arcs, distance, and speed in baseball) or language (writing stories, poems, or sentences) and others require

a bit more creativity. Nothing says you can't extend a unit study that's supposed to last only two weeks. The Unit Study Police won't track you down and demand that you begin a new topic as long as your child is learning and you're both enjoying yourselves.

You say that you know an oceanographer but haven't had the time to give her a call? Most people love to talk about their passions, especially if they're fortunate enough to pursue those passions full time. Schedule a lunch date with your friend, or invite her over to see what your brood's been up to the past few weeks. With a few chocolate chip cookies and a glass of milk, I bet you can convince her to talk about the ocean and why she loves it. That, in turn, can fuel the fire in your children so that they want to learn more. You may feel a little left out before the end of the afternoon, but watch your kids' eyes sparkle as they discuss a topic they feel strongly about with a professional in the field.

The same holds true no matter what your child's passion may be. If your child displays a hearty interest in cooking, who do you know who really loves to cook and does it well? That person could really fuel your child's interest — as if it needed any help! And a visit or conversation with an expert can help fuel your own imagination, showing you where to take your unit study next. With a little persistence, if your child really enjoys the topic, your unit study doesn't have to end after 48 pages. It could go on for a year or two.



GETTING SIDETRACKED

If you find that you particularly enjoy a subject, take a trip to the library to find books related to your topic. Or stay home and browse the Internet for YouTube videos, images, and articles related to your subject. Some unit studies, which I have not listed here, are nothing more than a very long list of Internet links. As you click through them, you learn about the subject. You can do that yourself with a topic near and dear to your heart. (Two more weeks on "History of the Sewing Machine," anyone? No?) An afternoon exploring online or watching related science videos may present a welcome change after you just spent days talking about the sea and perhaps creating clay models of ocean animals or diagrams of the oceanic food chain.

Changing Pace with Unit Studies

Even if you use textbook curriculum for most of your studies, breaking out of the print mold and jumping headlong into a unit study is nice every now and then. For one thing, it makes your students think a little more about how the different parts of life actually fit together. For another, it gives you a break from the middle-of-the-year doldrums.

If you find that your children are deeply interested in one or two subjects but for the most part enjoy textbooks, then those subjects are the ones to pursue with unit studies when you decide to take a breather. Sometimes while you work through a year's studies, *you* see a hole in subject matter that you think should be filled. Find a unit study on that topic, and take a week or two to teach it. Do your kids find black holes fascinating, and does the science text cover them in a paragraph or two? Looks like a unit on astronomy may be in order.

Or to present another scenario: You think that economics is fascinating, and you know the library contains several juvenile books on the ins and outs of money management, basic economic theory, and business practices. However, you'll be hard pressed to locate economics in any textbook outside of consumer math in most elementary or middle-school curriculums. Again, unit studies come to the rescue. With a little investigation, you're sure to unearth a prepared unit study or two that you can use. The Council for Econ Ed produced a program called *Never Too Young: Personal Finance for K–5 Learners*, available from their website at www.councilforeconed.org, and the Econ Ed Link, located at www.econedlink.org, offers grade-level economics lessons as well as collections of lessons grouped by topic. Add one or both of these to your stack of books and protect your progeny from personal finance failure.



AT OUR HOUSE

WAXING AND WANING

We hit the low point of our year in late February. It never fails: Valentine's Day passes, and our interest in schoolwork does, too. And the kids aren't alone in this — I don't want to walk downstairs and pull out the books, either. To combat the February grubbies, we spend a little

more time making chocolate chip cookies for home economics class, creating hands-on art projects to supplement science or social studies (or simply for the joy of making something new in art class), and drag out some favorite board games for math and geography. Or I dip into my filing cabinet and pull out a unit study that takes two weeks to complete.

Local history, events, and landmarks make a wonderful topic for a unit study, but you probably need to design it yourself (see the next section for some hints). It's a topic that no textbook covers — a topic that adds a native polish to your children's education and heightens your own appreciation at the same time.



Taking my children to see the Johnny Appleseed gravesite turned out to be one of the highlights of moving to a new town recently. Crazy about American history, the kids thought that moving into the town that became John Chapman's (Appleseed's) last stop was incredibly cool. Without the pressures of settling in a new place, that trip would be a wonderful beginning to a unit study on local history. Your area has places like that, too.

Focusing on Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning is relatively new to education, and to the homeschooling scene. The concept is simple: Kids learn better when they find themselves invested in something they feel is important. In project-based learning, students complete a deep investigation into a topic and learn along the way, letting their innate curiosity guide them to understanding. They immerse themselves in the issue, ask engaging questions, and suggest plausible solutions.

Project-based learning is different from the unit study. Your students aren't simply learning about a topic here; they are deeply learning about a real-world problem in a way that also allows them to gain the knowledge they would if they sat in a traditional classroom with textbooks. At the end they produce something: a presentation or a product. Along the way they've learned how to learn on their own, an important life skill.

Short- and long-term projects

The project can take as much or as little time as you like. You can schedule a short project to last two weeks, or a long one that takes ten. Both approaches are valid, and they produce different levels of learning. Perhaps the issue at hand doesn't require ten weeks of in-depth study. Maybe this is your first experience with project-based learning (you may want to do a short run at first to test the waters and see how your student, and you, respond to the experience).

Scheduling a long project, one that takes many weeks to complete, allows for deeper, immersive learning. On the other hand, it also allows time for your student to become completely bored with the project and wish he were doing something else, which is not the goal at all. A long project needs to be an issue or problem large enough that the student feels justified in spending weeks to devise a finished product or problem solution.

Designing a project to suit the learner

Good projects must have five components to them: a driving question, investigation, student-driven research, real-world impact, and relevance to the curriculum subject. Okay, what does that all mean? The entire project begins with a question. Not just any question, this query must be strong enough and big enough to sustain weeks of investigation and analysis. *Why do we like the color blue?* is not a question that will drive weeks of inquiry, unless your student happens to be a doctoral candidate. Most students, frankly, don't care.

On the other hand, a question such as *How can we solve homelessness?* focuses the project toward one goal: solutions for an area's homeless population. This involves a real-world problem (so it meets the real-world impact goal), and it's a social studies question, so give it a check mark for being tied to the curriculum. Solving this issue is going to take creativity, research, investigation, and analysis, so only one component is left: It must be student-driven.

Student-driven learning is the heart of project-based learning. If the student doesn't guide it and keep it going — or at the very least, have some say in the proceedings — this is not going to end well. The whole point is to create a learning environment where your student can take charge of her learning and dive into a project that means something to her. Then, at the end of the investigation, she produces something to show what she learned, whether it's

staging an event like an information fair, presenting her findings at a town hall meeting or library seminar, or producing a product like the prototype for a feasible formerly homeless permanent housing pod.



TIP For more information as well as a step-by-step guide, you may want to look at *Project-Based Learning: Creating a Modern Education of Curiosity, Innovation, and Impact*, by Blair Lee and Samantha Matalone Cook. It's available from the SEA Homeschoolers bookstore, found online at www.secularecclecticacademic.com. You may also visit the Buck Institute for Education's PBL Works, at www.pblworks.org. Buck Institute specializes in project-based learning for schools, and the site offers articles and suggestions.

Designing Unit Studies

Of course, with a little time and creativity, you can create your own unit studies. Assembling your own curriculum around one topic sounds like a big deal, but with a great topic and some time, putting together a unique unit study can be great fun. Designing your own unit studies presents two drawbacks:

- **It takes time.** For a busy parent who needs to get dinner on the table, teach several children, and still make the other wheels of life turn on a daily basis, this could be enough of a reason to take an extended trip to the nearest education store with your credit card in your pocket.
- **It may require access to a couple of grade-level subject books.** This includes science, language arts, or math, so you know which skills are typically covered at a particular grade level. If you have a good library — or better yet, a nearby college library with an educational books department — this could be a great excuse for the unit-study developer (that would be you) to spend a long Saturday and a pocketful of change at the college library with a stack of books. This leaves parental unit number two in charge of the kids for the day while you browse … ummm … *work* to your heart's content.

The good part? You can teach *anything* you want. If you want to teach bug genetics as a unit study, then grab some books from the library and go for it. Creating your own unit study on economics almost takes less time than tracking down a study that someone else already created.

Subject-ing yourself to this?

When you make your own unit study from scratch, your unit study needs to cover all the subjects you'd normally teach, unless you plan to skip the math, for example, and work through a math text along with the unit study (also a fine decision in the unit-study universe). To be complete and all-inclusive, each unit study needs to include the first four subjects from the following list and as many of the others as you can fit in logically:

- **Math:** Create math problems at your child's level. If you're working on second-grade addition, for example, and your unit study is baseball, then you can add bats and balls, write a story problem that talks about number of pitches thrown until the team reached the final out, and so on. For the same unit, math for an older child may talk about speed of the bat, distance the ball travels, or the number of hot dogs that individual team fans eat.
- **Language Arts:** Reading, comprehension, grammar, writing skills — the whole kit and caboodle — can be included in language arts. Although you don't need to include *all* this in every unit study that you write, most units do ask students to write a little bit about the topic. Perhaps your child wants to create a story about the topic at hand. Or read a book or two about the topic and talk about it.
- **Science:** Sometimes a unit study shines in science. Other times you may need to work a little. If you just designed that unit on bug genetics, you're off the hook for science. The entire unit study qualifies as science. On the other hand, a unit on ancient Egypt may take some time to look at the creations of the Egyptian engineers, mummification, ancient medicine, or the tools that the Egyptians used to get the job done.
- **Social Studies or Geography:** Much like science, social studies may be your main topic, or you may need to work some information into the topic at hand. Some questions you may keep in mind as you work: Where was your topic first seen or invented? What culture surrounded the time or

event? Where did this take place? What are the residents associated with your topic used to? What preceded it? Did it change the prevalent culture in any way? What personalities were involved? Can you research explorers, inventors, sea captains, farmers, or kings?

- **Art:** Draw. Build. Act. Design. Create. These all fall into the art category. Design a Roman mosaic. Sketch an insect's genetic makeup. Build a temple from clay or LEGOs. Create a tapestry to illustrate the unit that you're studying (felt shapes work for quick tapestries when needlepoint takes way too long). Paint the flowers that you're learning about.
- **Music:** Sometimes music fits into a unit study nicely. Listening to folk music while you explore the civil unrest of the 1960s may be a natural fit. On the other hand, you may need to work a little harder to fit music into that bug genetics unit study. (If you really need one, look up A Capella Science on YouTube. The song is called CRISPR-cas9, and while it's not specifically about entomology, it does sing about genetics.)
- **History:** Adding history to a unit study may be as simple as researching when an event began or an item was invented. On the other hand, history could be as complicated as talking about the events and times that affected an item's inventor. Write diary entries. Design a period newspaper. Build a model of the time's architecture. (What if the medieval world had Twitter?) Delve as deep as you like and get as creative as you want. It's your unit study and your call.
- **Physical Education:** You may need to be a bit creative with this one, but if P.E. fits into your unit, then use it! Run footraces like the ancient Greeks or gather a group of homeschool students to finish that baseball unit with a rousing game.

Digging for topics

If you need ideas for unit studies, follow your children around for a couple days and watch what they do. If one spends all his time engrossed in books, think about a literature-based unit study, such as *How Books Are Made*. If another child hits the door to unearth rocks from the back yard, you may have an archeology or rocks and minerals lover. Both topics would make great unit studies.

Some topics are evergreen. You can present them more than once as your

little group grows older. Perhaps your student is interested in

- Animals, horses, or mammals
- Baseball, basketball, fencing, or sports in general
- Cooking or catering (which may include business and economics information)
- Dandelions, herbs, herbal medicine, or herbal lore
- Holidays around the world, through history; those you celebrate or specifically ones you don't
- Iceland, ice, or the Inuit
- Jupiter, Saturn, the solar system, or astronomy
- Kites, flight, transportation, or weather
- Medieval history, ancient Egypt, or any historical culture
- Starting a business

Calling all units …

Now that you have your topic in hand and a few ideas for each subject, what do you do with it all? This is where the fun and creativity come in. First, sit down with a nice pad of paper or a computer screen. A cup of your favorite hot beverage won't hurt any, either. Arrange your sources around you and take a deep breath. It's time to create!

Start with your topic. If it's a science topic, build your science parts first. If it's a social studies or history topic, start there. Are you building an entire unit around a book, such as Lloyd Alexander's *The Book of Three*, which is based on Welsh mythology? Then begin with the book's chapters and their content and build from there. Write an introduction. Why are we spending two weeks or more on this? Why is it important? The introduction doesn't have to be long, but it sets the focus of your study. And you need to write this stuff down because three weeks later you may not remember the details. (Okay, maybe it's just me. If *I* don't write all this down, it's long gone when I finally sit down to teach it.)

Say you're building a two-week unit study. Fourteen days — oops. No, two weeks would be ten days. I guess we need to give the kids their weekends off!

For two weeks you actually have ten days of instruction. And your topic will be (picking from the preceding list) kites! Pretend it's springtime wherever you are, with nice blustery winds that will work well with a kite study.

Kites really isn't a science-only study, or a social studies–only study. It's a mixture of several things. Decide what topics you want to cover. History of kites/types of kites/manufacture of kites/kites in warfare/kite festivals. That's a good list to begin with. Now list the days in order, and assign kite topics to each of them. Then go back and assign activities from other subjects to fill out the days and the unit study. My list looks like this:

1. **History of kites: Ancient China**
   Language arts: Reading kite poetry
   Art: Feng Zikai, *Fly Kite*
   Math: Kite addition
2. **History of kites: Japan and Polynesia**
   Language arts: Polynesian kite myth
   Art: Carp kites
   Math: Kite tesselations
3. **History of kites: India**
   Art: Francisco de Goya, *La Cometa* (The Kite)
   Language arts: Write a kite story
   Math: Kite subtraction
4. **History of kites: United States**
   Science: Ben Franklin and kites
   Language arts: *Magic School Bus Rides the Wind*, Scholastic
   Math: Money math, buying a kite
5. **Types of kites**
   Science: Wright Brothers and Alexander Graham Bell
   Language Arts: *Ming and the Magic Kite* by Lois B. Noffsinger
   Math: Kite addition
6. **Manufacture of kites: Companies**
   Art: Kite fabrics and colors; design a kite

Phys ed: Pretending to flutter like a kite

Math: Kites from tangrams

7. **Kites in warfare: World War I**

   Science: U.S. Weather Bureau

   Language arts: Writing about “The Kite That _____

   Math: Kite perimeters

8. **Kite festivals: India’s fighter kites**

   Science: Wood struts, metal or composite

   Art: *The Kite*, John Morgan

   Math: Kite areas

9. **Kite festivals: China**

   Music: “Let’s Go Fly a Kite” from *Mary Poppins*

   Art: Making Brazilian children’s kites

   Phys ed: Flying kites

   Math: Calculating kite string length

10. **Kite festivals: United States**

    Language arts: Writing a kite poem

    Phys ed: Flying kites

    Math: Kites and shapes

When I finish my preliminary list, I have some idea where I’m going. I know which topics I plan to teach each day; I know which books and which artworks I need to get my hands on. If we are going to fly kites the last two days, we need to either build or buy kites. If I want to make them, that will need to go into my list.

From here I flesh out my plan. This is turning out to be a social studies unit study with a strong science component. Taking one day and one subject at a time, what do I want to teach the children regarding that topic? For Day 1, History of kites: Ancient China, I write or outline the content of the day’s lesson, and then move on to the next subject for that day, which is language arts. I know that many children’s poems have already been written about kites in the springtime, so I spend time tracking those down. Now I have a list of three or four poems to cover. I already located Feng Zikai’s beautiful

watercolor *Fly Kite,* so once I design a simple math page about kite addition (or not so simple, depending on my student's grade or level), Day 1 is complete and I'm ready to complete Day 2.

When I'm finished writing the teaching notes for Day 10, my unit is complete. I usually do this on a computer so I can press the Print button when I'm finished. Then I punch holes in the unit study and file it in my teaching binder for the day that I need it, probably within the next couple weeks.



LET THEIR INTERESTS GUIDE YOU

As your children mention an interest, write it down somewhere. If you keep a running list of interests as the younger set talks about them, soon you'll have more topics than you could use in a three-year time span! Even if your child only shows a deep interest in one or two topics, explore those. You may find that you create several unit studies based off the first one as new secondary and tertiary fascinations develop.

Do you have a chocolate lover at your house? Explore the history, recipes, and creations and the part chocolate plays or played. Chocolate development in the United States was completely different than in Europe, and the story is fascinating. Joel Glenn Brenner's *The Emperors of Chocolate* gives you an inside look at two of the United States' largest chocolate companies if you want a jumping-off point for that chocolate unit.

Does your child play only video games? Then take an in-depth look at graphics, animation, computer programming, and the hardware that makes the videos go. Including the histories of the companies that produce the games counts as business class, and you can get as involved in game programming as you want to. Look at the history of video games and learn about Nolan Bushnell and Atari, the little company he founded. Then go from there. Even with a seemingly tiny topic such as video games, you can create a unit study that will keep your students involved for hours.

Chapter 16

Unschooling: A Walk on the Relaxed Side

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Defining unschooling**
- **Learning through unschooling**
- **Unschooling tools and toys**
- **Recording your progress**

What would you do if you could throw out all the dry textbooks and teach your children by guiding them through their days? You watch them flower as they take the initiative to explore the ideas and subjects important to them, and you answer questions as they arise. Is this your idea of chaos, or does the idea make you sigh inside and think warm, fuzzy thoughts?

If the idea of turning your children loose to learn and explore life appeals to you, you're not alone. Thousands of homeschoolers join you in this adventure that educator John Holt coined *unschooling*. Unlike most of the other options currently available, unschooling gives you complete freedom to do whatever you want as long as you're confident that your children are learning.

More than anything else, unschooling needs to be *fun*. One of the basic tenets of unschooling, sometimes unspoken, is that more learning takes place when the students actually enjoy what they're doing. That doesn't mean that everything needs to be rosy all the time, but it does place a high priority on fun. As Ben and Jerry once plastered onto a bumper sticker, "If it's not fun, why do it?" (Ben and Jerry would've made great unschoolers.)

Raising Eyebrows and Suspicions

Outside of the term *socialization* (see Chapter 1), no word raises more excitement in the homeschooling community than *unschooling*. Some parents

become downright hostile in favor of — or against — this type of education, and they defend or attack it hotly, depending on their views. After taking a long, hard look at what teaching children actually *looks like*, however, most homeschoolers would probably have to admit that they use unschooling methods at least some of the time. They just don't call it that.



TIP Born out of educator John Holt's research and experiences, unschooling basically says that children learn on their own because they're wired that way. Give them a warm learning environment, and they'll take off, assimilating experiences and ferreting out information without any preset curriculum or schedule.

Along with this, Holt also believed that children are sensitive to adult intrusion, and one of the best things adults can do to help youngsters learn is to stay out of their way. You see this concept in action when you ask some leading question of your 7-year-old daughter, and she looks at you as though you have a cantaloupe on your head. The look on her face says, "When you ask me that question, it sounds like I'm too dumb to know the answer." If you've ever experienced that look, then you instinctively know one of the basic tenets of unschooling.

Parents who successfully unschool their kids trust their children's learning instincts. They have an innate trust that these kids have valid opinions, true internal drives to learn new concepts, and the inquisitiveness to experience life until the learners find the answers to their questions.



AT OUR HOUSE Although we generally follow a curriculum during school time, unschooling takes over after the texts are shelved for the day. As I write this, my 10-year-old son sits cutting out and assembling paper soldiers and tanks so he can explore World War II while the 9-year-old sits in front of the computer, glued to *Sim Safari,* a geography, nature, and economics simulation for children. These activities are not listed as scheduled tasks, yet they're highly educational. The kids just don't know it. They call this type of amusement *fun*.

I hear the question roaming around in your head. How well do these kids function? Do they learn anything, or do they simply play all the time? As unschoolers move into adult life, some attend the nation's leading universities, and others opt for military schools, trade schools, or entrepreneurship. Like all homeschool families, unschooling graduates fall within the full range of post-high-school life — at least, that's what I gather from talking to their parents.

Fitting the Bill

Unschooling may be the perfect educational match for your family. After all, homeschooling is all about deciding what fits *your* family the best. Before deciding to pitch all those textbooks, however, you may want to do a little personal and library research:

1. **Read these books written by John Holt:**
    - *How Children Learn* (Perseus Press)
    - *Learning All The Time* (Perseus Press)
    - *Growing Without Schooling* (A compilation of the first dozen issues of *Growing Without Schooling* magazine, which Holt created in 1977 to reach the families who embraced the concept of learning without walls; published by Holt Associates)
2. **Ask these questions about your kids:**
    - Do they thrive on loose structure and individual exploration?
    - Are they self-motivated when they explore something that interests them?
    - Do they spend most of their free time exploring what you'd consider educational in one form or another?

    Reading, drawing, crafts, design, games, and computer programming all fit into this category, but think of this list as a dynamic beginning rather than a static perimeter. If you're forever dragging your son out from under the kitchen table to start school because that's his favorite place to read before noon, then you could have a potential unschooler on your hands!

Unschooling requires both children who love learning and parents who are

willing to let them do it. Our house contains the children but not the parents. As time goes on, I incorporate more and more unschooling into our program, but I still feel secure with a textbook in my hand.

Like every educational method, you don't have to jump into it with both feet — no matter what anyone tells you. If unschooling looks great but you, like me, feel better with a textbook in your hand, then take a year or two to explore the option. Purchase books to guide you in the subjects that you feel need books, and schedule one or two subjects as "unschooling subjects" for the year. Then turn your kids loose and see what happens. You may be surprised at what they do.

Learning through the Course of a Day

How much learning do you really fit into a typical day? You may be surprised, if you sat down at the end of a week to catalog everything you do. Informal learning takes up a large portion of a homeschool family's time as parents explain how the world works by living it.

Although every unschooling family looks different, here's a set of suggestions to start your imagination as you ponder education outside textbook walls:

- **Beginning with breakfast, let your older children fix bacon and eggs for the family while the younger ones set the table.** In educational terms, everyone just spent time in home economics class — especially if you stand by to answer any questions that may come up.
- **Spend the morning building with LEGOs. Engineering, science, and, to some extent, math classes have begun.** Playing with LEGOs may not seem very educational, but when your 11-year-old shows up an hour later with a collection of small robots that move their arms as you rotate the heads, you begin to see it as time well spent. These robot creations require a gear system almost like a car steering wheel. How do you figure this out? By playing with LEGOs!
- **Use lunchtime to listen to foreign language learning audio.** This takes advantage of natural downtime. The kids are all stationary for a change, so you can work on something educational with everybody.

- **Use the library to research the children's latest interest, whether it happens to be ornithology or oceanography.** Then later, perhaps you can follow up the study with a relevant field trip to the local aquarium or aviary.
- **Incorporate strategy and thinking skills by sitting down to an early evening family game that teaches strategy and thinking skills.** Although *Forbidden Desert* looks like an easy board game — after all, you only need to keep your team alive to the end of the game — working together and maximizing everyone's strengths takes cooperation and strategy skills. (Always designate one person at the table as the water carrier, or you might not make it. Tip from experience.)
- **During your next trip to the grocery, take the children along and work on cost-per-ounce as you select items to fill your cart.** This counts as math.
- **Keep a journal of the day's activities as they happen, or jot them down at the end of the day.** This ensures you that you did accomplish something until you get the hang of the unschooling lifestyle. A family who incorporates the suggestions in this section finds that although the kids opened a textbook not once, they still covered home economics, science and technology, some math, foreign language, more science, and strategy and logic (which you could also classify as math).

Every unschool day won't look like this because the days tend to be as varied as your life is. Enrichment classes, such as swimming, horseback riding, or art, may take a portion of your week. But overall, the unschooling family exchanges textbooks in favor of *real* books and class time for life experiences.

Filling Your Home with Unschooling Tools

You'll know an unschooling household on sight. The home usually overflows with books, games, kits, and maybe a computer or two. Hey! Wait a minute. Isn't that what *all* our houses look like after the first few years or so? When you attempt to get a handle on the educational plethora in your life, turn to

Chapters 21 and 23 for organization tips.

The love of learning tends to take over in an unschooler's space, and you'll hear these parents talk about pulling the Russian CDs from the shelf because somebody showed interest. Already thinking that their children may be interested in languages at some point, they amass an assortment of introductory language materials. Or you may find them foraging through the local library's collection, making mental notes so they know where to find the language in question.

Unschooling families learn to look for educational content in almost everything. An unschooler may pounce on a game that more traditional homeschoolers have abandoned because they don't yet grasp the value of fun in learning. Teaching the geography of the United States and business basics through a railroad board game, such as Empire Builder, is much more fun than working through two textbooks simultaneously — especially if you're the one expected to write out all the answers.

Your collection of educational tools can be as varied as your imagination. As long as you keep real life in mind, and the things your children will eventually need to live life on their own, you'll be fine. The following sections offer some ideas for unschooling toys and gadgets … er … um … tools and manipulatives.

Books

With a book in your hand, you can go anywhere. Walk the streets of Turkey or Turkmenistan, view Arabia through the eyes of Scheherazade, or follow the latest in virus research. Children who see books as holding the key to the world will embrace them. They'll turn to books when they want to know something.

If you watch your own children when they have free access to books and time to read, you'll notice that they don't always run for the books written at their current reading level. Sometimes they choose a challenging book, and on other occasions they seem drawn to books well below their reading level. Their choices depend on their reasons for reading, what looks interesting to them, and their moods at the time. Adults react to books the same way. Sometimes, for example, you want to read James Michener, and other afternoons you'd rather browse through "The Far Side" cartoons.



TIP If you follow unschooling, you should have an ample number of books at your house or free access to a good library. And if you refrain from culling the *baby* books every time you notice that your child is reading at a new level, your child's reading collection can encompass a wide range of levels. Reading is reading no matter what level book your child grabs from the shelf, and giving her a choice of books above and below her reading level allows her to stretch her mind when she wants to as well as relax and read simply for pleasure.



AT OUR HOUSE We have a *Titanic* lover at our house. I started it — I bought him a second-grade reader about discovering the *Titanic.* Now, he still has that beginner book along with several adult treatments of the *Titanic*, a few reprints from 1912 that give him a true feel for the time, and some juvenile titles sprinkled in between. If I tried to throw away the introductory book now, he'd mourn for it. He sees it as the book that launched him into a new, exciting hobby. And he still reads it from time to time, battered and bent as it is.



REMEMBER Keep in mind that both fiction and nonfiction are important. Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories develop thinking and deductive skills while they enhance vocabulary (let's see … that would be science and math and language arts), but no fictional account truly explains the intricacies of laser science to a child who wants to learn them.

To build your library with less outlay, you may want to keep a list of books that your children want as birthday and holiday ideas. Scout the remainder tables at the bookstores. All the books at the bargain table aren't out of print; some of them simply got a ding or two on their way from the print shop to the warehouse. If this is a book that your child can drag with him for the next six months in and out of the car, under the bed, and waaaaay too close to the swimming pool, then a scratch on the back cover probably won't bother him

at all.

Games

Gathering around the table for a game night, in some cultures, is still very much the way things are done. Children learn cause and effect, strategic thinking, economics, business, sportsmanship, and creativity — all good things to have if you plan to survive in the world as an adult — from playing games.

Your game collection can range from small decks of cards to large intricate board games. The choice is up to you. Your available storage space, budget, and personal preferences decide whether you want to go big or small. Some ideas for your game closet include

- **Similo History, Set, Aquarius, and Dan Ariely's Irrational Game:** All card games, playing Similo can teach strategy through discovering similarities and differences between historical figures, and playing Set enhances your mathematical ability to see likes and differences in attributes (what color, how many, and which shape). Playing Aquarius challenges you to complete a secret goal before your opponent figures it out and blocks you. Dan Ariely's Irrational Game tests how well you understand human nature — the catch here is that every question is based on actual research, and the cards provide an interpretation of the results and refer you to the actual research. Most of all, these games are fun, which is a major requirement of any good game.
- **Anti-Monopoly, Formula D, Ticket to Ride, World's Fair 1893:** Board games, such as these, require a larger beginning investment, but they pay you back in replay value. Playing our bedraggled version of Empire Builder, an early railroad game, taught my husband about the major railroad companies of the 19th century, geography, and business. Twenty years later, we still use that same copy. Anti-Monopoly is based on the original game invented by Elizabeth Magie on her dining room table in the early 1900s. Formula D is a realistic Formula One racing game, Ticket to Ride takes you all over the U.S. (or other countries) by train, teaching geography in the process, and in World's Fair 1893 you are an organizer of the biggest event since the invention of the dishwasher — wait, wasn't that one of the newfangled appliances that first appeared at the fair? Secure attractions and gather influential people around you as you plan

the greatest fair of all time — at least, the greatest fair the world had seen before 1893.

- **How Do You See The World?, Rory's Story Cubes, The Farming Game:** A little off the beaten path, these games focus on discussion, storytelling, and, well, farming. How Do You See The World? leads you to answer questions about relationships, life's purpose, or beliefs about all sorts of topics. In Rory's Story Cubes you create a story that's determined by a roll of the die. Playing The Farming Game realistically teaches the ins and outs of running a farm from purchasing grain and cows to paying the taxman and harvesting your crops. Plus, it includes Colorforms, those fun plastic stick-ons from the '50s. What could be better?



TIP Finding these games may prove to be a challenge. Full-fledged specialty game stores are often the only shops that carry most of them, so check your FLGS (friendly local game store). You won't find these games at your local Walmart or Target. If you can't find a store that sells them in your area, you could try one of the game sellers on the Internet: Boardlandia (www.boardlandia.com) or Funagain Games (www.funagain.com) should start you off, and you can find many others through searching Google (www.google.com) for a specific board game.



TIP If you locate a copy of a particular game on Amazon and the price makes you need CPR, use that Amazon information to look up the manufacturer's site on the Internet. Games that look like they are long out of print are often very much in stock with the manufacturer, and they will happily sell you a copy at a less-than-heart-attack-inducing price.

Software

Computer Internet access and software help to build a well-rounded home library. Although you don't need to run out and purchase every new title on the market, a few well-chosen titles can add much depth to your growing, inquisitive learners. Again, knowing what you're looking for guards against unfortunate purchases.

To round out your unschooling software library, you may want to consider:

- **An encyclopedia subscription such as Britannica Online:** If you're part of a "look that up" kind of family, then you may benefit from an online encyclopedia to show the children the difference between accuracy and Wikipedia. Websites can publish anything they want, at any time. Sometimes having access to a reputable source is nice.
- **Foreign language software:** For the 12 and under set, KidSpeak 10-in-1 Language Learning gives you an introduction to ten different languages in a three-CD-ROM set. Older learners may appreciate a total immersion program, such as The Rosetta Stone.
- **Word processing software:** Whether you use LibreOffice, which is free, Apple's Pages on your Mac, Microsoft Word on your PC, or something else, you'll need some kind of word processor to crank out newsletters, brochures, outlines, letters, and anything else the kids concoct for paper use.
- **A good typing program:** If your children don't already know how to keyboard, a typing program can save them incredible levels of frustration in the future. When you truly learn how to type, you can get the words on paper almost as quickly as you think. The frustration of having to hunt and peck out each individual letter is alleviated. Typing lessons are free at www.typing.com, and the site is student friendly.
- **Computer games for strategy:** Whether you want to explore puzzle solving skills or physics with Portal 2, creativity and collaboration with Minecraft, ancient civilizations with Age of Empires or Sid Meyer's Civilization, or compete against the computer with a chess program, the number of game titles out there is almost endless.

Technological and building toys

If it fits together with gears, you can make something out of it, or if it runs on batteries, you can probably call it a technological or building toy. LEGO and LEGO Education, mostly because they're available and you can do so much with them, stand among the leaders. What household doesn't have at least a few LEGO bricks lurking around? LEGO Education is where you find lesson plans as well as technical, instructional sets that include way cool gears that you can't get anywhere else. These sets explore simple machines,

manufacturing processes, robotics, and much more. You can locate LEGO Education at www.legoeducation.com or call 800-362-4308.



TIP If you want to give the idea of LEGO bricks and simple machines a try without purchasing a full set, Klutz Press publishes *LEGO Gadgets Science and Activity Kit.*

K'NEX, Meccano's Erector Sets, Fischertechnik, and Learning Resources' Gears! Gears! Gears! all give children the chance to create, build, and design. Little hands stay busy for hours on end with these sets, and because they're made up of components that depend on your imagination, they develop creativity, engineering, and thinking skills as the child creates. Be sure to check the age range for each set. Gears! Gears! Gears! works great for the age 3 and up crowd, while the pieces in an Erector set are tiny and best for ages 10 and up. (To locate a good selection of Fischertechnik products, visit their website for a list of retailers at www.fischertechnik.biz/wheretobuy.)

Videos

Why include videos in an unschooling curriculum? Videos provide a starting point for all kinds of discussions. Want to talk about history and propaganda? Check out a few 1940s musicals from the library or stream them online and discuss how these movies helped paint a picture of America to the audiences who watched them. Interested in the science of special effects? In addition to documentaries that tell you how these stunts are arranged, locating a couple of the movies that received recognition for their special effects enlarges your child's understanding.



AT OUR HOUSE We recently located a documentary on movie effects that traced the history of special effects from the 19th century to the present. The kids had already seen movies such as *Star Wars*, so they were keenly interested in how the effects were done. To add to the evening, we pulled out a couple of the oldies-but-goodies that the documentary also mentioned, such as *A Trip to the Moon* from 1902.

Watch cartoons from the 1930s onward for an overview of animation history or trace one actor's career through three or four films. Use them to springboard a discussion about diversity, cultural sensitivity, and what was acceptable for the time. You can also use a movie as a jump start to cultural study, as a companion to the original book from which it was derived (this is an excellent time to talk about artistic license), or to give visual, moving images to science topics, such as bacteria or animal life. As in all other areas of unschooling, let your children's interests guide your selections.



TIP To locate short clips of movies, public domain flicks, and science animations, visit YouTube (www.youtube.com) or try the Internet Archive at www.archive.org.

Recording Their Progress

Making your adventures fit into a typical educational mold may require some creativity when record-keeping time comes. How do you record three afternoons spent building with K'NEX, volunteer time at the zoo, listening to foreign language audio over lunch, and an in-depth study of the neighbor's newly hewn tree? Although at first glance, it may look like these activities have no educational content, you *can* create a logical-sounding list of activities from your children's life explorations.

If you live in a state that requires a performance portfolio or some other regular documentation, you need to use *education-speak* to explain what your children do and what they learn from it. Public and private school educators do this all the time to justify what they know are learning experiences — especially if those experiences don't fit into the required activity list for the year. So your field trip to the zoo that you took this week because the weather happened to be nice enough becomes an offsite exploration into worldwide animal behavior, socialization (you ate lunch with a group of friends), and retail practices (you hit the gift shop before you went home and took note of its contents).

This may sound like you're fluffing up the trip, but you're actually not. You're taking the experiences from life and putting them into a form that

educators can understand when they reference them against a list of state requirements for a particular grade. If everybody uses the same vocabulary when you file a report or portfolio, understanding what you covered in a year is made easier.



TIP Many unschoolers sign up with a *private school satellite program,* or *PSP,* if they live in states that require portfolios or other yearly documentation. The PSP keeps records and explains how to document daily doings so they fit into an educational report. Chapter 10 gives you more information on PSPs, satellite schools, and the like.

EEK! SO I'M TEACHING THEM *NOTHING*?

Take a deep breath. Actually, if you embrace the unschooling method, you teach them quite a lot. However, you do it in a non-schoolhouse way. If it makes you feel better, locate and tightly grip a course of study list (also called a *scope and sequence*) specifically designed for the grade levels you currently teach. This tells you what a child should know at each particular grade in the United States, and while you don't need to follow it to the letter, it's a good list to help you sleep at night until you get your feet under you. You can find a good, comprehensive list at WorldBook, worldbook.com/typical-course-of-study.aspx. I've kept a printed copy of this available for years.

So once you have an idea of what they need to know, your creativity begins to flow as you sip that half glass worth of fruit juice someone kindly left in the fridge. History? Check. Math? You've got it covered. Science? Ummm. Art? Well, maybe?

Where do you go for those subjects you don't want to teach, or you don't feel comfortable teaching? This is when you turn to library books, YouTube, or board games. You team up with a friend for a series of field trips or nature science sessions. You investigate one part of science that you're interested in as a family and go as deep as you can, branching into related topics as they appear.

The point with unschooling is that it's *child-led* learning. If the child is interested in world languages, you learn every language under the sun — or at least as many as you can muster. Then, perhaps, you can tackle science or art through a favorite language. You guide with the understanding that the children will cover all the large subjects and topics, from history to critical thinking skills, as they investigate topics that interest them.

Once you get to high school, some information needs to be covered in an orderly manner. You can't jump into trigonometry, for instance, without knowing about *x* and *y*. College-bound unschoolers need to cover the normal high school math sequence and the expected science courses for whatever university they plan to attend. Whether you do that with a textbook in hand, or through conducting science experiments and solving higher-level mathematics and the equations that bind the two together, however, is up to you.

Chapter 17

Hitting the Road with Worldschooling

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Driving and teaching together**
- **Planning your trip**
- **Determining your academics**
- **Using the Internet intermittently**

Ah, the joys of the open road. Seeing the sights, hitting the highways, brushing the bugs from your teeth — wait a minute here. We're not talking about doing the motorcycle-with-almost-no-windshield road tour. This is a family trip!

Worldschooling is a term for packing the books and hitting the road. So grab your satchel and your math book, climb into the van, and go. The map says your first stop is in six hours. Did anyone remember to bring lunch?

Homeschoolers have done this for years, but usually only a few of them and for very particular reasons. A family with a child who engages in a sport competitively (ice skating, basketball, bowling) may benefit from school on the road. Another type of homeschooler who benefits from this is the one whose breadwinner travels the country from assignment to assignment, as engineer, nurse, over-the-road truck driver, or a host of other occupations. Keeping the family together in this instance sometimes means climbing into a recreational vehicle (RV) and doing school on the highway.

Roadschooling versus Worldschooling

You may see this referred to as *roadschooling*, or road-schooling. Perhaps you see worldschooling or world-schooling. Whichever way someone spells it, it often means the same thing. You load everybody into a converted school

bus, a large van, or an RV, and you drive into the sunset together.

Sometimes roadschooling practitioners draw a distinction between the two terms. Roadschooling, in its purest sense, means that you've decided to spend an extended amount of time teaching from the road, whether that means 1 month or 30, but you stay within your own country or continent. Worldschooling, on the other hand, may refer to the same activity, but is generally outside the boundaries of your own country; touring Europe or South America counts as worldschooling.



REMEMBER Taking a vacation doesn't count as roadschooling. If you remove yourself to the wilds of Florida or the beaches of Michigan for two weeks, you aren't really roadschooling. You're going on vacation, and you packed a few school materials to take with you.

Engaging the environmentally curious

The traveling homeschooler needs to enjoy the outdoors, especially if she plans to travel in some type of movable house. While some RV options allow you to park and sit, others require setup or teardown, and who wants to eat every meal in the RV when it's beautiful outside? Many roadschoolers cite the environment as one of the main reasons they chose to school on the road. They want their kids to see the mountains, the plains, the rivers, and the valleys of their country. And they prefer to do it firsthand.

School on the road gives you the opportunity to hike trails in every national forest if you want to. Begin or enlarge an herbal collection as you learn about medicinal herbs as you travel. Visit every museum you come across in your travels. You can even drive down Route 66 and experience the 1950s all over again — with caveats, of course. A lot has changed since the fifties, and for some of it we're very glad. If you packed a poodle skirt, however, it would be fun to wear on the trip.

Following your dreams full or part time

If this whole idea makes you itch to jump into the car, you have some decisions to make. First of all, do you want to do this part time for a few months and see how it goes, or are your dreams all or nothing?

If you want to do this for only a few months, do you want to rent or purchase a vehicle you can sleep in? You could use hotels, of course, but even if you get a free breakfast every morning the cost adds up very quickly. (Of course, if you're worldschooling outside the U.S., you may be using the continent's train system, carrying a backpack, and staying in youth hostels.) If you rent or purchase some type of recreational vehicle, what kind do you want? How many people need to sleep in it each night? Sometimes that determines what you get. Do you want to get a shell of some kind and build it out yourself? (That takes an admirable amount of skill, but it's doable.)

If you're interested in a more permanent solution, such as planning three years constantly on the road, where are you going to keep your stuff? Do you plan to rent your current home? Put everything you own into storage? (This will add to the expense.) And what about the cat?

Small animals, and even a few larger ones, travel fine long-term. Hamsters and gerbils can cause havoc if they escape their cages and eat through a couple layers of your RV. (Ouch! That's an expensive repair.) Animals in glass cages take their lives in their hands when you go around curves. But dogs, cats, and the like do well. Some people even travel with birds.

As you sit looking at the things you own and use every day, do you think you could leave most of it behind? Some people can't imagine doing that, so the multi-year travel dream ends right there. For others, this may be the very thing to get them to pare down everything they own and begin life anew with the family in tow.

Planning is everything

World/roadschooling requires rearranging your life as you know it, for the most part, and reducing it to the smallest square footage possible so that you can enjoy the country and school at the same time.

It's not unusual for families to spend two or more years planning a jaunt like this. Of course, if employment throws you into a situation where you travel with your spouse and kids or they get left behind, then you can plan relatively quickly and alter arrangements as you go. The best practice, however, is to take your time planning a life-changing move like this one.

The more time and effort you spend planning before you go, the fewer nasty surprises you will find once you embark. Some families mark off the states

they'd like to visit on a large map, while others schedule a highway-by-highway route that covers the first few months. If you plan to stop every night at a top-rate campground, your docking costs will quickly rise. Camping overnight in a national forest is generally less expensive, but of course you can't do that every night. This is where some of that planning comes in.

Will you be making money on the road or living off your savings? That makes a difference in how long you can be away, and it determines some of you lodging and activity choices. How many kids do you plan to take with you? (All of them, I would imagine!) How old are they? Little people take up less room than bigger people, but sometimes little people need more stuff — toys, games, and so on.

Here are some of the things you need to consider:

- **Cost:** How much do you reasonably have per month to put toward your adventure if you're gone for three months? How about eight months? Five years?
- **Cargo:** How much can you live without? Weight is extremely important when you live on the road, and those pounds add up. Do you really need to take that 1950s cast iron sewing machine with you? Does the desktop computer need to go?
- **Space:** Even while thinking about weight, you need to consider space. How many school items do you really need, and where will you store them? Can everyone live for an extended time if they only have one small cabinet apiece for all their personal items like toys and books?
- **Capability:** Will you be able to drive a vehicle large enough to contain your possessions? Does the size of movable house that you feel comfortable with limit the number of people who can sleep at one time? Many people survive quite nicely turning the dining room table into a bed every night for the littles, and then making it up again in the morning before breakfast. Do you want to be one of them?
- **Storage:** What will you reasonably do with your items while you're gone? Aunt Edna may have an almost-empty basement, but does she really want all your stuff in it for three years while you tootle around the country together? One option is to rent your house furnished, with many of your possessions intact. Another is to find a starving college student

who wants to move out of the dorm to babysit your house and keep your fridge stocked with the housesitting fees you pay her. Of course, you can always rent a sizeable storage unit and pack everything into it before you go.

- **Technology:** How will your travel affect your technology use? Weight restrictions generally mean that the smaller and lighter your technology, the happier you will be — and the more of it you can have. Investing in e-readers or tablets may seem like overkill now, but it's something to think about while you decide how you will pack everything in and still stay under the weight limit for your vehicle.



WARNING Staying under the weight limit for your vehicle is very, very important. If you go over the weight limit, at the least it could mean costly repairs later, and at worst it could mean a nasty accident and injury, or worse. Those numbers are there for a reason! Please heed them.



TIP If you want to connect with other families who do this, hop onto Facebook (www.facebook.com) and join one of the roadschooling or worldschooling Facebook groups. There you'll meet a host of people who are currently doing what you hope to do, and they have lots of ideas for how to start out.

Choosing Your Academic Approach

While your educational philosophy may not change during your travels, how you execute it may. A Montessori-inclined family, for instance, may pack the math block set, but those little pieces of plastic or wood might function in many lessons they never thought they would. They may be used for dexterity lessons, art, building blocks, and a few other things besides math class. (If you haven't decided on a philosophy or teaching method, all of Part 3 tells you about popular options, including Montessori.)

If part of the reason you travel is so that your children can experience new places and the outdoors, then you may want to alter your approach a bit. Maybe science becomes an outdoor class almost every day, and social studies takes place at museums, art galleries, and shopping malls. (You can learn a whole lot about a place and its people spending a few hours in the local shopping mall.) You still only have so many hours in each day, and if you want to learn in a different way while you travel, then part of your normal school day may have to give a little.

Ditching the books … or not?

If you are a textbook-heavy family who wants to travel (you use textbooks for every subject), you don't necessarily have to change your method. Textbooks, however, are heavy. Very heavy. You may not think about it, but four children each using four to five textbooks for the year could easily equal 60 pounds or more. Plus, where will you keep all those books on board?

Thankfully, many publishers offer digital versions of their textbooks. Sometimes you get a digital version as a matter of course if you purchase a physical text. Check with your favorite publishers to see if switching to digital books is an option for your travel year. Then all you need is the weight of a couple digital reading devices, one for each child if you want everyone to work on the same subjects at the same time.

Maybe you decide you want to forgo all the textbooks for a year. What would you replace them with? If your children are younger than Grade 8, you can visit a website like the Core Knowledge Foundation, located at www.coreknowledge.org, and download the Core Knowledge Sequence, which tells you exactly what kids need to know for each grade level. Armed with that you can teach much of their curriculum as you travel or add a little of it in each day until they get it all. (Make sure you study it before you go, so you know whether you need materials, such as poetry or math manipulatives.)

With loaded e-readers or tablets, some manipulatives to teach math, and a busy sightseeing schedule, your kids could experience a year they'll never forget and stay at grade level at the same time. Even if you decide to wing almost every class, keeping a solid math curriculum (or however else you teach your solid math program) for each child is generally a good idea. Daily math practice of some kind goes a long way toward keeping those skills sharp. Many roadschoolers climb into the RV with their e-readers and their

paperback math books that they can write in, and they're set.

Living on and off the 'net

If you plan to use the Internet for all your subjects, stream educational videos, and use grade-level specific websites for your entire trip, you may want to think of a backup plan. Internet access is still spotty in some places, and often campgrounds aren't known for their excellent Wi-Fi connectivity. Especially if you plan to stop in relatively isolated places, Internet access may become more of a fantasy than a reality.

The reality is that you will find a strong Internet connection on some days, and a weak or nonexistent one on others. You need to be prepared for both — hence the suggestion to download materials before you go. If you find yourself with great Internet service most of the time, take advantage of it for whatever you want to do. On those days when Internet is sparse, you can turn to your predownloaded material and still get stuff done.

DANCING THE ROADSCHOOL RV TANGO

There's more to think about than sleeping space when it comes to acquiring an RV for extended travel. Unless your pal from high school or your first cousin twice removed offers you the use of his RV for a year or two, you have some decisions to make. Although they may seem unimportant now, some of them have unintended consequences.

If you're looking at an RV, keep in mind that this is like buying a house — it's an emotional decision. Try to keep the dewy-eyed dreams in check until after you acquire your house on wheels. If you can, you'll end up saving a lot of money. Some of the flashy upgrades like dishwashers and clothes washer/dryer combos sound like great ideas, but they don't always work as well as you think they will (or should), and five months in you may wish you had that storage cabinet space again.

If you want to travel year-round and go where it's cold, your accommodations need to be able to support that. Frozen water pipes underneath the RV put a damper on your weekend activities in the snow. Not only do you need to know how to get out of that predicament, you need to know how to fix a myriad of other little things that go wrong as well. RVs can break down, like any vehicle, and you may find yourself spending longer in a city than you planned to.

Be sure to research carefully, plan everything you can think of to plan, and if this still sounds like a good idea, I wish you safe and wonderful travels. This adventure will provide your family with lifelong memories and amazing experiences. I wish I could go with you.

Chapter 18

Charting Your Own Academic Course Eclectically

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Meeting your child's needs**
- **Assembling your own textbooks**
- **Writing the curriculum yourself**

"It's new, improved, and guaranteed to teach your student everything she needs to know for life — at least for this subject at her current grade level." Curriculum publishers try really hard to pull together a comprehensive collection of subjects that appeals to you as the parent/teacher *and* that teaches your student at the same time. Most of them do a great job — every now and then you find a losing proposition but not often.

The truth is that any publisher's curriculum must meet the needs of a certain group of children or that publisher doesn't stay in business long. So if a publisher presents a set of textbooks or unit studies, and they've been around for a few years or more, then that publisher's curriculum matches what the nation's teachers (including homeschoolers) want to buy for their students.

That much said, please keep in mind that no particular publisher had *your* child in mind when it created the latest way-cool homeschool curriculum. Why? Just like every other child, your child is completely special and unique. Although you may be able to find a set of books off the rack that meets your child's needs, you also may find yourself frustrated and attempting to create "the perfect curriculum" for your child.



TIP Assembling your own curriculum for your child doesn't need to be frustrating. It can be plenty of fun — especially if you give yourself

enough time to check out all the options before you make any big-ticket purchases or system-wide changes. This may mean choosing an inexpensive curriculum that almost meets your needs the first year while you research, assemble, and pull everything together during a summer break.

Sometimes assembling the "perfect" learning package is as simple as adding to (or subtracting from) a full curriculum system from one publisher or private school's distance learning options. For example, if you find a large unit study that you'd really like to use for the year, but it seems a little light on math and details, you can add a good math program and visit your local library to collect books that provide in-depth information about your topic.

On the other hand, if you find a great curriculum that adds a bit too much for your taste, you can always subtract what you don't like and replace it with something else. After all, it's your curriculum.

Knowing Whether Your Kid's Kinesthetic

Does your child learn best through her ears, eyes, or hands? Known as *learning styles,* and divided respectively into *auditory*, *visual,* and *kinesthetic learners* in education-speak, how your youngster picks up information is important. Channel the child's learning through her best receptor, and you find much less frustration in the long run. Short term, though, presenting information in the best way can be challenging. Here's a quick rundown on the different types of learning:

- **An auditory learner listens to song lyrics, old radio shows, and commercials once or twice and then repeats them verbatim to you.** Auditory learners respond well to videos, computer games, and CDs or cassette tapes — as long as they don't get bored. They also listen well when you tell a story from a subject such as history, especially if you give them a page to color while you relate. Proving that they really heard what you said, they can then tell the story back to you.
- **A visual learner learns through written words and pictures.** Although visual learners may pick up some information through their ears, you can

give them a story on tape, ask them to tell you the story, and they'll probably miss some vital parts of the tale. If you give them a print version of the same story, on the other hand, they can tell you what happened and when. These children learn well with textbooks, workbooks, and the like.

- **Kinesthetic learners explore the world through touch.** *Telling* a kinesthetic learner about fractions may not get you anywhere, but if you take a piece of paper and show the child how to fold it into fourths, and then ask him to do it, the concept clicks much better. Kinesthetic learners can be a challenge to those of us who learned mostly from books. They require an abundance of creativity, but they're also plenty of fun. After all, where else can you play with (and eat) M&Ms as part of math class every day?



WARNING This theory has been debunked by psychologists, who say there's no such thing as learning styles. On the other hand, teachers who work with children every day swear by it. You do whatever you want. If this makes sense to you and helps your child make sense of the world, then use it. If it doesn't, then disregard it.

Pulling from Different Publishers

The easiest way to create your own curriculum is to find out which publishers excel at certain subjects and to purchase those. Although a full curriculum lineup from one publisher looks really nice (all the books are color coordinated and suggest an overarching order to your life), the truth is that one publisher usually doesn't excel at every subject. If they did, why would the world need a second curriculum publisher or a third? (I'm talking about stand-alone textbooks here. Other types of education, such as unit studies or Charlotte Mason style, are a different animal. Turn to Chapters 15 and 12 for more information.)



AT OUR HOUSE I use a different publisher for almost every subject I teach. Through

trial and error, I found some keepers, which I happily pass along. Others didn't work so well; when I get a book that doesn't work with my children, I offer it to another homeschooler who may be able to use it.

Starting with what you know

If you want to wade through the incredible wealth of curriculum choices out there and assemble your own, where do you start? Actually, that's a really good question. You'll feel much more confident if you start with what you know and move to the subjects that you don't know as well.

For example, if you're really good with numbers yourself, start by deciding which math curriculum you want to use. On the other hand, if foreign languages are your forte and you want to include a language or two in your homeschool, begin by deciding how you want to impart that love to your children. Starting with your strengths lessens the "I don't know what I'm doing" blues because you *do* know what you're doing.



TIP Here's another tip the educational pros don't tell you: No one is good at every subject, but — at least at the elementary level — one teacher is expected to cover it all. And in many situations, the teacher in the classroom doesn't have expertise in the course that they find themselves teaching. Perhaps the school's administrators hope to move a teacher into her area of expertise when the school finds a space, but meanwhile the school had an opening and that's where the teacher filled in.

After you have one or two subjects out of the way and you feel surer of yourself, move on to the areas in which you don't feel as confident. This is where an idea or two from a veteran homeschooler or a friend who knows your children comes in handy. But keep your wits about you, even when you ask for suggestions. Veteran homeschoolers, no matter how long they've done this, don't walk through life in an impenetrable halo of light any more than you do. They make mistakes and purchase the wrong curriculum once in a while, too.

Pulling from the stacks

Searching through a narrow list of curriculum providers gives you the option of choice without the overwhelming knowledge that you need to siphon

through 36 different math books before you find something that you like. If you try to tackle too much at one time, your brain goes numb and even chocolate won't revive it. Nothing works but a break from the task at hand while you recharge.

In an attempt to save you from chocolate overload and prolonged breaks, the following sections list various curriculums (and their publishers) that you may want to look at when you design your own textbook collection. By no means exhaustive, this cadre suggests the broad ranges available to today's homeschool family. Use them as a starting point, a guide for your first year, or as a definitive list of what you *don't* want for one reason or another.

Some of these curriculums I use with my own children, and I elected to skip others in favor of another program. Also take a look at Chapters 6 through 9, which cover elementary education through high school and beyond, for other curriculum ideas.

Math

Every homeschooler and textbook publisher has his own ideas about what constitutes a good math curriculum. Basically, you want to get from counting to algebra in 12 years or less. If your curriculum looks like it will do that and you can supplement the places it misses, then your child will be fine.

Every textbook can't possibly cover absolutely everything in one year. Do you think experiencing math is important? If you do, then you'll be happier with some of these publishers than others. If, on the other hand, you prefer to go about it the rote way and feel that strict memorization is the key to math skills, then different math texts will appeal to you.

Here are some of the basics, the tried-and-trues, and a new face or two thrown into the mix:

- **Mortensen More Than Math:** (Anna's Math Page, www.annasmathpage.com) The Mortensen system can be a bit difficult to track down, but Anna's Math Page offers information as well as ordering. A Montessori-style math program, Mortensen teaches math through hands-on manipulatives and small paperback books. When I used this system with my youngest, we worked with the manipulatives but didn't write in the books so they could be used for another child, or emergency tutoring, later. Doing the math and actually using pieces that you can pick

up and manipulate helps learners pick up the concepts. Mortensen focuses on arithmetic, algebra, measurement, problem solving, and calculus.

- **Saxon Math:** (www.hmhco.com/programs/saxon-math) A Houghton Mifflin Harcourt product and the current darling of the homeschooling movement, Saxon Math harkens back to the traditional days of mathematics for Grades K–12. Each page presents three or four new problems, and the rest of the work consists of review problems from past sections. Thousands of homeschooling families swear by it, but if your child hates never-ending review, she will swear … well … near it.
- **Singapore Math:** (www.singaporemath.com; phone 503-557-8100) *Singapore Math* arrived in the United States in 1998. I bought it. An excellent curriculum even then, it lacked some things. My daughter didn't get enough practice, for instance, for the concepts to stick. Since then the program has been completely revised to be comprehensive. If you want the very first edition of *Singapore Math*, you're looking for the yellow Primary Mathematics books. Otherwise, stick with the newer Dimensions series. Whichever series you prefer, be sure to scroll down in the shop window and take a look at the supplementary books available for both series, which focus on extra practice problems and word problems for each level. Singapore Math Live (www.singaporemathlive.com) offers video lessons that correspond with the math books along with parent training videos per lesson. Math for Grades Pre-K through 8.

Language arts

Reading, writing, grammar, and spelling — language arts include so much, and yet educators lump it all together under one heading. In a world where people communicate primarily through the spoken and written word — from newspapers to email — language skills form a basis of a solid homeschool curriculum. For those of you with teenagers, there is more to language than "Huh?" "Yep," and "Nope."



TIP A trip to your local educational supply store provides you with loads of ideas for language arts books, from spelling to writing practice. Many publishers provide language arts help for busy teachers (and that

includes you!) who need to supplement grammar or writing.

Although I can't begin to include all the available options for language arts, here are a few to make you think. None of these resources qualify as light and fluffy, but they are excellent. Be sure to turn to Chapter 6 or 8, where you will find a write-up of the Brave Writer curriculum, which would be my top pick for language arts. It teaches you how to teach writing. Here are some other options:

- **Analytical Grammar:** (www.analyticalgrammar.com; phone 919-783-0795) Designed for Grades 4 to 12, Analytical Grammar is meant to be used one-third at a time in the lower grades, and then refreshed with a literature companion that matches your current studies (American, British, Shakespeare, or world literature). This program teaches grammar from the very beginning. Not sure what a noun is? No problem. Stuck with participles? Analytical Grammar can help there, too. If your child needs intensive help with grammar, take a look at this curriculum. Available from the website as well as other homeschool vendors.
- **Easy Grammar:** (www.easygrammar.com) Easy Grammar takes a ten-minutes-per-day approach. Your student completes short exercises each school day to learn and reinforce grammar rules. Available for Grades 1 to 12, the Easy Grammar line teaches concepts necessary for grammar understanding, while Daily Grams provides daily review to reinforce what the student already knows. Available from the website.
- **The Shurley Method:** (Shurley Instructional Materials, Inc., www.shurley.com/hs; phone 800-566-2966) Using this method, a student learns intensive grammar. With the help of the Shurley Method's singsong jingles and a set way to tackle each sentence, the student is exposed to parts of speech (subject, verb, adjective, and so forth) to every word in every sentence. Children who enjoy talking and singing typically do very well with this first-through-eighth-grade program.
- **Logic of English:** (homeschool.logicofenglish.com; phone 612-808-0585) Logic of English combines spelling, reading, and handwriting for Grades K to 2 in the Foundations program, and spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and sentence writing for Grades 3 to 8 with the Essentials set. Essentials also functions as a reading intervention set for Grade 3 and above, should you need one. This is a programmed curriculum, which

means it leads you through exactly how to teach the material so you don't have to guess. Available from the website.

Library books form a great basis for reading material. You can purchase reading textbooks, but if you use library (also known as *trade* or *real*) books, you expose your child to complete stories, real authors, and good writing. A child who reads real books also learns a wider vocabulary because grade-level reading textbooks only use a certain number of words per grade, but library books have no such limitation. They also cost less!



TIP The books and authors that your child loves from her reading time, if you use library books exclusively, make great gift lists for family members.

Science

No one could possibly learn everything about science in 12 years of school. We have a name for those people who've tried — research scientists. Even lab scientists devote their lives to one small science area.

Now that the pressure's off, what do you need to know in 12 years? Learners need to observe the world around them and draw conclusions. They need to see how basic aspects of the world work — physics, chemistry, botany, and astronomy, for example. Understanding in botany can be as simple as watching colored water creep up the veins of a celery stalk or as complicated as explaining Mendelian genetics. You begin with simple stuff while your children are young and work into the more difficult concepts as they grow. Here are some examples of the wealth of science curriculums available. Be sure to read over Chapters 6 and 8 for further suggestions.



TIP Again, the library can be a great resource. Books such as *More Great Experiments Than Anyone Could Use in a Lifetime* crowd library shelves, just waiting for you to snatch them up.

- **Teach-nology:**

(www.teachnology.com/teachers/lesson_plans/science) A technology resource for teachers, this site really *does* provide more lesson plans than you could use in a lifetime. Most are identified by general grade level, so whether you want to introduce polymers to your second-grader (and create some way-cool slime in the process) or explore how businesses include science and technology as a twelfth-grader, Teachnology gives you the tools.

- ***Handbook of Nature Study:*** Published by Cornell University Press and written by Anna Botsford Comstock in 1911, this book gives you more than 850 pages of information on nature science. Originally written for elementary school teachers and updated where necessary, this volume gives you years' worth of nature information. It also covers what most people consider the basis of an elementary science curriculum: animals, insects, plants, earth, and sky. Throw in a few simple machines experiments and an anatomy review and you're pretty much there. Now … where did we put those LEGOs?
- ***The Story of Science*:** This book series by Joy Hakim, published by Smithsonian Books, brings a literature component to your science class. The three volumes include *Aristotle Leads the Way*, *Newton at the Center*, and *Einstein Adds a New Dimension* and tell about the advances of science within a story format. Recommended for middle schoolers, approximately Grades 5 to 8, reading this aloud may bring it to younger learners. Available from booksellers.



TIP Unit studies work well for science if you enjoy getting your hands dirty. Check your local educational store for science kits and books that cover individual topics, such as birds, volcanoes, or the ultra popular *Birds and Volcanoes Together.* Or dip into Chapter 15 for a list of unit study publishers.

Social studies and geography

One of the joys of homeschooling is that you can separate learning from textbooks. Both social studies and geography work well when you study cultures and areas of the world with books written specifically about those

lands. Begin with your own area, if you like, and branch out from there. Another suggestion is to concentrate on a part of the world that intrigues your child and move around the world from that point.



We spend some time each year covering actual United States and world geography and map skills, but much of the kids' modern cultural awareness comes from their independent reading. I keep a shelf of books about the world and its people, and occasionally point them toward one in answer to a question or to broaden our knowledge of a particular area of the world that comes up during other subjects.

Visit your local library for books that highlight various countries. The library provides easy access to books about all parts of the world. If you want to begin building your own home social studies collection, use the library as a starting point and purchase the books you really like.

A few of the available social studies resources include

- **Mapping the World By Heart:** (FableVision, www.fablevisionlearning.com) This is a curriculum that teaches children to actually draw international maps from memory. Children learn about world geography as they draw in rivers, cities, boundaries, and much more. Used and loved by homeschoolers for years, this curriculum is designed for fifth-grade students and older.
- ***The Complete Book of Maps and Geography:*** Thinking Kids. This *consumable* book (meaning that you write on the pages) covers the basics of maps, directions, and world and U.S. geography in a little more than 400 pages. It took us about a year and a half to work through this book, and the kids learned much more about geography than I ever dreamed they would. Designed for Grades 3 to 6.
- **Map Skills for Today:** (Scholastic, shop.scholastic.com, then use the search bar) These classic geography workbooks for Grades 1 to 6 haven't changed a whole lot since we used them in grade school. They taught solid geography basics then, and they still do. Available from the website.
- **Trail Guide to Geography:** (Geography Matters, www.geomatters.com)

Choose between Trail Guide to U.S. Geography, Trail Guide to World Geography, or do them both. I used the world geography course at the high-school level to give my kids a semester credit in high-school geography. Students create a large geography portfolio, country by country or state by state, as they study each area. Each title is adjustable to teach Grades 3 to 12. Available from the website.

History

History hits me right in the pocketbook. A quick survey of our homeschool library shows that history books far outrank any other subject at our house. We don't browse through the bookstore looking for extra math books to read before bed, but a new history title always catches our attention and usually ends up in the bag (after the required visit to the checkout clerk).

The best way to learn about history is to actually live it. Short of spending your entire summer as a docent guide at Williamsburg, reading about it is a close — and less expensive — second. To explore a time period, use reprints from books written at the time you're studying, biographies of men and women who made a difference in their societies, and descriptive volumes that show a glimpse of the age.

You can approach teaching history in one of two ways:

- **Timeline:** Parents who choose the timeline approach begin at the beginning. Then, as they move up the timeline (or down, depending on your perspective), they add in various civilizations where they fit. Teaching your child the history of civilizations as they come along offers one distinct advantage. Your child doesn't wonder which came first, the Aztecs or the Egyptians. If you teach each civilization in turn as it arises, your child *knows* which culture appeared before the other.

  In much the same way, when you get to the history of the United States, your learner has a framework that she can hang all her new information on. She doesn't wonder what came before 1492; she knows.

- **Segments:** Teaching history segment by segment, on the other hand, allows you to concentrate on various cultures at different times of your child's schooling. If you want to hit American history each year for 12 years, you can do that. And because this is your course, "American" can also mean a year of intensive Canadian history, Mexican history, and so

on. Let your desires for your child's learning guide you.

When you assemble your history tools, take a look at some of these resources:

- ***History Odyssey:*** Pandia Press (www.pandiapress.com) Take your kids on a tour through the ages with the History Odyssey courses. Beginning with *History Quest: Early Times,* you then travel through the middle ages, early modern times, and more current modern times — and that's all in Grades 1 to 4. Another set of books repeats the cycle at a higher learning level from Grades 5 to 8, and the high-school-level study of ancient, Middle-Ages, and American history round out the curriculum (some of these are currently in development). The study guides lead you through reading selections and activities from a variety of books and online resources to complete the year's history course. Available from the website.
- ***A History of the United States:*** Oxford University Press; published after a mom got fed up with her child's history curriculum at school. Author Joy Hakim sat down and wrote an 11-volume history of the United States that you can use for students anywhere from sixth through about eighth grade. Each book is divided into 40 or more easy-to-read chapters, so you may read a chapter a day and get through the series in a couple years.
- **Stanford History Education Group:** Visit Stanford University's History Education website at http://sheg.stanford.edu to locate both world and U.S. history lessons you can use. Whether you're looking for a solid lesson on the Battle of Thermopylae or a lesson on reading immigration passenger lists to glean information, Stanford has you covered. All lessons are available for free download once you register with an account.

Stories of inventors, cultures, civilizations, and military organizations may add interest to your study. These aspects add depth to your history curriculum and also capture the heart and interest of a less-than-interested history scholar if you happen to match your child's current passion with a period in history.

Electives: Music and art

Whether you include subjects such as music and art in your curriculum depends on your state requirements as well as your own devotion to the

subjects. Keep in mind, as you plan, that you don't have to teach these lessons yourself. Virtually any community offers a local music teacher for piano, guitar, or flute, and many offer art classes as well. Don't overlook YouTube, www.youtube.com, for engaging short videos on art techniques, music styles, and music instruction.

So breathe a sigh of relief because you may be off the hook. If you're not, or if *you* happen to be the local music or art teacher, then I offer a few options that you may like:

- **Maestro Classics:** (www.maestroclassics.com) If you want to introduce classical music to your students, this set includes Prokofiev, Bach, Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saens, and more. Each CD or mp3 file gives you the story of the composer and some of his greatest hits. Best of all, almost all of these titles offer a downloadable curriculum guide that you can use to create an entire unit study around the music, culture, and time period. Available from the website.
- **Kids Guitar Zone:** (www.kidsguitarzone.com) If your child has always wanted to learn the guitar, this may be the place to start. Australian Andrew Keppie is a professional musician with a certificate in teaching, and he puts both to good use in this free online guitar course. Andrew teaches the kids how to hold a guitar, use a pick, tune the instrument, and read guitar tablature, which is guitar sheet music for nonclassical players. And that's all in Lesson 1. In Lesson 2 the students begin playing from written tablature. The lessons also include downloadable music charts so the kids can play the tunes later.
- **KidsArt Art:** (www.kidsart.com/product-category/kidsart-art-teaching-booklets-only-4) Each small 16-page booklet in the Skills and History collections concentrates on a different skill or history period. Titles include "Celtic Ireland," "Arts of Africa," "Arts of the Orient," "Chalk & Charcoal," and "Rembrandt," to name a few. These are inexpensive ways to introduce your student to an art form or period, or they make great add-ons to a history study.
- ***Mark Kistler's Draw Squad*:** Published by Simon and Schuster, this is a kids' drawing classic. In 30 lessons (each one taking several days), Mark outlines basic drawing techniques and gives the child an opportunity to draw what she just learned. If you love this, Mark wrote several other

books on drawing, and he runs a subscription site where he teaches drawing via videos. Visit his 3D drawing website at www.draw3d.com; the *Draw Squad* and other books are available from your favorite bookseller or online.



TIP I also talk about art and music options for your homeschool in Chapter 12.

Writing a Curriculum from Scratch: The Diehard Approach

Some courageous souls embark on the write-your-own-curriculum journey. With a *scope and sequence* (a list that tells them what each grade level covers) in hand, along with plenty of available time, they create each subject's content for the entire school year. Then, I suppose, they disappear to the nearest Residence Inn for a month's rest and relaxation. I know that I would.

Although designing your own curriculum takes a huge amount of effort on your part, it does have one great benefit. If you create lessons that present information the way your child learns, then your curriculum should help your child amass information in a way that few purchased curriculums can.



TIP Most homeschoolers who end up writing their own curriculums do so because they can't locate a prepared guide for one particular subject that they want to teach their children. For instance, I teach business theory to my children each week and have for the past several years. Because I have yet to find an elementary business theory curriculum, I assemble library books and combine business history with vocabulary, personal experience, and biographies to create my curriculum. We talk about sole proprietorships and corporations, the advent of products, such as Kleenex tissues and Hershey's chocolate, and the women and men who

made it all happen.

If you elect to write your own curriculum, you certainly aren't alone. Parents who were skilled at the subject they tackled wrote many of the single-subject curriculums available to homeschoolers. When they attempted to locate a curriculum to use with their own children, these parents failed to unearth any prewritten curriculums for their specialty because none lurked in the back of the homeschool catalog waiting for discovery. So they sat down and wrote their own.

To write your own curriculum, you need some kind of document that tells you what children learn at each grade level. In edu-speak this information is a *scope and sequence.* Any of these resources work for your purposes:

- **Core Knowledge Sequence:** (www.coreknowledge.org) The Core Knowledge Foundation, founded by E.D. Hirsch Jr., offers a free Grade K to 8 scope and sequence that you can download from their site. (Dr. Hirsch wrote the book series *What Your _____ Grader Needs to Know*).
- **World Book Typical Course of Study:** (www.worldbook.com/typical-course-of-study.aspx) Homeschoolers have used this website, or a variation of it, for more than 25 years. It lists actual skills that students need to master for each grade level. One of the easiest sites to use that gives you real information, the site tells you what the students need to know in real English, so you can design your curriculum point by point for social studies, language arts, mathematics, and science. If you want to download the list in PDF format, visit www.worldbookonline.com/training/html/tcos.htm.
- **U.S. Curriculum Standards:** (www.educationworld.com/standards) Organized by subject, it then may require some clicking of links until you reach the information you seek. The write-up on the Education World website is relatively general, but if you click the Source link at the bottom of most paragraphs, it will take you to the parent organization site and more involved standards lists.



TIP Check your local library for curriculum standards or a printed scope

and sequence if you don't have Internet access. While you're there, you may want to take a look at the Core Curriculum Series, edited by E. D. Hirsch Jr. You may know of them as the *What Your Child Needs To Know in* X *Grade* series. Although these books don't include complete curriculum suggestions, they provide a good starting point if you want some general ideas for various grade levels.

With standards or scope and sequence in hand, list the skills you need to teach a particular grade and then put your creativity cap on. Take another trip to the library (if you're not there already) to see what resources you can find that fit your list of skills. For subjects such as math, you may be able to follow the standards suggestions by creating resources as you need them, but a subject such as science or history generally needs some backup materials.



TIP Standards language can be incredibly confusing when you try to apply them to something useful, such as a particular project or book. You may decide before you get too far into this that an extra resource would help. *Home Learning Year by Year: How to Design a Homeschool Curriculum from Preschool Through High School* by Rebecca Rupp shows you how to take the standards that you collect and create a useful curriculum from them no matter what grade you need to teach.

IF YOU'RE NOT USING *MY* CURRICULUM, YOU'RE CLUELESS!

Homeschoolers tend to be a self-confident lot, and sometimes they go a bit overboard. I've actually had people tell me that I didn't know what I was doing because I neglected to jump up and down at their curriculum choices and run out to buy them myself. Did they know that I have a special-needs learner at my house? No. They didn't ask. They didn't care. They simply wanted to push their choices down my throat.

Don't fall for this kind of attitude. Nobody knows your child as well as you do. Although everyone makes mistakes once in a while, you will know if you happen to buy the wrong curriculum one year. You'll probably figure it out before the end of October.

Asking for other people's opinion is great — in fact, talking to people I trust saves me money every year as I think about introducing this publisher or dropping that one from my yearly lineup. But I try to talk to other homeschoolers who know my children. After they know my kids, they have a better idea of what may work well. Thanks to other parents' suggestions, I've taken the time to look at many different textbooks that I didn't know about otherwise or

didn’t plan to take the time for. It’s kind of like a new coffee mocha brand — you may be leery to try it on your own, but when a friend raves, you just have to check it out for yourself.

Keeping other people’s opinions in mind — or dismissing them — the books you buy for your child ultimately depend on what you know about your learner. If you think a particular approach will work with your child, then it probably will. You know plenty about your own child that you never took the time to put into words. Mothers usually call this their “instinct.”

Go with your instincts, Mom or Dad. You know. You really do.

Chapter 19

Special Concerns for Special Students

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Teaching special learners**
- **Working with gifted children**
- **Helping medically fragile students at home**
- **Looking at equipment and education programs**

When you have a child who carries a "special needs" label to school every day, the thought of teaching him at home gives you an additional measure of stress — whether the label happens to be a learning disability, gifted and talented, or something else. Yet these children, perhaps more than any others, respond incredibly well to one-on-one tutoring — which is basically what you do in a homeschool situation.

You may need to adapt your curriculum, change your school year, or alter your expectations for a special needs student. Maybe you need to buy M&Ms by the case. When you bring your child home after attending public school and you give them a month or two to "detox" and get used to staying at home, you may be surprised at how much and how quickly they learn. Sometimes, the act of re-introducing your child to a daylong environment where they feel loved and cared for does wonders, especially if the school experience was less than stellar.

Considering Yourself Capable

No matter what kind of challenges you and your special needs child face during your homeschooling time, your homeschooling success depends on a few intrinsic basics:

- **Exhibiting patience:** Homeschooling a special needs child requires more patience, perhaps, than teaching a child without special needs. If you live with that child day in and day out, however, you already have that patience. If you didn't have it when you first laid eyes on him, you certainly learned it through the intervening years.
- **Knowing your child:** You know how to communicate with this child, when he hurts, and when he understands and when he does not. If you really stop to think about it, you know much more about him than a school would. And because this little one belongs to you, his learning success means the world to you.
- **Providing a steady environment:** When you teach your child at home, surroundings remain constant, so changing faces and environments don't upset your youngster. This is a great advantage for all special needs children, but for some children this is *very* important.

  My son, for instance, freaked out when he saw toys and other items scattered on the floor in our *home*. The disarray bothered him severely. Sending this child to a school where other children sometimes act in surprising ways and adults expect him to move from room to room throughout the day would have definite negative emotional effects. He would be an emotional wreck by the end of the week or completely withdraw from the people around him because of the activity.



TIP Although you need to structure the environment so that your child learns, you don't want to structure it so much that it actually hampers her growth as a person. Standing back and building independence is one of the hardest things some parents need to learn when they homeschool a special needs learner. The oh-I'll-get-it-for-you-honey tendency, if left uncurbed, stifles your child's growth instead of helping it. No one wants to watch a child struggle! Watching my son become frustrated enough to throw tantrums when he was learning to talk again was hard for me, but I knew, as a former educator, that I only had until he reached 5 years of age to utilize the open doorway of speech development. So we worked on it day after day until he got it. Each day's progress brought hugs and glasses of grape Kool-Aid for him and moist eyes for me as I watched

him ever so slowly reach his communication goals.



FUELING FUTURE HOMESCHOOLING

When we first thought about homeschooling, my son was completely nonverbal and showed signs of intense frustration. The local school system tested him for a special needs preschool class, but he did not qualify because he tested within a normal IQ range. So *in spite of the fact* that he could no longer talk to me, the local schools had nowhere for this child to go.

The thought of teaching him at home terrified me at first. Yet I looked back over the past year we'd just completed — through modified sign language, a communication board I created all over the refrigerator door, and day-in-day-out language practice, I was able to reach this child. The first day he said "Mama" again, the tears rolled down my cheeks. Today he's a teacher who runs his own non-profit dedicated to providing accessibility to Internet users. Our homeschooling experiment worked.

Your child can become more independent than he is now. Maybe that means bending or reshaping a spoon so he can hold it and eat by himself. Perhaps it means researching and trying every method that you can think of until you unlock the mysteries of the written word and he begins to read. But he *can* do it — especially if you stand behind him and cheer at every step.

Guiding the Gifted

If your child puts in a good day of homeschool by completing third or fourth grade math, assigned reading, an art project, and reciting the Greek alphabet for fun — all before lunch — then follows you around the rest of the day saying things such as, "Hey Mom! Come watch me reenact the Battle of Yorktown," then there's a good chance that you have a gifted learner on your hands. Especially if the child is age 5 or 6, as this one was when that day occurred. (Honest! I was there.)

Gifted children qualify as special needs learners because they don't learn the same way that the average child does. They process differently, learn information outside the norm (both in content and in speed), and generally keep you on your toes as a homeschooling parent. Because they learn differently than normal, the books and materials sold for general

homeschooling often fail to meet the needs of these children, but unlike the homeschoolers of 20 years ago, today's families have access to programs and books that actually work.

Taking different paths

Gifted learners take in information differently. They don't amass details and data faster than usual as much as they take a whole different route to get there. Remember the "Family Circus" cartoons of Billy's adventures? When his dad called him, instead of walking down the path from the swing set to his dad, Billy jumped off the picnic table, ran around the bird feeder a couple times, touched all the tree trunks, and *then* ran to see his dad.

That's kind of how gifted learners learn. The interesting (and sometimes frustrating) thing about this is that one moment you may be talking about dinosaurs. Then their brains kick in and you end up talking about the similarities between ancient Rome and recent attempts to colonize in space. How did you get there? If you ask them, they outline jump after jump and map their mental journey for you — but you still may end up shaking your head at the end of the explanation.

They pick up skills that way, too. With absolutely no previous training, the child I mention earlier in this chapter who loved Yorktown multiplied in his head by the time he was 4. He loved numbers and figured it out. Of course, this leads to some interesting questions later, when you think he knows something that he missed. It goes something like this: How in the world can you multiply and divide decimals and fractions, but you never learned how to *subtract* double-digit numbers? Obviously a day of review is in order.



WARNING Because of the way gifted students learn, most general textbook and workbook programs won't work with the gifted unless you want to add much to the material, such as hands-on projects. You can try (goodness knows I did), but don't be disappointed if your children say they're bored.

Like all special needs students, one-on-one tutoring works best with these learners, especially if they test highly gifted or profoundly gifted. (Highly gifted students fall within the 160 to 180 IQ range, and the profoundly gifted

score 180 and higher). Because most education is developed for the normal student range, these kids usually learn best when taught with creative methods — just like *all* their special needs counterparts.

You may find that your child is *twice exceptional*, also known as *2e*. This means that while the child definitely tests as gifted, there's also something else going on, a second exceptionality that may mask the giftedness. These children are "gifted and." They may be gifted and autistic, gifted and deaf, gifted and blind, or gifted with ADD. No particular exeptionality makes a child 2e; if she tries to balance both giftedness and any other aspect that makes her an exceptional learner, she is twice exceptional.



TIP If all this is new to you, and you hear bells ringing in your head as you read about gifted learners, you may want to read an essay titled Is It a Cheetah? by Stephanie Tolan. You can find it at the GT World website (www.stephanietolan.com/is_it_a_cheetah.htm). Stephanie does a wonderful job explaining how gifted learners react to their world.

Rounding up gifted education resources

You may need to hunt doggedly and upturn an occasional stone, but many resources exist for parents of gifted children — especially on the Internet. Some publishers produce unit studies for gifted learners, and others create curriculum that just works well with them without actually being designed that way.

Here are some ideas to get you started in your quest.

- **The classical curriculum:** A classical education appeals to gifted students because of its depth. Many of these learners like to get their hands around concepts, so they thrive with a curriculum that explores the questions of the ages. See Chapter 11 for more information about the classical approach to homeschooling.
- **Moving Beyond the Page:** (www.movingbeyondthepage.com; phone 888-316-8242) Written for gifted and creative learners, Moving Beyond the Page contains everything you need in language arts, math, science, and social studies for ages 4 through 10. At the 9-to-11 age range, the

curriculum drops math and continues with language arts, science, and social studies until age 14, or high school. Currently this company offers one high school course in language arts. This curriculum goes beyond simple comprehension to creative application of the concepts. Instead of simply studying about eathquakes, your 11-year-old re-creates earthquakes and different earthquake waves to understand what they do and how they differ. You may see this curriculum referred to as MBTP in online chats or posts.

- **Royal Fireworks Press:** (www.rfwp.com) Devoted to gifted learners. While their most popular curriculum among homeschoolers seems to be Michael Clay Thompson language arts, they also offer curriculum for science, social studies, project-based learning, and Latin. Be sure to check the age range of anything you plan to purchase; Level 7 doesn't necessarily mean seventh grade. It may mean upper high school, ages 16–18. The age ranges are in the gray box at the top of each book's entry.

Teaching the Medically Fragile

Children with medical problems spend so much time in and out of doctors' offices, and sometimes even in and out of the hospital, that regular school attendance becomes a hazy fantasy rather than the norm that most children experience. Between doctor visits, scheduled tests and operations, and medical devices ranging from braces to heart monitors, families juggle many more plates than those who simply get a child to school in the morning and soccer practice afterwards.

Homeschool provides a haven and some calm in the storm. You can teach on the good days — those days that you spend at home with an alert learner. Some families take reading or history to the doctor's waiting room and work until the appointment time. When you spend as much time in the doctor's office as these families do, you notice the week the magazines change on the table! After awhile, the office begins to look as much like home as your own living room, and life takes on a whole different timing.

Making your child as comfortable as possible and keeping your child alive function as your two top priorities. Continuing to function as a family quickly becomes a third priority, especially if your child becomes medically fragile as she grows older. Somewhere after that comes schoolwork and intellectual

learning.

If your hackles rise at this priority list, then you don't have a medically fragile child at your house. The good news is that with homeschooling, your child gets in more useful days during the year than she would otherwise because you're on the watch and can teach each good day. Or if she consistently shows more energy during a specific two-hour period of the day, as a homeschooler you can declare that your prime teaching time.

Getting the Goods You Need

Exceptional learners sometimes need special stuff. For one thing, they often don't learn in the same way as other children. Notice that I didn't say *as well* … I said *in the same way*. To teach the same information to a special needs child, you often need to let the creative juices flow. The need to present abstract concepts with concrete manipulatives, for example, may keep you pondering for a few weeks. After you figure it out, though, and your learner *gets it*, all the effort suddenly becomes worthwhile and you have the energy to do it again with the next topic.

Special equipment and services

Although not always the case, special needs learners sometimes need specialized equipment and services. Speech therapy, physical therapy, and adaptive devices all lend a hand toward your child's independence. Although medical insurance (if you have it) may cover some of these things, it doesn't cover others. Check with your insurance carrier to see what they cover *before* you seek out costly assistance or devices. A little advance planning can spare you the shock of what it can cost later.

You also may be able to get assistance from your school system. It depends on your state and your local school officials. Some school systems provide speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy to families regardless of whether they homeschool, yet others withhold these services from homeschoolers. Your local school official in charge of the district's special needs services should tell you whether such services are available in your area.



TIP One option, especially with physical therapy, is to schedule a "training session" with your favorite physical therapist (PT). Especially if your child needs daily stretching exercises that remain the same for years on end, or strengthening exercises that don't change until the muscles change, your local PT may be willing to show you how to do those exercises yourself with your child. First, this allows you to exercise your child in the comfort of your home and on your schedule. Second, this frees the physical therapist — the school PTs that I've worked with in the past all had way too many cases for the available hours of the day.

Your child may not need any of these services. Many special needs homeschoolers don't. You also may experience time periods when you need assistance as I did, and times when you do fine on your own. Go with what you need. If your frustration level rises with no abatement, and you can't see the end of the tunnel for the obstacles, check out some of the resources in this chapter and get some help for your child and for you.

Individualized Education Program

Schools use an Individualized Education Program (usually known as an IEP) for two reasons. First, the IEP lists point by point what a student is supposed to learn in a year's time. Second, it covers the educational establishment's posterior regions by proving that the learner learned *something* the previous year. A well-written IEP gives a classroom teacher a blueprint for the year. They take a long time to craft, especially if you want to actually document a student's needs and progress.

Most homeschoolers don't need to create an IEP for their own children unless they want to document progress and service needs. If you live in a state that requires a yearly portfolio, you may need to file an IEP for a special needs child. Your law (or state homeschool support group) should tell you for sure.



TIP

AHHHHHHCHOOO! ALLERGIES

Doesn't everyone suffer with allergies at one time or another? Although almost every adult remembers a reaction to pollen, poison ivy, or even chocolate, some children live with allergies that can be debilitating. Children who generally enjoy school, but who spend two weeks or more at home each month during fall and spring because they have the "flu" or who walk around looking like raccoons due to the black circles under their eyes, fight to maintain their concentration during these down times.

These kids, although not sick enough for hospitalization, live through long stretches where they just don't *feel* well. Depending on an allergy's severity, prescribed medication may lessen the symptoms but not eradicate them entirely. Various and sundry chemicals, building materials, and office supplies found in a normal school setting do nothing to help this child's situation.

If your child experiences mood swings and you think they could be allergy related, you may want to take a look at a book called *Is This Your Child?: Discovering and Treating Unrecognized Allergies in Children and Adults* by Doris Rapp, M.D. Dr. Rapp describes possible food, chemical, and environmental allergies, and she also explains the emotional behaviors and physical symptoms that accompany said allergies. It's a big one —626 pages of information — but some families found it life changing — especially if they found that their children were wrongly diagnosed with ADD/ADHD.



TIP If you decide you need an IEP and don't have the foggiest idea where to begin, the U.S. Department of Education offers a website devoted to IEPs. Visit online at www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html for the ins and outs of the IEP. This site is designed for students actively in their school systems, so your requirements may be a little different. But it gives you a good start. The site also offers a sample IEP form that you can copy and use as a basis for your own.

Information

If you have a special needs homeschooler, then please don't flounder for lack of information! Certain companies devote much of their time and money to the challenge of special learners. From adaptive learning devices to specialized curriculum, it's all out there if you only know where to look.

A few of the resources I amassed while working with special needs learners during the past several years follow. Take this information as a starting point. Due to page restraints, there is no way I could list all the available resources, but these links address learning disabilities and special needs of all types:

- **All About Reading:** (www.allaboutlearningpress.com; phone 715-477-1976) In 20 minutes per day, using the Orton-Gillingham method of reading instruction, this program takes your child from pre-reader to reader as she works through four levels. The material is scripted, so it tells you exactly how to present the information to your child. They also offer All About Spelling, which is also scripted so that it's easy to use and effective.
- **Handwriting Without Tears:** (www.lwtears.com) Handwriting Without Tears teaches a modified script in both printing and cursive that's easy for kids to understand and write, along with verbal cues to help them make the letters correctly. Does a letter touch a line? Then it *bumps*. That's easy for children to grasp. The company also offers Keyboarding Without Tears, if you think your child may benefit from typing instead of/along with handwriting.
- **ReMedia Publications:** (www.rempub.com) This publisher specializes in workbooks for kids who are below grade level. They also offer a life skills math series called Bank Account, Bargain, Budget, and Checkbook, as well as a large binder that contains full-color folders designed to teach the basics of mortgages, budgets, vacation planning, and more. Both sets are for Grades 6 to 12; the binder materials are written at a Grade 3 to 5 reading level.
- ***Steps to Independence: Teaching Everyday Skills to Children with Special Needs:*** This book, by psychologist Bruce L. Baker and disability specialist Alan J. Brightman, lays out how to teach skills necessary for independence. If you've ever had to teach a child how to play because she didn't grasp play skills on her own, you understand the need for this book in a parent's library. Covers getting ready, self-help, toileting, play, and more.



TIP Turn to Chapters 6 and 8 for more curriculum suggestions that may meet your needs. The Montessori method may work well for your learner; you'll find information in Chapter 13. You also may want to look at unit studies in Chapter 15. Many exceptional learners thrive with unit studies designed to match their learning levels. If your learner is

fascinated by bugs, dolls, or cars, creating a unit study that teaches all the subjects using their greatest interest may increase learning and retention tremendously. At the very least, you'll both enjoy the experience.

INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION

All too often, the special needs child becomes lost in a classroom situation. She's ready to move on and others don't get the concepts yet, or she doesn't understand and the teacher can't see for the other faces in the room that need help, too. Both extremes lead to a child whose needs aren't being met.

Homeschooling shines as an alternative for these learners. With individual attention, also known through the ages as *tutoring,* these kids progress at their own rate. If they miss something along the way, you take the time to re-teach it. And best of all, when they don't understand because the presentation doesn't click with them, you have the freedom to be creative. Use M&Ms, strips of paper, papier-mâché, crayons, a tape recorder, computer software, or whatever it takes.

Conversely, when your learner gets a concept on the first try, she doesn't sit through the presentation three or four more times while the teacher attempts to reach the other students in the room. Here, homeschooling gives you the freedom to move on when she's ready. Then slow down if she requires it later.

Because your child is one of … well … one, and not one of 20 or 30, you also have the opportunity to add extras into your school day. If your learner loves to dabble in paint, take the time to use paint while you explore history. Re-create various painting styles — or even pictures — of the time period. Who cares if you do the whole thing in finger paint?

On the other hand, customizing your learner's program also means that you don't need to force him to do the things that he hates to do. Some students (mine included) absolutely *hate* papier-mâché. The consistency turns their stomachs. Last I heard, papier-mâché proficiency wasn't included in *any* state's list of competent life skills.

If your child hates it and he doesn't need it, why do it? Redirect that energy into something he *does* enjoy. Maybe papier-mâché and glue are yucky at your house, but gummed paper (sheets that you cut shapes from and lick to stick onto other paper and things) qualifies as cool. Use what works.

Part 4

Nailing Down the Details

IN THIS PART …

Decide where to conduct your homeschool. You can use one specific room, or take over the entire house if you like.

Cut your costs by locating curriculum in unusual places. Scour the library shelves, use your Internet connection, and locate inexpensive options.

Observe your traditions and teach your kids at the same time. Whether you consider yourself a Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Pagan homeschooler, resources exist that you can use.

Organize your homeschool. You can track everything in a planner, use the computer, or file everything into folders to keep it all neat and tidy.

Determine whether you want to keep grades in your homeschool. Perhaps a portfolio showcasing the child's achievements for the year would work better, especially if your state requires one.

Use your Internet connection as an asset to your homeschool. Educational resources abound online for every subject and then some. Whether you need art examples or a primary history resource, turn to your computer to locate it.

Locate your homeschooling people. Organize a co-operative teaching experience, or join one already in progress. Find other homeschoolers using your curriculum or sharing your passions.

Chapter 20

Defining Your School Space

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Determining when enough is enough**
- **Using the room you have**
- **Setting aside a special space just for homeschooling**
- **Filling your home with learning**

Visions of the perfect schoolroom dance in your head. Blackboard-covered walls, begging to be decorated with colored chalk, beckon. Seasonal trimming sparkles invitingly on brightly festooned bulletin boards. Around the corner, computers beep as children investigate the latest software in the lab. Then you wake up.

Thankful that it was all a dream, you look around at your home, and the following question nags at the back of your mind: Do I have enough extra room and equipment to embark on this homeschool adventure?

In school or out of it, the fantasy schoolroom described is just that — a fantasy. No one has the time or materials to do it all perfectly every time. One of the beauties of homeschooling is that you can start where you are and use what's available to you. Then, if you like, you can add to your stash as time goes on.

Making Room for Chalk

At some homeschools that I know and love, learning materials bulge from every closet. These moms and dads, marking every tub, tin, and bookcase so they know exactly what they have and where it is, collect from used curriculum and garage sales. Then, when they need the Hebrew version of Scrabble, they drag it out from under the bed for the day's lesson. The whole house functions as a schoolroom and a storage place for homeschool paraphernalia.

Other families set aside one corner or a bookshelf and small, covered crate to hold all their supplies, and they're set for the year. They function quite well with a minimum of extras, still get the job done, and have room under the bed to store off-season clothes instead of blank sheets of poster board. These homeschoolers, though, are part of a pretty rare breed.

Most homeschool families fall somewhere in the middle. They don't collect every educational doodad that they see, but they do set aside a closet shelf and maybe a bookcase or two to hold books and supplies. This keeps everything together with a minimum of allocated space.

Setting aside the optimal amount of space

When do you decide enough is enough? When all the room under the beds boasts of homeschooling supplies? When you find yourself adding a fourth bookcase to the family room? When you're calling the builders to add an extra room onto the house? When you crowd the new computer into the kitchen?

If you guard the door against the Homeschool Stuff Collectors Society while I share, then I'll tell you a secret: You only need to collect as much stuff as you feel comfortable using.

If you enjoy amassing large quantities of things, then homeschooling will quickly move to the top of your shopping list. You can find *so many* things to buy for your homeschool! Some of it classifies as useful, although other objects can only be considered froufrou.



TIP If you have a library card and the books in hand that you need to cover the current year's subjects, then you're probably set as far as the absolute necessities go. One good, kitchen-cabinet shelf or bookcase shelf or a couple of those pseudo–milk crates that you can buy at discount stores should work as storage space. Then you can create your school space virtually anywhere that you find comfortable. When you begin to collect extra goodies, however, you require more storage space. That's where the beds come in.

Buying too far in advance increases storage needs

After you assemble the basics that appear on every public school to-buy list — paper, pencils, crayons or markers, glue, and the like — the rest is gravy. Construction paper is nice; scissors and glue see plenty of use with the younger set. If you see a science project that would work well with your current year, by all means buy it if you have the extra cash and you think the brood would enjoy the experience.



WARNING Buying this year for seven years down the road, however, tends to be a waste of money in the long run. If you happen to use a good number of out-of-print reading books in your homeschool, that's one thing, but purchasing most items because they're available and they look good for several years in the future generally fills your supply closet with an abundance of useless stuff.

For one thing, you have no idea what will interest your second-grader when he reaches high school. Several years of development and refinement lay between second grade and the senior year; your little one may find a completely different set of fascinations by the time he's a teen. In addition, the curriculum that looks so good now may lose its luster in a few years when the new edition hits the bookstore shelves.



REMEMBER Like all rules, the caveats for advance-curriculum purchasing also have their exceptions. However, you may want to go ahead and buy for the next couple years so you have it on hand if

- **The publisher announces a major revision of a particular curriculum that you're in love with and are sure to follow for the next several years.**
- **You don't follow the traditional calendar year.** You teach all year round and take a vacation when you need it instead of when your area schools declare time off.
- **You follow one particular curriculum year after year, but you aren't sure when you'll finish the current installment.** In this case, you may

want to plan ahead and purchase the next book or two in the series.



AT OUR HOUSE We do this with history. Our history curriculum, although not actually set in stone, follows a logical historical progression. My children know that as soon as we finish the study of Viking culture, play a few, way cool Viking games, and create some faux Viking projects, we're off to study the Middle Ages. Because I know that we'll cover the Middle Ages and then move into the Renaissance, I purchase books a year or two ahead to be sure they'll be handy when I need them. Spending half a year or two years on the Middle Ages doesn't matter — I can pull the next book off the shelf and keep going.



REMEMBER When you think about how to fill *your* homeschool supply closet, try to purchase only the whiz-bang extras that you'll really use. A closet stuffed with educational items that you never get around to using means that

- You have a closet that's useless for anything else because it's full.
- The kids never get the educational benefit from the products because they sit idle.

Once or twice a year, I go through my school closet and pull the items that I want to use before the end of the current semester to ensure that I actually incorporate certain activities into my teaching day. If I didn't, my home would turn into a collection of educational box art.

Deciding between the Den, the Dining Room, or the Whole Darn Place

When you look for a place in your home that would be suitable for a school space, the goal is to find a spot where everyone feels comfortable

congregating each day. Although the back porch may be good during spring and early fall, too many rainy days can depress scholars and force them to find another schooling spot. Save the back porch for really beautiful days and try to locate a space inside the house for daily lesson and reading time. Your raindrop-free textbooks will thank you.

You can also use a multipurpose room for a homeschooling classroom. The living-room floor and chairs make a nice place to work if you object to hard chairs in the kitchen or dining room, especially if your children stay awake on the sofa. The parental bedroom, although not optimal all the time, provides a soft, cushy bed for reading and a space big enough that everyone can pile onto it if they're careful with toes and noses.

Even the corner of a room works great as a school space if that's what speaks to you. Setting up a bookcase, a table, and a storage area with paper, pencils, and extras keeps everything in one place and within reach. If you have a toddler or preschooler at home, teaching the other children in one portion of a larger room allows the youngest family members room to roam and play.

Like everything else in the homeschooling universe, you work with what you can to fit your needs. Do your children need absolute quiet when they work? Take that into consideration when deciding on a school space. Must you complete other tasks as you teach? Then situate them close to where you'll be working.

Gathering around the kitchen table

For some families, the absolute best place for a homeschooling class is the kitchen table. For one thing, it provides a warm, comforting atmosphere that's hard to beat. Who can feel poopy when they wander to the room where hot soup, bread, and cereal regularly make their appearance?

The kitchen also provides a ready-made table or counter, along with chairs, benches, or stools to sit on while you work. Although the living room couch may look inviting, it's also so cozy that you awaken an hour later wondering where your time and that chapter went. A more pedestrian reason for working at the kitchen table is that it gives the Educating Parental Unit (that would be you) time to work on breakfast, lunch, and dinner while still overseeing school activities. And if you're used to fixing three meals a day for an entire family, you know how much time it takes! Having everyone together in the

kitchen while you chop, puree, and sauté relieves some of the daily get-it-on-the-table stress.

Setting aside a special room

If you're fortunate enough that your home contains a room that you don't currently use, you can always transform it into a schoolroom. Using one specific room allows you to assemble all (or most) of your school supplies in one space. This cuts down on clutter in the long run. Not having to search through two different floors of your home for the red construction paper can streamline your school day.



AT OUR HOUSE At our house, the schoolroom was always the last area to be cleaned because we used it so much. Designating a whole room as your schoolroom gives you the option to shut the door when you have guests. Closing the door keeps a lid on the clutter that seeps out of the room at the same time that it keeps visiting little fingers from rifling through your school stuff. If you have many small or inquisitive children visit your home, your children probably won't take the results of their busy fingers with the best grace. (I know that mine don't!)

Another benefit to using an entire room for your school space is that you have definite *on* and *off* times. If you're in a room that has been designated for school, then children may come to associate paying attention and getting down to business with being in that room during school hours. At other times of the day when they're out of the schoolroom, children feel free to participate in activities that don't involve grammar or numbers.



TIP This approach may be most effective with younger children. By the time a child is 10 or 11, she *knows* when school time falls and when she is free to pursue her own interests. With children between 5 and 8 years old, however, those lines sometimes blur a bit.

Just because you have the room available doesn't mean that you need to set it aside as a full-time schoolroom. If incorporating your school space area into a

larger room of your house, such as the kitchen or living room, fits your family style, then do it. Some homeschooling families find that separating school from the rest of life adds nothing to their standard of living.



THE PERILS OF YOUR OWN PLACE

The first five years that we homeschooled, we designated the spare bedroom as our schoolroom. Complete with computers and primary school desks, this tiny work of art functioned as our school away from school. The kids had a special room to store crayons and pencils, paper and workbooks.

During those five years, almost every day that dawned on our schoolroom illuminated an area that was messy beyond belief. The floor bore the constant remains of the yesterday-after-school-construction-paper project. We-luv-you-mommy messages were scrawled on the whiteboard more often than Greek nouns and verbs. Books littered the floor from the bedtime reading scramble the evening before. Some days, the first hour of our school day became a clean-the-pit exercise. The little desks and whiteboard were nice, but they quickly lost their appeal.

When we moved into our present home, I proposed a radical lifestyle change — no more schoolroom. Instead, the children work at a long conference table set up in the basement right outside Mom and Dad's shared office. The table is big enough to spread out their work if they need to, yet small enough that they can clean the area before they trash it again. (That, at least, is the goal.)

Many homeschoolers dream of having a whole room for their school space, and some set aside space for a schoolroom and love it. For us, though, designating a whole room for school definitely put a strain on our lifestyle instead of enhancing it. Our schoolroom had to go.

LEGO bricks in the living room and homework in the hall

Some families live in and use the whole house as a school space. Yours may be one of them. Regardless of a room's intended purpose, the activities of the children in these families expand to fill their allotted space and the children move from room to room throughout the day. These homeschooling families deserve credit for actually using every square inch of their home space and *living* there.

Although the home that uses all of its space for living in as well as homeschooling may look like chaos reigns supreme, any child from the

household can report the exact progress of almost every activity in the home, “That? Oh, yeah. That’s Antoine’s LEGO tower. He wants it to reach the ceiling by Monday.” A little awed, you leave said tower where it stands and move on to another room.



TIP If your books and supplies stay in a place where they’re accessible, you don’t actually *need* a specific place to sit and work. If you want, you can spread out throughout your home, read in the bedrooms, and sculpt on the kitchen floor. Children must feel comfortable on the floor; they spend plenty of time there. If it doesn’t bother you and it doesn’t bother them, why change it?

Most adults and some children feel more secure if the school space is a specific area. If your family members feel differently, then go with the flow and see how it works. Maybe your daughter’s creativity only flows when she sits underneath the family room table. I find my girl there quite often. You could always help her out and install a portable light that hangs beneath the table so she actually sees the words she reads.

If your son feels better in the hallway when he snips those construction paper creations and it doesn’t bother you, then why not leave him there? Little pieces of construction paper come up much more easily with the vacuum than they do when helpful hands try to pick them up and swipe them off the table onto the floor. You need the sweeper then anyway. Why not start on the floor from the beginning?

Sometimes you do need to practice perfect posture and sit still. Penmanship and pencil drawing, for example, really do work best when your child sits in a chair at the table. (Believe me, we’ve tried all kinds of ways to do handwriting, and the most legible results come from table and chair. Underneath the table does *not* do it for me.) Building projects, however, really don’t require a table any more than dolls or cars do. Your child can pretend and create just about anywhere. Use what works for you.



REMEMBER

LET *YOUR* NEEDS DETERMINE *YOUR* SPACE

When you look at your home to figure out where you want to spend time during school hours, try what seems good to you. Who cares if you have three empty rooms upstairs and you prefer to work at the kitchen table? I won't tell anyone if you don't.

And if you decide to move the girls into one bedroom so you can change the empty room into a dedicated schoolroom, go for it. Of course, it helps if the girls happen to be friends to begin with, but it's your house, your children, and your school. Do what seems best to you.

The moral is that you are in charge here. If you homeschool, you do so because homeschooling is the best decision for your family right now. Take that freedom and look at your home. The same standards apply. No matter where you decide to do school at your house, it needs to be the best decision for your family today.

If you find that your organization needs to change next month or next year, then change it. During our schoolroom years, I moved those little desks all over the room trying to determine the best fit for the way that I explain information and the way that my little scholars internalize it. No one will say a word if you decide to move your school space from the basement to the living room. At least, no one *should* say anything — I know everybody has an opinion these days, but where you put your school space is your decision.

I have a homeschool friend whom I've known for several years. In that time, I've seen her move the school space all over the house. School started in her basement. Then it moved to the dining room. After that, it migrated to the family room off the kitchen for more comfort, and she held classes in the kitchen for a long while. Now she has designated a room that sits above her garage: It's perfect for her. Finding the ultimate space took some time. It may mean a couple of migrations for you, too, but you'll get there.

Chapter 21

Cutting the Costs and Searching for Stuff

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Finding economical curriculums**
- **Checking out homeschool conventions**
- **Buying and borrowing with fellow homeschoolers**
- **Visiting the library**
- **Knowing what you can and can't copy**

Remember the story that circulated a few years ago about the gourmet cookie recipe? You know the one — a friend of a friend of a friend inadvertently pays an outlandish price for a well-known corporation's cookie recipe and then sends the recipe out to everyone in the known universe so that she feels better about the hundreds of dollars she paid. I hate to break the news to you if you haven't heard it somewhere before now, but the story isn't true. Known as an *urban legend*, it's a tale that sounds like it should be true or could be true, so people believe it.

The costs of homeschooling fit neatly into the *urban legend* category. You hear horror stories from the media about the "true" cost of homeschooling. Fear begins to gnaw at you, and you wonder if you can do this homeschooling thing after all if it's going to be *that* expensive. To dispel at least one urban legend from your life, let me tell you the truth: Homeschooling doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg. It's as inexpensive or as costly as you want to make it.

Although a few families gleefully spend thousands of dollars on homeschooling each year, most people simply want to reach the end of the year with a little left in the homeschool fund. Spending $500 or less per child per year is not unusual. Some families even manage to spend under $500 per *family* per year and still do a great job teaching their young ones.

Slashing Curriculum Prices

You can provide your children with a good, solid education without spending money like water. A textbook or program's high price tag is no indicator of its usefulness to your children's educational needs. The goal is to locate resources that work for your kids and to help them learn what they need to know. Keeping your goal in mind while you shop for curriculum (those books that help you teach particular subjects such as math or science) may save you money all by itself.

Many homeschoolers find that their needs for inexpensive curriculum vary with the years: Some years, you find yourself with a tight budget and realize that you need to cut expenses. This sounds like you? The following tips help.

On the other hand, if this is the year that you want an expensive educational device (such as a good-quality microscope for high-school science) and you need to cut the costs of educational books and supplies to afford the equipment, then you may glean an idea or two that you can use here.

Choosing an inexpensive curriculum

One of the easiest ways to keep a lid on costs is to select one of the more inexpensive curriculums out there. If you have your heart set on a science book that costs $80, a math book that sets you back $60, and $130 in miscellaneous history books for the year, you've already spent over $250 for one child, and you need textbooks for other subjects! Looking at one expensive textbook may not be so bad, but when you throw two or three more into the pile, the numbers add up frighteningly fast.

An easy way to guard against this curriculum overload is to set a maximum annual budget for each child. If your yearly budget for each child is $200, for example, you may need to use some creativity to fit everything into that, but it's certainly doable. A set budget means that you can't run out and buy the neatest, coolest curriculum that you see this week *unless* it happens to fit within your price range. Price range limits may not be loads of fun, but they are part of living.



TIP Sitting down with your child, your budget, and your curriculum ideas

may be a good exercise in economics. This gives you a great opportunity to explain why money really doesn't grow on trees and to drive home the concept of *opportunity cost* — that when you purchase one item, the money is gone and you lose the opportunity to buy something else. (Quick! Jot it down as a math or business lesson! That golden moment you just shared counts as class time.)

Another option is to start with a prepackaged curriculum-in-a-book that covers most of what you need for the year and fill in the extras as you need them. Although several publishers used to market these, and may at some point again, only two series are currently available. Carson-Dellosa, an established educational publisher, produces both the *Comprehensive Curriculum of Basic Skills*, Grades K to 6, and the *Complete Book of Grade X* (Grades K to 4). The Comprehensive Curriculum series includes English, science, some history, citizenship (depending on grade level), and study skills. The back of the book contains some teaching ideas and a complete answer key. Although the front of the book lists no science and no social studies, the reading selections concentrate on these subjects and geography. You can easily use the reading selections as starting points for further study. The Complete Books include reading, English, writing, and math. (Locate them online at www.carsondellosa.com.) Realistically, you need to supplement these books with reading books from your home or local library, making sure that some of the titles you check out cover both science and social studies.

Finding free, the least expensive of all

Let's face it: Getting a curriculum for free is the ultimate in curriculum savings. You can achieve free curriculum without writing it yourself in two ways: You can scour the Internet for free downloadable unit studies and materials, a perfectly valid — if time-consuming — way to dig up curriculum, or you can opt to use a ready-made, but free, curriculum. Some of these are downloadable; some the kids use online. But all come without price tags.

- **Big History Project:** (https://oerproject.com) Designed for high schoolers, this course looks at big history, from the Big Bang to the modern day, in a one-year course filled with reading, writing assignments, videos, and infographics. It may take you longer than a year to complete.

There's a lot here.

- **CK-12 Foundation:** (www.ck12.org) Look here for free textbooks on math and science for Grades K to 12, including those hard-to-find science books like biology, chemistry, and physics.
- **Core Knowledge:** (www.coreknowledge.org) Core Knowledge offers free language arts, history, and geography for Grades K to 8, and science for Grades K to 5.
- **Discovery K12:** (www.discoveryk12.com) This is a completely free online curriculum for Grades K to — you guessed it — 12. It includes every subject you need, and you can use it as a full curriculum or only use the subjects you need and fill in with other options.
- **Khan Academy:** (www.khanacademy.org) Very popular with homeschoolers, this website grew out of Sal Khan helping his younger cousins with math homework. Now it offers everything from preschool math to physics, and from art history to AP Biology. It's all free for your use, and it will track your student's progress through a grade-level subject, like math.
- **MIT Open Courseware:** (ocw.mit.edu) If your student is ready for challenging courses, MIT offers many of its past courses online for free. You won't get college credit, but you will get knowledge in a particular subject, and that usually works for high school. If you have an advanced teen who is interested in a topic like architecture or economics, this is the place to go.
- **Wildwood Curriculum:** (www.wildwoodcurriculum.org) This Charlotte Mason style curriculum guides you through ages 6 to 12 (Grades 1 to 7) and gives you suggestions for resources that help you complete and teach it. Many of their book and resource suggestions are either free or can be found at your local library (or a good substitute). See Chapter 12 for more about Charlotte Mason schooling.
- **World History Project:** (https://oerproject.com) In much the same vein as the preceding Big History Project, World History Project introduces high-school students to history through reading selections, videos, writing opportunities, and more.



TIP Whew. That was a pretty big list. For faith-specific, free curriculum, take a look at Chapter 22.

Locating used curriculum

Unlike chocolate-chip cookies, you can use textbooks more than once and still get the same result. The easiest way to reuse curriculum, of course, is to pass books down the line in your own household. You buy them once and each year that you reuse them gives you a bonus.

If you have more than a couple children at your house, and you find curriculum you really like, using it with more than one child helps to justify the cost of a hardbound textbook. It also saves you time the second or third time you teach from the same book. You open it and think, "Oh, I remember this." And off you go.

Short of passing books down the line, you can track down used curriculum in a wealth of places. Some homeschoolers give their used books to other families who need them or sell them to other homeschoolers at a more-than-fair price. (I've been on a long-term swapping binge with several families for a number of years, and I pick up titles I think they'll like if I see them at a really good price. Because I only spend an extra dollar or two at a time, it becomes more of a game than a burden. You can read more about sharing with other homeschoolers later in this chapter in the "Tapping the Fountain of Fellow Homeschoolers" section.)

Once or twice a year, most areas gather their homeschoolers together and hold a used-curriculum fair. The idea is that you sell what you no longer need for a few dollars, and you buy what you do need. Of course, what you buy depends on what other homeschoolers offer for sale, but you can really cut your costs if you live in an area with a good used-curriculum fair. Keep in mind that *good* is a relative term. You probably won't find as many high-school level science books at a used book fair as you will resources for kindergarten through fourth grade. Whether you turn up great stuff depends on what you need to begin with.



TIP Although this rule is often ignored, you should pay about 50 percent of retail price, or less, for used curriculum. Following are a few other resources to check out:

- **Amazon:** (www.amazon.com) Sometimes the used-book offerings on Amazon are a goldmine, and other times they come closer to a scam. If you find the book you want but it seems way too expensive for what you're getting, walk away and try another venue. Prices on used books are set by the individual vendors, not by Amazon.
- **eBay:** (www.ebay.com) How did we survive without eBay? This is where I go first when I'm looking for used curriculum. Be sure to read the entire listing so you know what you're getting.
- **Facebook:** (www.facebook.com) Regardless what you may think of Facebook as a social media site, it's a tremendous clearinghouse for things like used books and homeschooling materials. Look up "Buy-Sell Homeschool Curriculum" or a variation of that, with or without your state or city included, and see what comes up. You may make a new friend or two along the way.

Writing your own curriculum

Writing your own curriculum always saves you money because you don't have to purchase anyone else's textbooks. When you embark on an adventure like home-curriculum production, however, you trade time and energy for money. Creating your own curriculum year by year from scratch takes an enormous amount of time. You need to look at each year's expectations and then design a curriculum around that.

Designing a curriculum from scratch with the help of library books isn't impossible — far from it. Many homeschoolers do it every year. Some write their own curriculum to save money, and others do it for the creative outlet. A few homeschoolers create curriculum because nothing yet exists that meets the needs of their children.



TIP For an in-depth look at writing your own curriculum and what it entails, take a look at Chapter 18. I suggest resources to help you in your task as well as an approach or two that makes the job a little more manageable.

If saving money is your main reason for writing your own curriculum, you may be better off pursuing some of the other ideas in this chapter. Buying one or two books that you plan to use for several children and utilizing the library for the rest isn't that expensive, and it would certainly save you the time that you'd spend on creating your own curriculum.

Sourcing Your Curriculum

Your homeschool reference file bulges with ideas. You settle on a curriculum or education method after weighing the available options, create a list of must-haves and optional extras for the year, and you're ready to go. Your mind full of rosy possibilities, you set forth to collect all the home education goodies that you can for this year's learning extravaganza.

Now you face a wall. You know what you want (or kind of what you want, anyway). Where do you get it? Homeschool supply stores don't sit on every corner waiting for the hordes to enter. Homeschool supply stores would be nice — especially on those days that you'd really like to try something new — but that's not reality. If you're not looking for used curriculum this year, and you don't need or want to use a free option, where do you find your stuff?

Looking at your local store

Sometimes the best educational materials sit right in your own community. A peek into the local phone book under "Educational Supplies" or "Teacher Supplies" may reveal a small gold mine of educational stores. These shops come in all sizes and carry a wide variety of materials.

Although you probably won't find complete subject textbooks in one of these stores (such as Shurley Method or Glencoe Science), this is where you turn for unit studies, workbooks, and much more. These stores also carry items

such as construction paper, glue, tempera paints, recorders (as in musical instruments), puzzles, math manipulatives, components for science experiments, and foreign language supplements.

Locating an educational store in your own community gives you the advantage of a nearby store that you can visit when you want to supplement a class or two without waiting for mail orders to arrive or visiting the office supply store for yet more printer paper. You also have the opportunity to see the books in real life and flip through them before you purchase them. The flip test can tell you plenty — whether the book's text looks like it's at your child's reading level, if the page layout includes too many or too few blank lines, questions or paragraphs for your liking, and so forth. (Because few homeschool children actually enjoy a trip to the educational store, it's also one of the few places that you can escape to browse without a chorus of helpful, hopeful voices wanting to accompany you.)

Avoiding the malls: Ordering via Internet or mailbox

When you comb every educational store in town and you still can't find what you're looking for, it's time to turn to the Internet catalogs. For the cost of shipping, these companies mail their products to your door, which saves you from braving three feet of snow or blinding sunshine to procure them yourself.

Sometimes you can procure an actual printed catalog of materials, but unless you're averse to online shopping, finding products on the Internet from these companies is much easier. More often than not, catalogs are digitized and you flip through them on your computer screen. Not so many years ago, my mailbox overflowed with print offers from every company imaginable. Am I interested in an honest-to-goodness home wheat grinder? This company tracked me down through homeschool mailing lists.



TIP Although these companies don't sell every product available to homeschoolers, they provide a good starting point:

- **Nasco:** (www.enasco.com; phone 800-558-9595) This company sells so many educational materials that they created 20 catalogs to showcase it all. Their arts and crafts, science, math manipulatives, and physical

education supply catalogs would interest most homeschoolers. Nasco also offers a special needs catalog. Nasco's primary customer is the public school or teacher; you can order physical catalogs if you like by visiting the website and typing "catalog" into the Search box.

- **Rainbow Resource Center:** (www.rainbowresource.com; phone 888-841-3456) An oldie but goodie in the homeschool universe, Rainbow Resource Center offers both secular and Christian resources. If you download their catalog (or request a print version), each item is marked with an icon so you know whether the resource is Christian, neutral, or secular in content. If you are interested in secular curriculum, be sure to do your research elsewhere prior to placing an order. The Rainbow Resource icons are not always accurate. (A quick visit to Chapter 6 will explain *neutral* in this context.)



TIP These companies sell a little bit of *everything*. Look for other vendors throughout this book; you can find them listed with information on the subjects they specialize in (for example, I talk about the Great Books Academy online store in Chapter 11). Appendix A points you to even more curriculum and resources.

Attending a Homeschool Conference

Every state has one. Even the most diehard homeschoolers often miss them because they forget to mark them on the calendar. But if you're on top of things, and don't mark the information on the sticky note that gets swept underneath the refrigerator until *next* June, you'll be ahead of the game.

Some states throw large conferences, and others host smaller ones. Check with your state or local homeschool organization for a list of conferences in your area and their dates. Sometimes various cities within a state hold conferences in the course of a year. No matter how far or near the conference is to your home, homeschooling conferences all have one thing in common — no, not food — vendors. They all offer a *vendor room*, which is usually filled with individual booths and/or tables where each vendor advertises and displays its products. You can look over curriculum, feel the bindings, ruffle

the pages, read the words, pose questions directly to the sales representative standing inside the booth, and decide whether it's a program that you want to implement at your house.



TIP The reigning argument for attending conferences and buying from the vendors on-site is that you don't have to pay shipping. Although that can be a biggie, getting to see those books up close and personal is even more important.



WARNING Most of these state conventions are run by Christian homeschooling organizations (even the Great Homeschooling Conventions company). What does this mean for you? It means that all vendors have to sign a statement of faith in order to attend and exhibit. Any materials that they may have that contradict the beliefs of the convention holder either can't be shown, or they cannot attend as vendors. What materials might these be? Any books that contain information about evolution, dinosaurs — even rock and roll can be suspect, depending on the organization. If you're looking for solid secular curriculum, especially in science, you won't find it at one of these conventions. Search for "secular homeschool conventions" on the Internet for some options. More of them pop up every couple of years, but they don't always hold an in-person convention each year.

Hearing It from the Horse's Mouth

Your best friend José just told you about this great phonics program that he bought for his first-grader. Best of all, he told you what company publishes the program and provided you with the company phone number or website! Your tracking job is almost done. You pick up the phone or sign onto your Internet connection, order the program, and it wings its way to you.

Sometimes finding what you need really is that easy. A friend finds a curriculum or supplemental product that really works for her, and she passes along the information to you (and every other homeschooler she knows,

hopefully). Word really does get around in the homeschool world — especially if you belong to an area support group, an online support group, or gather with other homeschoolers for play days. Just like good recommendations tend to spur sales, bad ones steer you away from the questionable stuff.

Tapping the Fountain of Fellow Homeschoolers

Belonging to a local support group or bumming around with a group of like-minded homeschoolers offers more benefits than monthly sanity dinners. Fellow homeschoolers often work together to keep the cost of homeschooling to a reasonable level by loaning books to one another and/or stocking a textbook loaner library for member families and new homeschoolers who are just beginning.

Check with your local support group to see if it offers any cost-cutting perks. To locate a support group in your area, short of hanging out in the library at all hours of the day, contact your state homeschool association or search for your city or area on Facebook. Appendix B lists homeschool organizations by state, in case you don't have your local group's phone number memorized.

Borrowing books long term

Many homeschool groups operate a cooperative homeschool library. You visit the library at the beginning of the year, check out the books that you need for that school year, and return them in the spring (or sooner, if you're finished with them) so another homeschool family can take them home. Homeschoolers stock the library by donating their books as they finish with them rather than reselling them at a used-curriculum sale.

If everybody pitches in to help, the cooperative library can be a great local resource. One possible downer is that other families may not donate what you need this year, and you end up having to purchase a few books on your own. Your other alternative, of course, is to take what you can get and run with it. It makes for a rather haphazard curriculum but certainly a doable one if it's your best alternative during a term or two.

Sometimes groups of families get together informally and swap books

around. I did that for several years when a group of us were in our first few years of homeschooling, and it worked great! We actually saw what other families used in their homeschools, borrowed an occasional science or health text if we needed one, and examined other texts on a long-term basis while we decided whether we wanted to purchase a copy for ourselves.



WARNING If you borrow or lend books to other homeschoolers, you always run the risk that one of you will never see the book again. Not many people keep books intentionally, of course, but texts tend to get grouped together if you're not careful, and before you know it the book you borrowed is lost somewhere in your personal library. At that point, the only thing to do is fix yourself a nice cup of chocolate or tea and sit down to rifle through the books until you locate the animal. Your best bet is to keep one sacred loaner shelf somewhere in the house so you can immediately identify the books that don't actually belong to you.

On the other side of the equation, if you loan a book out for a long time, try to ensure that it's one that you won't need for awhile … if ever. I've loaned items to co-op members who dropped off the face of the earth, quit homeschooling, and I never saw them again. (Come to think of it, one of those families still has my baby stroller.) When that happens, you hope the book is still in print if you really need it, and you buy another one or chalk the whole experience up as a lesson learned.



TIP If you want to go into the long-term loaning practice, make sure that you keep a good, current list of what you loan, who you gave it to, and the person's current phone number or other contact information.

Buying as a group

Get together with other homeschoolers and purchase things in bulk. Although this may not be the rule for everything, various items cost less when you buy a whole truckload of them (or at least ten or so). Of course, before you go out and purchase 100 of something, you need to be sure that the homeschoolers in your community or co-op are interested in taking one off your hands!

Otherwise your research and savings are for naught.

If your local live theater group offers daytime performances, give them a call and ask about educational pricing. Educational ticket pricing may mean that everybody's passes cost less, or the theater may offer a free teacher/chaperone ticket for so many student tickets sold. Either way, when you're the teacher and you're paying for a good number of the tickets, you save.

Join a virtual bulk buying experience with the Homeschool Buyers Co-op (www.homeschoolbuyersco-op.org). If you find something you want, you can purchase it here, along with other homeschoolers, for a discounted price. Sometimes only more than one homeschooler needs to jump on the purchasing wagon to qualify, and other offers may require 49 orders or more before the discount kicks in. Be sure to do your research before buying to make sure the item or curriculum will meet your needs. Even at a discount it's not worth it if you don't use it.

Asking for the Discount

When you shop for homeschool supplies and books, ask the store if it offers a teacher's discount. Many bookstores and educational supply stores offer discounts to homeschoolers these days. A store may ask for some proof that you homeschool, depending on your state of residence and the store management's rules.



TIP If the store needs proof that you homeschool, and you use a full curriculum from a private school or register with an independent study program, then those documentations may work as proof for the merchant. Your local homeschool support group may also give you a membership card. If you have one, use it as proof of homeschooling when applying for educational discounts. If you have any type of documentation from your state of residence that you can show, it's a foolproof way to get the homeschool discount. Not many shops argue with the State Department of Education.

Breaking Out the Library Card

Repeat after me: “The library is my friend. The library is my friend …” There you go — you’re getting the hang of it!

The local library really is the homeschooler’s friend. Where else can you find movies, books, periodicals, newspapers, video games, and music, all for free? Of course, you have to return them sooner or later, but some libraries let you keep resources for up to a month or even longer if you renew them.

Libraries hold books on virtually every subject from philosophy to history, and some libraries offer a startling range of choices for any particular topic. Best of all, you can use the library’s collection to supplement your lessons as you need them. This cuts down on the number of books that you need to purchase for your home library, and it also drastically reduces the amount of storage space that you need for books.

While you browse the book stacks, be sure to check out the library’s other offerings. You may be able to check out a DVD or music to enhance your study. Periodically, I browse the DVD shelves looking for historical movies or documentaries that parallel the current history topic that I’m teaching. This lets me add some extra interest to the subject along with additional information that may not be in the books I use.

If you know what you want to cover during the year, your best bet is to spend an afternoon or two in the library and note what sits on the shelves at your branch. If you want a resource that your library doesn’t have, you can always try to get them from a main branch. Short of that, if you know exactly what you want, libraries participate in a program known as interlibrary loan. Your library can request any book that you want from another library and have it sent to your local branch for you to check out.

Sometimes you want the same books as every other homeschooler in your town. When that becomes an issue or on those days when you simply want the book to be there when you go to pick it up, you can use the library’s reserve service. This grabs the book off the shelf and holds it for a few days until you arrive to borrow it. Usually people reserve the latest-and-greatest release — your librarian may look at you funny the first time that you reserve *Great Deeds of Egyptian Engineers,* but he’ll get used to it in time. If you have access to the Internet, you may even be able to reserve books online.

More and more libraries allow you to virtually browse the stacks, request a hold for titles that you want, and then pick them up at your nearest branch a couple of days later. Not only does this save you time, but also you can browse the catalog 24 hours a day without leaving the comfort of your computer chair.



TIP Libraries tend to limit the number of books that you can check out during certain times of the year. Holidays especially put a crimp in unlimited book borrowing. If you plan to do a lesson on Valentine's Day, for example, you may want to take a look at the books in late December or early January to ensure that you see them. That way, you know which books you want to reserve well in advance of the rush.



WARNING And keep an eye on that calendar! Twenty-five books a week overdue can really put a crimp in your cost-cutting plan. With few exceptions, you can always extend the borrowing period if you catch it *before* you owe money.

Understanding Copyright: What Is Fair Educational Use?

Copyright is a fairly fuzzy subject, but one that touches homeschoolers where it hurts — in the pocketbook. What can you legally copy as you teach your children, and when do you need to purchase multiple copies? On the one hand, purchasing individual copies for all students seems silly, but then again, you don't want to break the law.



REMEMBER To begin with, any teaching materials that you purchase that contain black-and-white pages *and* the notice "Reproducible for classroom use" are fair game — you can reproduce the book's pages for your whole

cadre of children. If you have older children to teach now and plan to hold onto the book for your younger ones later, that's fine, too. Unit studies, some educational coloring books, and books with worksheets often carry the permission-to-reproduce statement.

What the permission-to-reproduce statement does *not* grant you, however, is permission to buy one book and reproduce it for every homeschooler in your town. If you find yourself teaching a course to a small group of homeschool children and you want to use your book as part of the class, then that group qualifies as your "class" as long as you teach the course.



TIP Be sure to take a moment and look for the permission-to-reproduce statement before you purchase educational materials. Look for it on the title page or on the table-of-contents page. I sometimes purchase more copies of a book than I need to because I don't see the notice.

When you copy books for educational use, you can make a copy for every student in your class. Usually, this means one copy for each of your children. The basic dos and don'ts of educational copyright use are as follows:



- WARNING **All copying done for the purpose of selling the copies to make money is an infringement of copyrights.** If you plan to do that, everything else in this section is irrelevant, and you're breaking the law.
- **You can copy one chapter of a book as long as it's less than 1,000 words or 10 percent of the entire book (whichever is less).** So, if you only want to cover Chaucer's "Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales*, you really don't need to buy the whole thing.
- **You can copy an article from a magazine or newspaper.**
- **Copying a short poem (less than 250 words) is okay.**
- **You can copy a chart, drawing, or cartoon from a book, periodical, or newspaper.**
- **Copying a whole book instead of purchasing a copy for your own use**

is a big no-no. Save your pennies and buy the paperback or check it out from the library.

- **Copying from a workbook that's intended to be filled in is also a no-no, unless it carries the permission-to-reproduce statement.**

DO I REALLY NEED THE TEACHERS' EDITIONS?

When you think about curriculum and saving money, whether to buy the extras becomes a question. Some curriculum manufacturers create textbooks, review books, teacher's guides, and a host of other materials that complement or explain each student text. Do you *really* need all this as a homeschooler?

Whether you need the teacher's edition depends on how comfortable you feel with the subject. For example, I wing through grammar, English, and high-school literature on my own, but an upper-level-math text makes my knees weak. If you feel comfortable teaching a course such as second-grade math with the help of a few M&Ms, beans, or counters when you need them, then you probably don't need to add the teacher's guide to your order.

Many teacher editions do little beyond providing the answers to the problems and questions in the student text. If your chapter discusses botany and you can identify the parts of a flower on your own, then the teacher's edition quickly takes its place as a nice doorstop. If you find that you need the answers to streamline your day, however, the teacher's edition becomes an investment rather than a throwaway.

Some teacher's editions offer suggestions for presenting the daily lesson, but if the text isn't designed for the homeschool classroom, these books take a "big group" approach. You find directions for tertiary discussions that add time to the class presentation; programmed, say-this-to-the-students-while-you-write-on-the-board guidelines; and instructions for introducing and wrapping up the lesson. In most subjects, none of this is actually necessary to teach one student.

Save money and try the class on your own without the teacher's guide. You can always order the teacher's edition later if you decide that you need it. If your children give you glassy-eyed stares day after day, either they're experiencing food comas after lunch or they need some extra help to master the material. That's when you fork over the bucks for the teacher edition or toss the entire curriculum and go with something that clicks with your kids.

- **Each copy that you make needs to show who owns the copyright and where you got the information.** Usually that information appears at the bottom of an individual workbook or on copyable pages, so you merely need to ensure that the entire page gets copied along with the notation at the bottom.



TIP

FIND THOSE BOOKS FOR PENNIES!

You look at the list of books that you want your child to read, and your wallet begins to show withdrawal symptoms. The next time you open it, you find three one-dollar bills cowering in the lower corner, defying you to fish them out. Reassure your money that it has little to fear.

Hanging out at the library with your book list is great, but every now and then it's nice to have the books available at home. For one thing, most homeschoolers don't have the time for radical book research during the day between teaching the children, rustling up meals, and dodging the family dog. Ten o'clock at night and beyond serves as the favorite research time in many homeschool households, and the only library open at that hour is the one at the local university! (Because, as we all know, college students never sleep.)

One option short of a late-night trip to the college library is to search out some electronic texts, also known as *e-texts.* Electronic texts from the Internet enable you to store hundreds of books in a tiny space (your computer hard drive or a USB stick) until you need them. When you want your child to read one of these books, you print it out on your home printer.

All these books are public-domain classics, which means that copyright laws no longer apply and you can print out the entire book for your use. E-texts include authors such as William Shakespeare, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Plato. Many of the titles are written by popular authors of the past, such as Edgar Rice Burroughs, who gave the world *Tarzan*.

Several websites specialize in downloadable public domain books. Check out the Internet Archive (www.archive.org), The Online Books Page (http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu), and Project Gutenberg (www.gutenberg.org). Also look at Google Books (http://books.google.com), if you have an idea of possible titles or subjects. Once you have a list of possible texts from your search, select Any books > Free Google eBooks from the first drop-down list under the search bar in order to get to the public domain listing. You can find a selection of children's picture and reading books at Children's Books Online (www.childrensbooksonline.org).



AT OUR HOUSE

I don't purchase duplicate copies of reading books or textbooks for my children. They're a year apart in grade level, and when I teach something to both of them together, I read aloud from the one copy that I have or tell them they need to read a particular book within the next couple days. They schedule their reading time so they complete the task individually. After everyone finishes reading the book, we go over its contents.

I purchase one math book or workbook, such as a foreign-language text that my scholar marks in, for each of my children. And, once in a while, I purchase duplicates of a book that I actually have permission to copy. For example, I use an art curriculum with my children that I have permission from the author to copy. And the text is relatively expensive. However, I tried giving everyone a photocopy of individual pages, and they didn't seem to enjoy the course. After asking them if they thought it would make a difference, I purchased a second copy of the art book and now everyone is happy.

If you want to read the educational copyright guidelines for yourself, look for them on the Internet at www.lib.uchicago.edu/copyrightinfo/fairuse.html.

Chapter 22

Teaching Your Traditions

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Looking at Christian curriculum options**
- **Locating Jewish curricula**
- **Finding Islamic books and programs**
- **Checking out pagan resources**
- **Teaching African American and Native American traditions**

You have the reading, the writing, and the ’rithmetic all set, but you feel like you’re missing something. Oh yes! The religion! The family culture! Once you collect that curriculum or stack of resources, you are ready to face the year. Now, where did I stash that holiday calendar …

Whatever your family tradition, you can pass it to your children while you homeschool. Leaving a private school or religious program doesn’t mean the end of education and practice. You can always teach the basics — and beyond — at home. With this chapter in hand, you will have somewhere to start your search. Whether you’re Jewish, pagan, or you follow another faith, these pages point you to resources you can use and groups you can join.



TIP If you don’t find your tradition within these pages, please know that I tried. Some religions and U.S. cultures seem to have no homeschool presence or curriculum options. Maybe this is a call for you to write one yourself.

Christian Curriculum

While homeschooling as a movement began outside Christianity, Protestant Christians quickly saw the benefits of home education after the 1970s and

began producing curriculum in abundance for Christian homeschoolers. Many of the individual state homeschool organizations provide primarily Christian support and curriculum suggestions to their members and feature Christian speakers at their conferences.

Christian homeschoolers have the choice of practically any educational method and materials to teach any subject. This section points you to some of the best and, in some cases, some less well-known curriculum options. Whether you want an all-in-one option where you purchase everything from one publisher or you'd like to pick and choose subject by subject, you'll find faith-based materials to enhance your homeschool journey.

Publishing all-in-one, Protestant style

Buying everything in one package or from one publisher is convenient. Everything matches. It all dovetails together. You only have to pull out your credit card once. Did I mention that everything matches, and often comes in coordinating colors?

You can find a coordinated program in several ways. A coordinated unit study lets you use one product as your overall guide and you pull individual books together (you can find many of them at the library) to complete the curriculum. An order with one of the larger Christian publishing houses will bring you science, math, social studies, language arts, and anything else you may want delivered to your door in one box. Sometimes these publishers even have full curriculum kits you can purchase for each grade. Here are some options:

- **Abeka:** (www.abeka.com) Affiliated with Pensacola Christian College in Florida, Abeka offers traditional textbooks in all subjects for Grades Pre-K to 12. As a traditional Christian school publisher, Abeka materials are designed so that you usually need the teacher's manual as well as the student book in order to effectively teach the class, unless you can wing it.
- **Ambleside Online:** (www.amblesideonline.org) This is a free online Charlotte Mason–style curriculum that covers Grades K to 12. For more about Charlotte Mason's philosophy, turn to Chapter 12.
- **Christian Liberty Press:** (www.christianliberty.com) Christian Liberty offers full-year packages by grade level. You select the option,

and they send you the curriculum kit with everything you need except pencils and crayons (it's a books-only package, as you would expect from a book publisher). They also offer CLASS, an accredited homeschool that provides grading, report cards, diploma, and transcript. (Other options are available too. Check them out.)

- **Easy Peasy All-In-One Homeschool:** (www.allinonehomeschool.com) Complete with printable workbooks and online reading selections, Easy Peasy curriculum ranges from Pre-K to Grade 12. And it's free.
- **The Good and the Beautiful:** (www.goodandbeautiful.com) This curriculum is designed to be taught to your entire family group. It includes a four-year rotation of history to cover Grades K to 12; science and health unit studies for Grades K to 8; handwriting to Level 7; math to Grade 6; and language arts for Grades Pre-K to 10 (with two more courses in development). Best of all, you can try it before you buy. Several levels of language arts, plus the Marine Biology science unit, are available for free download.
- **My Father's World:** (www.mfwbooks.com) This unit study curriculum is divided into three age-range blocks: K to Grade 3, Grades 3 to 8, and Grades 9 to 12. Up to Grade 8, the unit study contains every subject but math, and the high-school volumes cover history/social studies, English, and Bible. You can also purchase add-on language arts for Grades 2 to 8 that help round out the unit-study language arts sections.
- **Rod and Staff:** (www.milestonebooks.com) This no-frills Mennonite curriculum covers Pre-K to Grade 10. It's inexpensive and includes optional special education materials. If you opt for this curriculum, be sure to look at the art curriculum, Developing Motor Skills in Art. Designed for Grades 1 and 2, it's an excellent school introduction to art class.
- **Sonlight:** (www.sonlight.com) This literature-based curriculum covers Pre-K through Grade 12. If your kids love to read, and you like the idea of learning from a variety of books each year, this may be the curriculum for you.
- **Winter Promise:** (www.winterpromise.com) Winter Promise is a theme-based unit-study curriculum that allows everyone in the family to learn together. History topics cover a wide range of grades, science topics cover

four-to-five grades at a time, while language arts are grade specific. Use with Grades Pre-K to 12.

Science and other individual courses

Frankly, it's hard to be good at everything. Some curriculum providers do an admirable job, and I listed many of them in the previous section. Many publishers, though, cover one or two subjects, but they produce materials on those topics in great depth.

Maybe you're only interested in a new art curriculum this year. Or perhaps you are searching for that ever-present bugaboo, science. (Why does it seem that we're always searching for science curriculum? I don't get it, either.) Regardless what you lack or need to replace for a whole new year of homeschooling adventure, look through this list of component publishers:

- **Apologia:** (www.apologia.com) This creation-science curriculum covers everything from astronomy to physics, and beyond. Students in Grades K to 6 learn science through the seven-volume Young Explorer Series, while students in Grades 7 through 12 work through the Exploring Creation series: general science, physical science, biology, chemistry, physics, marine biology, and three advanced courses.
- **Beethoven Who? Family Fun with Music:** (www.marciawashburn.com) This is a PDF with active links that you use to teach terminology, composers, styles, pitch, and music creation. Written by a longtime Christian homeschooler.
- **Berean Builders Science:** (www.bereanbuilders.com) This science course for elementary students follows the course of history: Beginnings, Ancient World, Scientific Revolution, Age of Reason, and Industrial Age. Because it uses history as its foundation, it explores what the Christian scientists of any particular time period investigated in anatomy, astronomy, levers, magnetism, medicine, plants, sound, and much more. Written by Jay Wile, the original author of the Apologia series.
- **Horizons Math:** (www.aop.com) This consumable math curriculum for Grades K to 8 incorporates manipulatives along with memorization and practice. Each level is printed in full color.
- **How Great Thou Art:** (www.howgreatthouart.com) This art curriculum

begins with preschool options and goes all the way through adult books. Divided between pencil drawing, colored pencils, acrylic paints, and watercolors, each lesson completes a page or a portion of a page as the students learn art principles using these materials. The books come with cardstock painting and marker cards that students use to practice with markers and paints.

- **Life of Fred:** (www.stanleyschmidt.com) This math series is different. Written in a story format, the books follow math whiz Fred (who is 6 by the time you get to fractions in middle school) and his mathy adventures. The books cover Grades K to Grade 12 calculus. Many homeschoolers love this approach but be prepared to include extra practice problems to help the material stick. Available from Christian Book Distributors, www.christianbook.com.
- **Making Math Meaningful:** (www.cornerstonecurriculum.com) Building your child's math comprehension with manipulatives and guided instruction is the foundation of this curriculum. Students progress from working with you in kindergarten through third grade to working on their own. Available levels: K to Algebra 1.
- **The Master and His Apprentices:** (www.themasterandhisapprentices.com) This is an in-depth art history curriculum with a distinct Christian focus. Designed for middle schoolers and above, the teacher's guide includes worksheets and a course outline that help you work through the hefty textbook. This looks like it could easily provide a one-year course in art history for the high-school student.
- **Piano Course for Christians:** (www.davidsonsmusic.com) This is a hymn and classical music–based piano course. The books come with CDs in case you don't know piano yourself. Each level offers extra books featuring hymns, various composers, gospel music, and Christmas carols.

Adding Bible to the day

Another option for incorporating your Christian faith into your day is to purchase secular materials for math, language arts, and other subjects, and to add a Bible class to your daily rotation. Turn to Chapters 6 and 8, as well as the chapters in Part 3, for ideas.

Your best option for finding a home Bible study curriculum is to ask within

your community or to search the Internet using the term "[*Denomination*] Home Bible Study" or "[*Denomination*] Bible Curriculum." Even if I offered a list of 30 options, I would miss somebody, and who wants to sit and read two pages of curriculum suggestions, only to find that not one will suit them? That's just depressing.

LDS curriculum choices

If you are a Latter Day Saints homeschooler, you may already know everything available to help you with homeschooling. In addition to the resources listed below, you may want to keep your eyes open for a program called Accelerated Achievement, or A2. It was a curriculum comprised of public domain books on CD, covered Grades K to 12, and included an LDS supplement. The designer retired in 2016 but passed A2 to a daughter with a promise of reviving the curriculum. You may find it on eBay; you're looking for one or two CD-ROM discs. (The curriculum fit on one disc; the LDS supplement may comprise a second disc.)

Here are some current available options:

- **Family School Online:** (www.thefamilyschoolonline.org) Currently, Family School Online offers both accredited and non-accredited courses. Students in preschool through Grade 6 follow the non-accredited Family School platform, where the parent guides them through literature, history, science, geography, art, and music. You need to provide a math curriculum. Heritage Academy, the organization behind Family School, is working to convert all the middle- and high-school courses to an online, accredited, diploma-granting school. Currently they offer a mixture of accredited and non-accredited courses that cover everything from Family Science to Financial Literacy. Middle- and high-school courses include English, fine arts, geography, history, math, science, and electives.
- **Walk Beside Me Learning:** (www.walkbesidemelearning.com) Walk Beside Me is a four-year history-based curriculum that covers eight years of instruction (you go through the rotation twice). Teaching everyone as a group from a Parent Teaching Manual, the day begins with religion and history, and progresses from there, covering language arts, literature, geography, handwriting, science, social studies, art, and music. Every child has their own Student Learning Journal, which contains worksheets and extra reading to complement the group lessons. The sections on

language arts are particularly strong, covering children's literature, poetry, grammar, writing skills, and creative writing. LDS doctrine, leaders, and history are incorporated into all subjects. The Parent Teaching Manual also includes everything you need to teach Pre-K and kindergarten without purchasing anything extra for the student. Add math for your first through eighth graders and you have a full curriculum for Grades Pre-K to 8. Based on the LIFE School LDS homeschool curriculum.

- **The Good and The Beautiful:** (www.goodandbeautiful.com) This curriculum is designed to be taught to your entire family group. It includes a four-year rotation of history to cover Grades K to 12; science and health unit studies for Grades K to 8; and the curriculum also includes language arts, handwriting, math, drawing, typing, and nature study. Best of all, you can try it before you buy. Several levels of language arts, plus the Marine Biology science unit, are available for free download. This curriculum, while marketed to the entire Christian homeschool community, offers LDS supplements. Search "supplements" at the website for instructions on how to acquire them.
- **Liahona Preparatory Academy:** (www.liahonaeducation.com) Liahona offers distance education for Grades 3 to 12. Both accredited and non-accredited classes are available, and the school is affiliated with the brick-and-mortar Liahona Grade K–12 Preparatory School in Utah. Distance students are eligible to attend student trips, the annual youth conference, and the high-school prom.



TIP If you want to include only religious study in your day, and a full LDS curriculum doesn't interest you, take a look at Discover the Scriptures, found online at www.bookofmormondiscovery.com. Suitable for Grades 1 to 7.

Roman Catholic curriculum options

If you're a Catholic homeschooler and you want faith-based curriculum choices, you don't have to look too far. Catholic curriculum options abound. That only makes sense for a tradition that's built and managed an impressive network of parochial schools since before the 1890s.

With most of the programs here you can enroll to receive all their services, or you can shop in their bookstore and assemble your own program. Some of these curriculum providers are more traditional than others; be sure to read the About Us information on each organization's website if their stand is important to you.

- **Angelicum Academy:** (www.angelicum.net) Angelicum Academy provides oversight and teaching materials for preschool through Grade 8; after that students move to their sister program, Great Books Academy, for high school. Both programs are available from the Angelicum website. The elementary/middle school program covers art, language arts, history, literature, math, music, religion, and science. If you enroll your student in the program, Angelicum Academy grades tests and essays, issues report cards, and awards diplomas if students are eligible to receive one. You can opt to purchase their materials and use them yourself without the administrative oversight, if you prefer.
- **Catholic Heritage Curricula:** (www.chcweb.com) This curriculum has no tuition attached to it whatsoever. You buy the books and the syllabus, and you're free to teach the courses in your own time, as you like. Catholic Heritage says that it provides a gentle, doable program. In fact, they suggest that before purchasing any of their available electives (such as art), you purchase and read through the lesson plan for your student's grade level so you know which electives would best fit your student. Catholic Heritage publishes many of their own texts, which are designed to match their teaching philosophy. Available for preschool to Grade 8.
- **Mater Amabilis:** (www.materamabilis.org) Mater Amabilis is a free Charlotte Mason–style curriculum that covers Grades Pre-K to 12. You purchase the support books that you use to teach the curriculum, but all the planning is done for you. Turn to Chapter 12 to learn more about Charlotte Mason philosophy and practice.
- **Mother of Divine Grace:** (www.modg.org) Mother of Divine Grace offers an accredited classical curriculum for Grades K to 12 via distance education. You can purchase a grade-level syllabus and books and teach the courses on your own, or you can subscribe to one of several levels of support, including one for special needs students. Turn to Chapter 11 to find out more about classical education.

- **Our Lady of Victory School:** (www.olvs.org; phone 208-773-7265) With Our Lady of Victory School, you can enroll your students in the program, and let Our Lady of Victory keep records and issue report cards, or opt for independent study status, where you use their materials and issue your own report cards and keep your own records. If you choose the independent study program, Our Lady of Victory doesn't provide a transcript at the end of high school. That's up to you. Curriculum for Grades K to 12; this is a Traditional Catholic program that adheres to the Latin Tridentine Mass.
- **Seton:** (www.setonhome.com) One of the classic Catholic curriculum providers, Seton offers an all-in-one approach. You enroll in their distance education program, and they send you everything you need for the year: books, lesson plans, and report forms. In addition, they take care of the testing, the grading, counseling, and diplomas. You can purchase Seton textbooks without enrolling, but you can *only* get the lesson plans that go with the textbooks if you enroll. Visit the bookstore online at www.setonbooks.com if you want to shop for books only.

Jewish Resources

Look no further than this list of resources and materials to jump-start your Jewish homeschool. Whether you want to supplement your own teaching with coloring and handwriting pages, purchase textbooks on Jewish history and culture, or even enroll in a full distance-education day school, you'll find options in this section. Be sure to check out Akhlah, Berhman House, and Torah Tots while you're browsing.

- **Aleph Beta:** (www.alephbeta.org) This impressive set of videos, most from observant Rabbi David Fohrman, are designed to enhance your Torah study. While these can definitely be used with high-school students, you may want to preview them for language level before turning your kids loose — they are designed for adult study. On the other hand, each video contains narration along with delightful animation. You can use this for the weekly parsha, and if you find you love it, this advanced subscription level unlocks more videos.
- **Akhlah:** www.akhlah.com) This site is a gold mine for kids and

education. Want to reinforce the blessings, teach the Hebrew alphabet, explore facts on Israel, learn about the holidays, or make a craft? It's all here in the plethora of links situated on the home page.

- **Behrman House:** (www.behrmanhouse.com; store.behrmanhouse.com) A standard in Jewish education, Behrman House offers online learning activities and games at their regular site, and a plethora of books at their online store: Categories include Jewish Life and Learning, Hebrew, Apps, Stories and Fun, and more. Shalom Hebrew, one of the Behrman House apps, teaches primer Hebrew through practice and games to kids in Grades 3–5. You could build your Jewish curriculum from this publisher alone.
- **Jewish Homeschool:** (www.jewishhomeschool.blogspot.com) Here you will find free downloadable helps for every holiday, Hebrew practice, Montessori instruction, math, and household to-dos. If the link begins and ends with an asterisk, clicking it takes you to Teachers Pay Teachers so you can purchase it. These options are large collections of parsha-related Montessori activities.
- **Jewish Online School:** (www.nigrijewishonlineschool.com) If you want the option of a Jewish day school two or three days per week, take a look at this site. This school caters to students in Grades 1 to 8.
- **Torah Tots:** (www.torahtots.com) Here you'll find individual aleph-bet coloring pages, this week's parsha, even information on Yom Ha-Shoah, all for kids. Visit the gift shop for audio CDs and interactive software titles that teach each parsha.

Islamic Resources

Homeschooling Islamic families don't currently have a lot to choose from. The available materials are good quality, and homeschoolers like them, but there's certainly room for more curriculum creators here. If you see something missing in the available offerings, perhaps you could create it for your kids and offer it to fellow homeschoolers once you see how it goes at your house.

- **Ad-duha:** (www.ad-duha.org) If you don't know about this site, you must check it out. The bookstore offers storybooks, coloring and activity

books, and teaching books on the Qur'an. These contain Arabic and English vocabulary words, pages to color, maps, additional information, and review. Be sure to visit Ad-duha's free resources section; there you'll find Arabic pronunciation help for Grades Pre-K to 7 and a few nice downloads for the little ones.

- **I Love Islam:** (www.islamicbookstore.com) This colorful book series, which covers Grades 1 to 5, offers both student and teacher guides. While you're visiting the Islam Bookstore, be sure to look through the selections under Popular Islamic School Curriculums: The Islamic School Book series is a social studies curriculum for Grades K to 6.
- **Studio Arayiba:** (www.studioarabiya.com) Studio Arayiba offers online programs for homeschoolers in Arabic, Arabic reading, Quran, and Islamic studies. The classes meet two or three times per week, and last for 8 or 14 weeks. For ages 5 to 15.

Pagan Resources

While pagan families generally make do with translating their own reading and understanding into kids' terms and teaching one-on-one, once in a while it's nice to find something specifically designed for pagan children and families. Producing a children's magazine, while rewarding and much appreciated, is a ton of work — volunteers can usually only keep it up so long. Following you'll find a list of resources currently available; you can also search the Internet with the term "children's [or kid's] pagan magazine." Here are some resources to get you started:

- **Little Pagan Acorns:** (www.littlepaganacorns.com) Looking for pagan-themed handwriting pages, puzzles, notebook pages, or unit studies? You've come to the right place. Much of this material is free for you to download and use; some of it, especially the items in the section called "Year and a Day Academics," you purchase. But be sure to visit that part too; you'll find book studies to go with the Goddess Girls book series as well as an entrepreneurial math curriculum called Salam Shop. What better way to teach your Grade 3 to 6 child math than by running his own pagan shop?
- **Magic Forest Academy:** (www.magicforestacademy.com) While not

specifically a pagan curriculum, this secular unit study for ages 7-11 introduces students to a delightful array of nature, from ants to apples and rocks to rainbows. Best of all, it contains weekly unit studies for all 52 weeks so you can teach it for a full year if you want to, and then revisit it again with more information as the kids get older. Each unit includes basic information on the topic, arts, crafts, reading, science, games, a recipe, and a list of activities for further exploration.

- **Pagan Moonbeams:** (www.paganmoonbeams.com) This is an older newsletter produced from 2007–2012, and all back issues are available for download from the website. Pagan Moonbeams is a family educational resource that addresses history, nature, crafts, herbals, sabbats, lifestyle, and more. Designed for older readers (Grade 4 to 7) or as a family read-aloud and activity.
- **Pooka Pages:** (www.pookapages.com) This is the cutest magazine for pagan kids! Released online prior to each sabbat, each downloadable issue tells a story about Elsie and her cat Pooka, and also contains coloring pages, puzzles, poems, recipes, crafts, and ideas for celebration. Pre-readers even get a rebus story so they can "help" you read. Good for ages 3 to about 12. Make sure you download these to your hard drive as they're released, even if you don't have time to do everything in the magazine this year. Back issues aren't available, but if you love the Elsie and Pooka stories, you can find them in book form on Amazon.
- **SpiralScouts:** (www.spiralscouts.org) SpiralScouts is a pagan scouting organization. Focusing on personal development and the environment, SpiralScouts fall into one of four divisions depending on age: They are Raindrops (ages 3 to 5), Fireflies (ages 6 to 9), SpiralScouts (ages 10 to 12), or PathFinders (ages 13 to 18). They follow a curriculum and work to complete badges in many different skills. Visit the website to see if you have a charter in your area. If not, you could always start one.
- **Witch-lits:** (hesperidesgarden.org/witch-lits/) Published four times a year, each issue covers two holidays. Packed with articles, mazes, coloring sheets, recipes, and rituals, each issue explores a unique topic — all the issues of Volume II, for example, looked at the individual elements: air, fire, water, and earth. For children Grades 1 to 7.

African American Resources

If you want Afrikan-centered education for your children, you may need to poke around a bit or be willing to write some materials on your own. The following list highlights math and grammar for elementary children, a year-long curriculum for very young elementary kids, and several subscription boxes. The nice thing about a subscription box is that you can build a curriculum around it if it doesn't ship with one. These resources are a good beginning. Hopefully you can build on them to create an outstanding program for your children.

- **Because of Them We Can:** (www.becauseofthemwecan.com) Designed for ages 5 to 12, this monthly subscription box arrives at your house filled with stories of Black heroes and movements that paved the way for today. Each box includes an item of apparel that goes along with the box theme, curriculum, props, toys, and activities that help make the past come alive for your child.
- **Just Like Me!:** (www.justlikemebox.com) Whether your book-loving child is age 1 or 12, or any age in between, Just Like Me! has a subscription box for them. Each box includes two to three books, educational helps, and a gift.
- **Kamali Academy:** (www.kamaliacademy.com) Also known as Kamali Educational Services, this organization publishes Afrikan-centered math and grammar materials for elementary students. Find the materials online at Amazon (https://www.amazon.com/Samori-Camara/e/B00LQFOJZA) or on the Kamali Academy Facebook page (www.facebook.com/KamaliAcademy/). You may also want to visit the Kamali Academy YouTube channel inspirational and informative videos (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyxyZKoXLItaRPEvqZHhxPw).
- **Kwanzaa 365:** (www.teacherspayteachers.com) Young learners from Pre-K through Grade 1 will learn the Kwanzaa principles every day of the year for a full year. Along the way they'll discover all the countries of Africa. This curriculum looks delightful but be prepared to hit it a little each day all year long if you want to complete it within a year's time. Available from the Teachers Pay Teachers website listed.

- **Legacy Kits:** (www.legacykits.net) Designed by two homeschooling moms, each shipment brings you two books, one on African history and the other on a famous African American, along with two projects to complete (usually an art or a craft) and a workbook that covers the contents of the month's books. Choose between elementary and junior-high levels.

Native American Resources

Outside of tribal gatherings, ceremonies, and stories, how do you pass your native traditions to your children? In addition to the resources listed as follows, you may use time-honored stories as your language arts lesson. Tell the story. Then write it down. Once it's written, analyze it: What is the setting? Who are the characters here? Do you see the plot? This will help your children begin to look at tribal stories as literature, which they are — oral literature. If you use copywork in your home school, let the children copy from the stories you've written down (or perhaps located at the library). They can use sentences and proverbs as handwriting practice. Dig into your tradition and use it to further your educational goals. (Shh!! You're actually writing your own curriculum this way, but I won't tell anybody if you don't.)

Here are some options you can incorporate into your learning times:

- **Lessons from the National Museum of the American Indian:** (www.americanindian.si.edu/nk360/resources.cshtml) These lessons and resources, from the National Museum of the American Indian, come as teacher guide PDFs, websites, posters, or videos, and they investigate almost every subject of the curriculum from math to history. You can search for lessons by educational subject, by tribe, by regional area, or by lesson format (for instance, if you only want to use websites today). Useful for Grades K to 12; each lesson lists its grade range.
- **Lessons of Our Land:** (www.lessonsofourland.org) If you want to teach lessons on the arts, cultural arts, language arts, social studies, or science (wow, that's a lot of arts!), then this may be one of your favorite stops. Offering free lessons for Grades Pre-K to 12, Lessons of Our Land offers options like Comparing Tribal Origin Stories, Culturally Significant Places, and Gifts of Nature. You may need to modify some of these; they

were written with an entire class in mind.

- **Since Time Immemorial:** (www.indian-ed.org) This curriculum is a 29-tribe initiative in the state of Washington. It addresses tribal sovereignty, tribal history, and current tribal issues. You can teach it as it stands or incorporate it into your current social studies curriculum as you see fit. Can be used with elementary through high-school-age students.

DOING A LITTLE, DOING A LOT

Whatever your tradition, religion, or family culture, you can incorporate as much — or as little — of it as you like into your homeschool. If anyone tells you that you're doing it wrong, ignore them. This is your school, and you do it your way.

Maybe you want to teach every class with a focus on your tradition. That's fine. Perhaps you'd rather take one class and make it tradition-centric. That's quite all right as well. Using language arts is an easy one. Stories and poems, handwriting, and speeches fit into any tradition. But how about geography? You could use the earth as your base and teach from there. What plants, seasons, climates, or landforms are important to your tradition? Teaching those will help to bring the information home to your students in a solid way.

You could teach your tradition through science. How did your tradition's forebears view science? What science contributions did they make to your culture? Can your duplicate those experiences or experiments? (If the experience didn't turn out safely for them, please don't.)

Looking at your tradition through the lens of one of these subjects, or through history, art, or even music, helps you to see it with new eyes at the same time that you pass it along. Especially if you can't find anything you like that matches your tradition, or no curriculum exists yet, pull out that creativity and love for your kids that I know you have and see how you can pass your traditions in a somewhat untraditional way. They'll remember. If nothing else seems plausible, start in the kitchen and teach them how to cook the important foods. Everyone remembers the taste of their holidays. Your kids will, too.

Chapter 23

Turning Chaos into Organization

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Using homeschool planners**
- **Sorting through the paperwork**
- **Deciding on your school days**
- **Surviving homeschool burnout**

"Oh, hello! Let me dig out of this stack of clippings that I'm filing by subject and step over last year's textbooks. It's nice of you to stop by! Here … I'll sweep this owl pellet that the kids dissected last week off the table. After they uncover all the little bird bones, I hate to take it off the kitchen table. The owl ate a sparrow. See? Here's the beak …"

If this greeting is part of a scenario that sounds frighteningly familiar with a few substitutions, then you know a disorganized homeschooler or you are one yourself. The homeschool trappings get to us all, but it doesn't have to stay that way. (Goodness knows I need to clear the kitchen table of questionable things now and then so that we can eat in peace.)

Although all may seem cluttered now, there is a way out of the mess that the papers, curriculum, educational toys, and projects makes, short of setting a match to it. You may be surprised at how little paperwork you really need to make a homeschool function. Posting every scribble that Junior places on a piece of paper is tempting but unnecessary.

Tracking Your Week with a Planner

When it comes to day-by-day scheduling, nothing beats a teaching planner. Use a planner to keep track of pages covered; projects started and completed; special extras, such as field trips; and attendance. Although it may seem like organizational overkill at first, a planner really does streamline your life. You can see where you've been and where you're going.

Your planner can be as elaborate or as simple as you like. One family I know uses simple notebook paper with each subject listed down the side for a particular day. Every morning, the kids eat breakfast and open the notebook to see their day's lessons listed beside each subject heading. If you use many workbooks and textbooks and you go from chapter to chapter (even if you skip a few or complete them in some random order), this kind of planner may be all you need. Checking off each subject as you complete it serves as an attendance sheet of sorts; no check marks on the page means that school was cancelled for the day. If your planner has loose-leaf notebook paper or punched copy paper, a turn of the page designates a brand new day full of new educational adventures.



TIP Unless your state requires some type of daily documentation for legal homeschool compliance, your planning pages don't need to be works of art. In the public and private schools, teachers produce lesson plans that span pages to ensure the administration that they do something all day. Experienced teachers who teach the same level year after year can simply dust off last year's lesson plans and go at it again, refining as they go to reach a new student group.

If you plan to teach a new concept, such as fruit-fly genetics, and you gather a couple of books (or use the year's science text that you bought), maybe a website that offers hands-on genetics practice, and a couple fruit flies off the bananas in the kitchen, then you really don't have to spend five pages explaining what you're going to do. Your homeschool lesson plan may look something like this:

1. Read *Genetics* by Caroline Arnold and *The Code of Life* by Alvin and Virginia Silverstein (both from the local library).
2. Work through an online fruit-fly lab with Classical Genetics Simulator.
3. Conduct fruit-fly experiment.

You don't even have to use full sentences if you don't want to. As long as you remember what you did, the barest notations will do. Because most of the books that we read come from our home library bookshelf, I don't even

bother to include authors or series titles unless I have several books with similar names.


TIP

DISPLAYING GENIUS

If your Junior really does great work (even if you're the only one who thinks so), invest in a few inexpensive picture frames. Frame the really good projects and hang them on the walls for all to see. If you like, you can even change out the artwork each year to keep it "fresh" and provide a pictorial presentation of his progress.


AT OUR HOUSE

Since our first day of homeschool, I've used a reproducible planner. When downloadable forms became a thing, I switched to one dowloadable file that I print year after year. I use attendance sheets, weekly class schedules, and curriculum selection forms from one file. Because I found a planner that I really like, I don't need to relearn a new record-keeping system each year. My pages carry the same notations from year to year, and a quick glance through past years' filed pages tells me when I covered a particular topic for the first time.

Several different companies produce teaching planners and even homeschool planners to track your days. You can use a paper-based system, a computerized system, or something else that fits your needs. (I wouldn't recommend reconstructing your days in clay, however. The kids tend to get into it. Before you know it, that great science experiment becomes a lowly pot.) Some families use the little squares on the household calendar as the basis of their homeschool planning system.


TIP

Look for regular lesson plan books at your friendly educational store. If you want a system specifically designed for homeschooling, your best bet is to search the Internet or browse through a homeschool catalog or two. You can download several homeschool planners, which include

both individual-planning pages and full-scale computerized planners.

If you already have a planner you love, experiment to see if it will work as a homeschool planner. For some families, bullet journaling makes a great homeschool planner, lesson planner, and family calendar all in one. Do you already have a Passion Planner or a Happy Planner and love it? Customize it as your homeschool planner and you're set.



TIP You can find both free and purchasable, downloadable homeschool planner pages by searching the Internet with the term "downloadable homeschool planner" or "homeschool planner printable." You may want to fix yourself a cup of coffee before you do this, especially if you enjoy looking at clean, well-designed forms. This search is a rabbit hole of possibilities that may occupy you for quite a while. If you drop "homeschool" from the search, you'll find another delightful list of search results. These planners are designed for business use. Browse, click, and search until you find one or two that you think will meet your needs, and then give them a try. Planners are like bathing suits — they may say they're one-size-fits-all, but they really aren't. You need to find the one that fits you.



TIP For complete computerized planning packages, you may want to try one of those in the following list:

- **Homeschool Minder:** (www.homeschoolminder.com) This web-based planning software tracks lessons, grades, volunteer hours, attendance, and more. It offers 16 different reports and allows you to set your year or term to any beginning or ending date (plus tracking semesters, quarters, six-week divisions, or whatever). Because it works through your browser and Internet connection, your information is saved in the cloud so you can access it wherever and whenever you choose. Pricing options include monthly or yearly.
- **Homeschool Panda:** (www.homeschoolpanda.com) This is a combination social media platform for homeschoolers, lesson planner, library tracker,

and budget help. Your price depends upon how much of the service you want to use. If you only want the social media portion, that's a lower fee than social media with lesson planner added.

- **Evernote:** (www.evernote.com) No, this isn't actually a homeschool planner. But homeschoolers are using it effectively to create lesson plans, track yearly goals, keep notes for current or future use, and more. If you already use Evernote and love it, homeschooling is one more way you get to incorporate it into your life. You can opt for a free or paid account, and with Evernote you can organize anything.



WARNING Resist the I'll-track-it-all-later syndrome that hits so many homeschoolers. If you don't note what you did *somewhere*, I guarantee that three weeks down the road on a Tuesday afternoon you won't remember exactly what you did and you'll be unable to reconstruct your days. If you spent Tuesday afternoon cleaning the house, that's one thing, but if this was the afternoon that your daughter discovered a love of engineering concepts, you don't want to forget it.

Seeking the Paperless Society

If your house overflows with paperwork, join the club. Even the neatest homeschoolers struggle with paperwork overload. Between record-keeping pages, various creative projects (including that way-cool, desert diorama that your fourth-grader constructed three months ago), and completed assignments, what used to be your home could easily disappear under piles of miscellaneous paper scraps.

If you sit down to analyze the rubbish … er … um … treasures, you'll probably find that the stack falls into two major categories. Alone, each of these piles could easily overtake a kitchen or dining room, but together they're deadly!

- Mailings and homeschool information (including homeschool articles and magazines)
- Projects and assignments

In an attempt to help both you and I overcome homeschool clutter, I offer the following suggestions. You don't have to incorporate all of them (or any of them for that matter) into your routine, but use them as a jumping-off point for your own organizational thoughts. You may find a solution that fits your family uniquely, keeps everything together and organized, and makes you the envy of the local homeschool coalition.



TIP To reduce the homeschool clutter:

- **Maintain one area for homeschool equipment, supplies, and projects.** The more rooms that you use for school and project presentation, the more clutter that you need to chase around the house. If you restrict homeschool items to one room, one corner, or even a specific table, the amount of paperwork that you need to track is drastically reduced. Of course, convincing your little scholars that they need to keep everything in one place is like trying to herd cats!
- **File the year's papers in a cardboard box, and store it in the attic, basement, or garage at the end of the year.** These cardboard filing boxes come three or four to a package. You assemble the box and use it like a tiny filing cabinet. Unless you have a whole collection of children, one box should work for a whole year's worth of untossable goodies.

  Yearlong, I use a cardboard box as my working file and then transfer the end-of-year files (such as completed attendance papers) permanently into a metal filing cabinet. You can keep all your papers in one cardboard box; however, label the box with the year when it's full, and store it in case anybody should ask for its contents down the road.

  One nice feature of the filing box is that you can keep all your papers and projects in one place — a must for those homeschoolers who need to file a portfolio at the end of the year.
- **Store the year's books and supplies in an upper kitchen cabinet — especially if you decide to work in the kitchen!** This solves the whole clutter question. If it doesn't fit into the cabinet alongside the schoolbooks, then it's history. Decide what to keep as it forces its way into the kitchen cabinet and throw the rest away. For an end-of-the-year

portfolio, save the best of the your student's work.

- **Use a milk-crate-type container for periodicals and catalogs.** They tend to get out of hand unless you have a specific place for them to go. One plastic storage crate holds many periodicals and catalogs, and they stay in one assembled place until you need them again.

Thirty Days Hath September …

Deciding when homeschool is in session may be a cut-and-dried decision. Depending where you live, your state may tell you the hard part of the school year. Most states dictate the number of school days that you need in a year, and some even specify that you need to homeschool each day that the public schools are in session. If you want to keep it really simple, get a copy of your local school calendar (you should be able to locate a copy online) and use it as a guideline.

In other states that allow homeschoolers more leeway, you can let your calendar creativity take hold. Generally, homeschoolers need to teach anywhere from 145 to 186 days per year with most states hovering at a 180-day average (your state may vary).

Most schools and the majority of homeschools start in late August or early September and finish in late May or early June. If your family presents a special situation, such as a medically fragile, special-needs homeschooler or parents who travel quite a bit during the winter, you may want to rethink the September-to-June cycle. Unless your state specifically prohibits it, nobody will bother you if you decide to homeschool all summer in the air conditioning and take your vacation when it snows. As far as most states are concerned, the main point is that you teach the required number of days (the required number that your state specifies).



TIP If you want a copy of your state laws, you can probably get one from your state's homeschool association. Appendix B tells you how to contact your state organization; if you want to track down your state guidelines online, look at `www.responsiblehomeschooling.org`, the Coalition for Responsible Home Education.

Scheduling for Sanity

Take it from someone who tried and failed: You cannot teach 14 different subjects each day for nine months without burnout. If the children don't lose their patience with the program, then you will. When you decide which classes fall on what days, keep in mind that you and your family members all have physical and mental limitations — you can only do so much in a three-hour period before your brain shuts down for the rest of the day.



I have to take stock in burnout prevention every now and then myself. When I look at everything that I want to teach the kids — partially because I find it so fascinating — I sometimes try to pack too much information into one day. Their eyes glaze over, and I know that I just lost them. There's nothing I can do at that point but send everybody outside for some bicycle-riding recreation while I sit down and try to determine where I tried to do too much.

Remember that you have until your child reaches 18 to fill him full of wonderful skills and data. Although you may feel the crunch of time passing, you really don't need to do it all this year. Some subjects, such as logic and calculus, he may actually be too young for, and others, such as handwriting, he outgrows after sixth grade (or maybe even before if his handwriting suits you as it is).

To keep the continuity going, you probably need to schedule some time for math and language arts every day. Language arts consists of writing, spelling, reading, phonics, grammar, and English. If you spend some time on spelling and vocabulary twice a week or so, set aside a day for reading practice (also known as free time or pleasure reading), and use three days for English grammar or writing, everything fits. You can get it all in without overloading yourself or your students.

Science class generally occurs once or twice a week in elementary and middle school, and social studies or history happens a couple times a week as well. If you fill in a foreign language four times a week, art once or twice, and a music lesson or two, you suddenly boast a pretty full schedule. You also

get everything covered within a week's time, and it creates a minimum of stress on everybody.



TIP If you choose to go the unit-studies route, design your unit study (or purchase a ready-made one) to cover one or two weeks at a time. Then you simply teach the unit study and all the subjects fall into place. Wonderful, eh?



AT OUR HOUSE In the name of sanity and maintaining interest, if we experience a spark of interest in the week's history lesson, I may cover history every day for two weeks and then pick up the science that I left laying in the dust after the history fever subsides. We still get it all done, and I capitalized on high interest levels at the same time. (Using my handy-dandy planner sheets to mark down what I teach and when I teach it, I am reminded to go back and hit those science lessons later.)

Keeping Your School Spotless

Unless you're Martha Stewart, you will survive if someone finds a small dust bunny under the middle of your king-size bed. Although you may find it hard to imagine, most people don't care if your canned goods aren't alphabetized. (Organizing your canned goods on the shelf according to the alphabet does make finding the corn and cranberry sauce much easier, but your organization probably won't raise your housekeeping standards in the eyes of other people.)



TIP If you plan to homeschool, you may need to resign yourself to a sometimes-messy house. Your home doesn't have to be messy all the time, and it certainly doesn't have to qualify as a constant shambles, but sooner or later you will find projects on the table for more than 24 hours at a time and maybe even textbooks left out.

Finding time to actually clean the house while you homeschool is tough unless you design a schedule that you can live with. One homeschooler that I know takes every morning for housework time before the group settles down to schoolwork. She posts a rotating calendar on the refrigerator so that everybody — parents as well as children — knows their daily pick-up and organization jobs, and she remembers to take a look once in a while to ensure that it's getting done.

Other families set aside Friday afternoons or Saturdays for deep cleaning and overlook the messy spots the rest of the week. No matter how you decide to tackle the job, cleaning and cooking qualify as subject matter for Home Economics class. I actually set aside Friday afternoons for cooking class, when we concentrate on the math skills needed to produce an edible dessert.



WARNING If the idea of an occasional messy home is completely unacceptable to you, then you may not be a candidate for homeschooling. The sheer several hours per day that it takes to teach your children at home definitely cuts into the productive hours of each 24-hour period.

Feeling the Burnout

Sad to say, every day in the old homeschool isn't all wine and roses. If it were, people would beat at our doors to find out how we do it! Just like the public school teachers, you have days that you don't want to teach school. It's normal. Expect it. And don't let it freak you out when it happens the first time.

You may feel this way because you're simply trying to do too much. The super-homeschool-parent syndrome hits us all at one time or another, and homeschoolers need to shun it. I didn't get it all done perfectly before I began homeschooling, so I don't know why I suddenly expect everything to magically fall into place now that I teach the kids at home.



TIP Maybe the winter doldrums hit you this week. The sky is gray, and

you feel gray inside. The last thing that you want to do is gather the troops together for another day of classes. This is the day to do something different. Select something out of the ordinary: Bake gingerbread cookies for "Home Ec Day"; make balloon animals and call it art class.

Perhaps you simply feel overwhelmed, and you need to know that you *are* making progress. Fix yourself a hot cup of your favorite tea and browse through your year's records. Look at everything that you did this year and rejoice that you're on track. If you're behind in something and you don't want to use summer days to catch up, take the time now to figure out how you plan to get to the end of the book by the end of the year.



AT OUR HOUSE We always know when the burnout days hit at our house. My husband and I look at each other, sigh, and wonder out loud whether a hired taxi can be there by 8:30 to get the kids to school. In 26 homeschool terms, I have yet to actually call the taxi, but I admit it's a tempting thought on some mornings — especially those mornings that I wonder whether I have the energy to homeschool one more time.



TIP When the burnout blues hit your home:

- **Spend the day on some way-cool art project.** Especially if the outdoors is drab, brighten the inside with construction paper butterflies, a new painting that you can frame, or a holiday wreath. Which holiday? Pick whichever holiday comes up next. Tie small flags to a wreath for Independence Day, shamrocks and gold coins for St. Patrick's Day, or make up a holiday of your own and decorate for it.
- **Pull out the educational DVDs.** If you have discs around the house or Internet streaming available, surely you can find something that you could consider educational. Think for a minute: Even Disney videos can be viewed with an eye toward the animation art (call it art class). If you happen to have a Disney animated feature on DVD, pop it into your DVD

player and watch it in Spanish or French so your kids hear the flow of a different language.

- **Go to the library.** Maybe it's time to get out of the house. Hit the library and look for good fiction; let the kids browse for nonfiction titles they'd enjoy; then head home for an afternoon of reading. Any nonfiction books they read go on the planner under the specific subject.
- **Take a vacation day.** If your schedule allows it, take a snow day. The schools do it! Sit outside and watch the birds nest. Deep clean the hall closet (some people find that relaxing) or sit and admire the latest LEGO creation.
- **Take your books to the park.** Sometimes a change of scenery makes all the difference. Load up the books and a picnic lunch, and hit the park benches. Reading under a tree does wonders for your mood, unless you happen on one of those beetles that bite.
- **Call another homeschool family and go to the zoo.** Burnout loves company. Take a trip to the zoo, the park, or simply spend time with another homeschool family. Sharing an afternoon together gives both home educators the mental fortitude to go another round.

Chapter 24

Making the Grade

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Grading pros and cons**
- **Measuring unit-study learning**
- **Putting a portfolio together**
- **Testing them yearly**

Tracking your student's progress, whether it's with letter grades, smiley faces, or complete portfolios, can be a bit unsettling for the beginning homeschooler. It seems like such an unnecessary part of your day when your main objective is to teach skills and you find yourself putting numbers at the top of seemingly endless papers. (Of course, they only seem endless because we … er … uh … let them pile up.)

Whether you're for grades in homeschool, against grades, or you're looking for another alternative entirely, you can look for answers here. Here you can find out about homeschool grades, portfolios, and standardized tests, with a few extra options thrown in for good measure.

Deciding Whether to Keep Grades

Whether to collect and post grades in the homeschool is a reasonable question. And plenty of homeschool parents are asking it these days.

Whether you decide to keep grades in your homeschool depends almost entirely on you unless you live in a state that asks to see grades at the end of your school year. (If you don't know whether this applies to you, begin your search in Chapter 3, which talks about the legalities of homeschooling.) As long as you have some system of tracking progress that others can understand if they need to, you're probably all right. If you live in a state that requires portfolios and you submit examples of your student's work with smiley faces on them, then you may not need a percentage grade for the school district

official to see that your child is learning.



REMEMBER Some states require that you keep your yearly grades on file. In this case, the law requires you to report some kind of final assessment. You may use the grading system or a detailed description of your child's progress. Your state homeschool association should know what's required and the best way to meet the requirements. Turn to Appendix B for a list of state homeschool organizations.

If grades make you feel better, use them. Because the point is to understand the material enough that the child gets the right answers, my family had a standing do-it-over rule for many years. If the problem or answer is incorrect, we talk about it and then the child does it once more.

Put the pros and cons on the scale. You never know. The concept of grading may seem unsavory in your mind, but grading may turn out a straight-A student.

Following are some of grading's pros:

- Grades give you a concrete measure.
- Grades tell you how much material the student actually mastered from the information you exposed him to.

The cons include the following:

- Grading every single scrap of paper becomes overwhelming.
- Grades assign a number to everything. How can you put a number on effort?

Writing the tests to make the grades that you record in the house that Jack built

Grades give you good information *if* you correctly structure the test or quiz. If you create a quiz that covers subject material that even the dog could pass with flying colors, then all that your student's quiz paper tells you is that he knows as much, or perhaps more than, the dog. Quizzes like this pad a

transcript and make the student look good on paper, but they tell *you* absolutely nothing. As the tutor who teaches this stuff to begin with, you should be able to glance over the quizzes and tests and get a good grasp of what your student does and doesn't know.



TIP How can you tell if you're creating a good, sturdy test? Some dos and don'ts:

- **Only ask for information that has been actually discussed or read.** Asking about the engineering behind the Roman Coliseum when you didn't cover that topic isn't fair.
- **Ask reasonable questions.** Demanding to know the obscure person's name found on page 294 of the state history text does nothing but infuriate your child.
- **Include important points about each section or chapter.** This ensures that you cover the material evenly, without concentrating on one portion over another.

A good guideline, if you're the one creating the test, is to ask your student what he would want to remember after reading a chapter in the text. Then incorporate that information into a variety of question forms. Although simple quizzes can be all true/false or all multiple choices, a good test uses a smattering of both — plus a question or two that requires a written answer for good measure. Requiring older students to put their thoughts into words, rather than simply identifying the correct answer on a page, encourages them to actually think about the material covered. Elementary students may do better with oral tests that don't require writing the answers. Talking to the student about what she read or the project she completed and writing down her answers gives you just as much information (and sometimes even more) without asking her to structure several paragraphs that outline her knowledge. Think of it as an essay in the air.



WARNING Some commercial textbooks come with review questions and tests

that are deplorable from a testing standpoint. If you read through a test that comes with your textbooks and it makes no sense to you, feel free to skip it or modify it. (If you get your books from a particular school or satellite program that scores all your child's tests and you happen to disagree with the test wording, give your umbrella school a call and talk to them about it. Fly over to Chapter 10 for the more on satellites.)



I only grade middle- and high-school work in my homeschool. When they are younger, my children work through their subjects year after year without any numeral or letter assigned to their progress. If they don't understand, then I keep presenting the same material in different ways until the topic clicks. When they do understand, I move to the next topic. We may begin some school terms with one subject a bit behind grade level and then catch up, and at the beginning of other school terms, we begin ahead of where we should be and take it easy for a few weeks in that particular subject. Even without an official grading system in place, my kids can tell you what grade they would be in if they were in the public school system, and their skills match or exceed those of their peers.

Figuring the grade

Grades aren't impossible to figure out with a good calculator or sharp pencil, but plopping percentages onto papers does take a moment or two of concentration. If your student is beyond the smiley/frowny-face grading method, you probably need to incorporate percentages and letter grades into his life.

One way to figure grades is to keep a calculator handy. Divide the number of problems correct by the total number of problems, and you have a percentage. If your page has 14 problems and your student got 12 right, divide 12 by 14 to get a percentage correct of 86 percent. If your student always gets every problem correct, of course, then she consistently gets 100 percent at the top of her pages with no division necessary. Few of us, however, are fortunate enough to have this issue at our houses.



TIP An easy way to keep grades (unless you have a computerized planner that does all the work for you like the ones discussed in Chapter 23) is to assign quizzes and tests worth a multiple of ten points: 10, 20, 30, and so on through 100. Then you can use the following grading scale:

- 90 points up to 100 points = A
- 80 points up to 89 points = B
- 70 points up to 79 points = C
- 60 points up to 69 points = D
- 59 points and below = uh-oh

Using the ten-point plan and the percentage division together works something like this:

1. **Your student takes a quiz worth 20 points.**

   Either the quiz itself has 20 questions on it, each one worth a point apiece, or it has 10 questions and each question carries a worth of two points.

2. **She gets 18 of the 20 correct, which gives her 90 percent (a low A).**

   To find the percentage, divide the total number of available points (in this case 20) into the number of points correct (18), which yields the percentage (90).

3. **You enter that percentage as a 90 in your plan book next to Quiz Chapter Three or whatever you decide to call it.**

   (You can call it Alpaca Quiz Number One if you want to — this is your school.)

4. **Through the semester, you continue to enter quiz and test results into your planner.**

   You score and tabulate each quiz or test in exactly the same way.

5. **At the end of the semester, you add up all the percentage scores (90, 70, 100, 85) and divide them by the number of quizzes and tests you offered.**

In this case, you'd divide the total by four. The result is your final grade for the semester. You take that percentage, which, in this example, happens to be 86.25, and plug it back into your grading scale. The percentage 86 falls between 80 and 90, so the semester grade is a B.



TIP To make things fair, you may want to count each test score twice (also known as *weighting* the test) so that it actually counts more than your general quizzes. Otherwise, a student who blows a quiz or two yet aces the chapter test may be in trouble when he actually learned the material. Another option is to only construct tests and not use the periodic quiz checkup at all.

Tracking Those Unit Studies

Grading and assessment can become a bit tricky if you teach using unit studies instead of individual subjects. How do you give a letter grade to the life-size catapult in your back yard? Do they get a *B* because they made it, and it almost works, or an *A+* because they refrained from sending that bowling ball through your neighbor's window? Hint: This would probably qualify for an *A+* in citizenship, a *B* in engineering (science), and maybe an *A* for creativity.



TIP If you want to find out more about unit studies, take a gander at Chapter 15. It talks about using unit studies as your full curriculum as well as dipping into themed studies. You can even create your own if you want to. Due to their hands-on nature, unit studies don't always lend themselves to letter grades. As long as you keep a good number of individual pages or written assignments incorporated into your topic, you can work with percentages and letter grades in a reasonable way. After you leave the "normal" realm of education and begin experimenting with hands-on projects, creative writing, and other like endeavors, you may need a new measurement tool. Creativity often eludes letter grades. (See the list of grading cons earlier in this chapter.)

That's where the unit-study *portfolio* comes in. Because the main goal is to show that your student spent all those weeks doing something educational and profitable as well as fun, a portfolio documents your student's progress. Not as intensive as the yearly portfolio required by some states, a unit-study portfolio can be thought of as a topical scrapbook. See the following "Keeping a State-Required Portfolio" section for more.

Your student may incorporate photos, poems, stories, descriptions — even a page or two from your student on why he enjoyed (or in some cases, *didn't* enjoy) working with this topic. Photos are great to show large projects, scientific experiments, and other such learning opportunities that refuse to flatten out for storage. (Have you ever tried to shove a test tube into a page protector?)

The scrapbook can be as elaborate or as simple as you want to make it. Perhaps you want to include a few worksheets that your student completed as part of the study. Maybe one page lists the books that she read or the various types of media that you explored as part of your topic: books, websites, and videos.



TIP When you include media, be sure to jot down full titles and authors along with publishers or production companies so that you can find these materials again if you want to. With so many books and videos entitled *Ancient Egypt*, you could peruse the library shelves for an hour and still not locate your favorite volume.



TIP Another type of unit-study portfolio is known as a *lapbook*. This consists of a file folder that you fill with all manner of little handmade books, foldouts, and handwriting samples to go along with your topic. A quick Internet search for the term will turn up more examples than you could use in a lifetime. If your kids love to color, cut, and glue, this may be a good method for you. If they hate all of that (as my youngest does), skip it. You'll save yourself frustration and angst.

If you teach with unit studies all the time, you'll devise your favorite method

of record-keeping as the years go by. Perhaps you may come up with a better way to track unit-study progress than through a pictorial and written scrapbook. Maybe you want to video snippets of the unit study as it unfolds, edit the video, and upload it to a private YouTube channel as a memory of the adventure. Do whatever works best for you as long as it documents your student's learning in a way that others can understand. (Writing your entire report using what your student learned of the Miami Native language may be way cool, but it fails to meet the *understandability* requirement of your portfolio unless a measurable number of the people you know read and write Miami.)

Keeping a State-Required Portfolio

What did your child actually do this year in homeschool? Some states want to know, and they require parents to file a portfolio for each child every year. Although the sound of the word *portfolio* may seem scary, your state probably spells out what the education officials want to see. The goal of a portfolio really isn't to stress you out. Think of your portfolio as a snapshot of your year: what you learned, where you went, and what you created.

States vary on what they want to see included in a yearly portfolio. Check your state law or call your state homeschool association to make sure, but in general, educational officials want to see a combination of these items:

- **Attendance records:** This ensures that you taught the number of days (or in some cases, hours) that your state law requires.
- **Record of subjects taught:** The easiest way to show subjects taught is to include a copy of your planning book that includes notations, such as "Science page 15; plants discussion." If your state doesn't require that much detail, you may need to provide a simple list instead.
- **List of materials or textbooks:** If you put together a Skillcraft Visible Horse model as part of science and anatomy this year, it goes on your materials and textbook list. (Anyone who ever took the time to assemble and paint one of these things will be duly impressed.) Also, include any textbooks that you used throughout the year.
- **Reading lists:** Did your student read it? Is the book at or above grade level? Then include the book title on your reading list along with the

author's name and the date read. I keep a running list of classic children's literature that I want my kids to read. The list is divided into grade levels, and each child has a column next to the title. I jot down the finish date for each book as they read it. If your students read for fun, and the book is at or above grade level, you can include that too if it fits the requirements of your state portfolio.

- **Creative projects (or photos and descriptions of said creations):** The reproduction of an Egyptian town that your students made last year will *not* fit into a standard portfolio album. However, a good snapshot or two will. Pairing the photo with the story of the town's creation and how you came to create it can add pizzazz to your portfolio.
- **Writing samples:** Did your student write a rump-kicking poem this year, or maybe even a set of poems using several different poetic forms? Include those puppies in your portfolio. Along with the actual mechanics of writing, as in handwriting, school officials are also looking at writing samples to prove that your student is learning to think. Short stories, paragraphs, and descriptive narratives all qualify as writing samples in addition to the usual page of sentences or grammatical work.
- **Worksheet and workbook samples:** These show that your child is working at grade level. You get to pick the samples so send a few of the best, but the goal is to show that your child follows directions, understands the worksheets, and that he's close to grade level.
- **Copies of standardized test results:** These prove that your student took them and that she made progress throughout the year.
- **Written yearly evaluation:** How did the student do overall? What goals did she meet? What goals need to be restructured for next year? Where did she excel, and where (if at all) do you need to re-teach at the beginning of the next year?
- **Photos and descriptions of activities:** If you went to the zoo to study venomous creatures, include a snapshot or two. Remember to grab your camera before you head to the ice rink for the monthly skating extravaganza. Get a few photos of your child volunteering at the library, the zoo, or the local bakery. These tell school officials that your student has a real life and doesn't spend his whole year preparing his portfolio.



TIP Slipping individual pages into the clear plastic page protectors that scrapbook aficionados use helps to keep your portfolio pages neat, clean, and organized. Slipping pages into the protectors only takes a few minutes, and you can find these protectors at any Walmart, Target, office supply shop, or craft store that sells scrapbooking supplies.



TIP If your state requires a portfolio, your state organization or area homeschooling groups will have this project mastered. Contact someone in your state who homeschools, or your state organization, and they can point you toward resources that will help you compile this yearly report without losing your hair.

Testing Standardized's Validity

Standardized tests ask a set group of questions to a huge number of students at a particular point in their education. So your standardized test may say "Fourth Grade Fall" or "Spring Second Grade." If you take the third-grade-spring test in the fall of fourth grade, then you'll skew the results and your answers won't correspond with those of the rest of the students who took the fall test. Your student will know too much. Likewise, students who take the fourth-grade-spring test in the fall of fourth grade won't score as high as they may if they take the test in the spring after a year of fourth-grade learning.

Several companies manufacture standardized tests. The following list shows a few of the tests available.

- **Iowa Assessments:** Also known as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, this test ranks your kindergarten-through-12th-grade child on math, language, spelling, social studies, and science. (Actually, these are slightly different tests, but they do the same thing. The Assessments test is aligned with Common Core, while the Basics test isn't.) Anyone with a bachelor's degree can administer the Iowa tests, but they must be approved as a tester; Iowa Assessments is offered by Bob Jones University Press, who

can also approve you as a test administrator if you qualify. Call 800-845-5731 or go to www.bjupresshomeschool.com/content/testing for more information.

- **Stanford Achievement Test:** Stanford offers grade-level tests that test reading, vocabulary, math, spelling, study skills, social studies, science, and a few other areas for kindergarten level through Grade 12. The Stanford Achievement Test needs to be administered by an approved tester. Almost every group of homeschoolers has one; call your local support group or state homeschool organization for more information, or visit the Bob Jones University Press website noted in the preceding bullet.
- **California Achievement Test:** This test spans Grades 2 through 12. You can administer the California Achievement Test to your own children without utilizing an approved tester, but not all states accept it as proof of standardized testing. Christian Liberty Academy provides the test to homeschoolers for a fee; visit them online at www.shopchristianliberty.com/special-service.

Your state may require yearly or periodic standardized test scores. If your law requires standardized testing, you have the children tested and then send the scores to your state or district educational gurus (whoever's supposed to get them) by a particular deadline. Or your state may require the tests but ask that you file all the scores unless someone calls to ask for them. Check with your state homeschool organization if you aren't sure. Look for organizations by state in Appendix B. Even if your state doesn't require periodic testing, many homeschool families do it anyway so that they know how their children stack up against that mythical "average" student. A good standardized test score tells parents where students lag behind in particular subjects and gives them a general idea which topics may be good to review in the course of the next year.



REMEMBER Depending what information has been presented to him at what time, your child may or may not score well on every part of a standardized test. The tests are designed to measure students against what they *normally* learn within the course of a particular school year. If you vary from that at all, the test scores will show it. One good example is

classical education. For the first several years, your student may not score well on standardized tests if you teach with a classical education emphasis — mostly because the test asks questions that you haven't covered yet. Your student may have no idea about Native American religious rites in third grade, for example, but she can wax poetic about the rise and fall of the ancient Egyptians. As with so many things, you need to take standardized testing with a grain of salt.

Another option is to use a nonstandardized test that tells you what your student does and does not know. One such test is the *Diagnostic Prescriptive Assessment* (www.edudps.com/dpa.html), which is available for Grades K to 5. Parents give *and score* the test themselves. It shows you what your child truly knows and has yet to master for a particular grade level so that you can tell what you need to review (if anything) and at what grade level your child is actually performing.



REMEMBER

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT THEY'RE LEARNING IF I DON'T KEEP GRADES?

Some homeschooling parents who live in states that don't require grades still keep grades solely because they want to know what skills their children learn. Although these grade-keeping parents find grading a hassle, they continue to divide and percent because they think it's the only way to track Julia and Jose.

Actually, grades tell other people how your child is doing. If your child were in the public or private-school system, her grades would provide a picture of her performance for you, the parent at home. As a homeschooler, the grades that you post show the local school district as well as any prospective homeschool satellite providers how your child measures up in the great scheme of things.

But if you're the one doing the teaching and you teach one-on-one, you know whether your child learns what you attempt to convey. Interested expressions, quick responses to questions and assignments, and the ability to repeat — in his own words — what you just said tells you that your child is learning. Correct math problems tell you that your child can add, subtract, or multiply without figuring a percentage for the top of the page.

On the other hand, that dazed is-it-time-for-lunch-yet expression tells you that maybe your child missed that last important announcement. An inability to complete the math problem that you just finished explaining tells you that your child was already out to lunch or you need to provide the same information in a different way. Try adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing with M&Ms or the counting rods.

If you keep an eye on your child's written work so you know whether she understands the concepts behind the chapter she read or the discussion you had together, you will be keenly aware of when she learns and when she doesn't. Because you know your child better than anyone else, you'll probably pick up on the signs that say she doesn't get it long before a teacher would. Every child is different — maybe you notice that arch to the eyebrow, a certain tilt of the head, or leaning forward or backward in the chair that alerts you to a momentary lack of comprehension.

When you see these things that you know all too well, that's the time to stop and go over the concept again before your child becomes frustrated, angry, and begins to think he'll *never* get it. At our house, I try to watch for these signs. I don't always catch them because sometimes my mind wanders just as the children's do — wonder where they get it? I routinely ask them, "Do you understand what I'm trying to show you?" If they answer "No," that's acceptable.

I say this to them because somewhere along the line kids get the idea that "No" or "I don't understand" *isn't* an okay answer. Maybe we inadvertently teach it to them by the things we say and do. However they get this message, I want my children to know that "Huh?" is a perfectly acceptable response to a concept if they really don't get it. If there's a problem, I want to take the few moments that I need to grab the counting blocks and re-teach that concept right then and there. I don't want to wait until three, five, or ten pages down the road when we have a certifiable problem on our hands. If you pay attention to what your children's nonverbals tell you, then catching the warning signs and being sure that they're learning as you go is easy.

Chapter 25

Plugging in Your Schoolroom

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Using your computer for online learning**
- **Scouring the Internet for courses and resources**
- **Taking a trip around the world — at home**
- **Enlivening dull subject matter**

Times have changed. And it's a good thing! Students no longer work with slate and chalk, and they don't fret over inkblots that spoil an otherwise perfectly copied manuscript page. Although you may mourn the demise of beautiful Spencerian script, writing without having to dip your ink pen into an inkwell qualifies as a positive change in technology.

Students took another leap when they began writing college papers on computers instead of typewriters in the early 1980s. Now, computers serve up reference information, math drills, science topics, music theory, and much more. All you need is the machine, an Internet connection, and time to use it.

More homeschoolers own and use computers than the general population. Lots of people forego computer ownership and complete most tasks on their cellphones. For homeschooling, however, using a computer helps to bring information to your desktop, not to mention the benefit of teaching computer skills and typing at the same time. Whether it's a desktop machine, a laptop, or some type of tablet, homeschoolers generally incorporate computer use and the Internet into their family life.

Schooling at Home … But Online

You bought the thing. Now, unloved and forlorn, it sits in the corner of your dining room while you homeschool. Incorporate your computer into your daily (or weekly) educational adventures. Your machine will love you for it — and so will your kids!

If you don't utilize it, your computer will age gracefully on a neglected tabletop, quietly gathering dust. Turn it on and make it work, perhaps every day. You can use the Internet for online education these days, and it's better than ever. (Options did exist in the 1990s for "online education," but they were rudimentary, at best.) Take advantage of what lies out there in cyberspace and bring it into your own home classroom. Courses, educational videos, music, animation, and more await the click of your fingers.

Opt for individual courses or components, which I discuss later, or jump in head-over-heels and find an entire online delivery system for coursework. Some of the following options may fit your needs better than others; you'll have to check them out to see if one calls your name. For further online options, turn to Chapter 10.

- **Acellus/Power Homeschool:** (www.powerhomeschool.org) The current official name of this non-accredited program is Power Homeschool; however, it used to be known as the Acellus Homeschool Program so you'll see both names used, especially among older homeschoolers. Although it's inexpensive (it used to be free), individual class video segments can last as little as 5 to 15 minutes in length (for a day's instruction), and parent responses range from *I love this for my exceptional learner* to *it was too easy for my kids, who raced through the material*. Power Homeschool offers extra work they call Special Lessons, but they are hands-on, which makes this not an online program any longer. Plus, if you're looking for a secular online program, this may not be it. While it began as a secular program, the developer has discussed adding Creationism and Bible courses to the curriculum. Grades K to 12.
- **Connections Academy:** (www.connectionsacademy.com) This is the K12 online public school program. Although they market to homeschoolers, especially parents just pulling their kids from school, this is not homeschooling. This is public school at home. The students are required to sit at the computer for 5+ hours per day and follow the public school schedules. This program is free to homeschoolers because it's funded by the school systems. Grades K to 12.
- **Discovery K12:** (www.discoveryk12.com) This is a free online Grade K to 12 curriculum that has nothing to do with the K12 Inc. that produces online public school curriculum. You sign up each individual child, and

they do the work with their own accounts. If you want detailed reports, including What I Learned Today, that's available for a yearly fee; one fee tracks all the kids, and it's an optional part of the program.

- **Khan Academy:** (www.khanacademy.org) You can use this free resource as a complete online learning tool if you want to. Most people use Khan Academy for one or two subjects, but especially for high school, this site includes everything you'd need outside of English literature, composition, and a couple electives — all of which you can find online other places.
- **MobyMax:** (www.mobymax.com) Designed to fill in those educational gaps for Grades K to 8, MobyMax covers all subjects for all these grades. While it was actually developed for school use, many homeschool families use this system year after year.
- **Time4Learning:** (www.time4learning.com) This online program covers Grades Pre-K to 12 and uses a combination of online learning lessons with printable worksheets that reinforce the information taught. Select different grade levels for each subject to correspond with your learner's actual levels.



WARNING If you see the terms "Connections Academy," "Destinations Academy," "Destination Career Academy," "District-Run Program," "Insight School," or "Virtual Academy," these are all online public schools run by K12 Inc. (found online at www.k12.com). They are not actually homeschool programs. While they are (usually) accredited, these are doing school at home without the benefits of doing school at school, such as immediate access to instructors, after-school activities, and the prom. These online public schools market heavily to the hopefully soon-to-be homeschooler, but they are generally *not* interested in talking to established homeschoolers. Why? Homeschoolers have no public school monies that can be transferred to the school districts running these schools — at least, in my state they don't. They don't want to talk to me. If you're interested in one of these schools, *please* look up reviews independent of the school's website before you join. You may find that it's just what you're looking for. Or you may find that it's not.

Coursing through the Internet

Perhaps you want more flexibility in your homeschool than plopping Junior down to read online for a few hours each day. Maybe you want the joy of teaching your children (it *is* a lot of fun) along with the break of turning them over to someone else every now and again. You may find yourself entering the realm of The Online Course!

The Internet shines in teaching individual courses like typing, coding, and that esoteric science course you never knew you wanted to learn until now. Sometimes these courses are taught live, which means you need to tune in at a particular time each day or week for a specific number of lessons. Other courses are computer driven or pre-recorded, which means if your kid is a night owl and wants to immerse herself in this course at 10 p.m., then 10 p.m. it is. While your own Internet searches may turn up a plethora of options, here are a few to get you started:

- **Big History Project:** (https://oerproject.com) Middle and high schoolers can learn about the history of the universe with this course. It combines reading selections, videos, graphics, and writing assignments to weave together a history while looking at geology, astronomy, biology, and more.
- **Coursera:** (www.coursera.org) Whether you're looking for computer, art, history, or even a course in beginning Chinese, Coursera offers free online courses on a variety of topics. These are designed for adult learners, so advanced middle schoolers and older can benefit.
- **Edx:** (www.edx.org) This is a clearinghouse for online, free courses. Some are self-paced, while others progress with a cohort of learners. Interested in business, engineering, or literature? Start your search here. These courses are usually free to watch and work through, and you can get a certificate for a fee. Most of these courses are provided free by various universities.
- **MasterClasses:** (www.masterclass.com) If your kids would love to learn cooking techniques from Gordon Ramsey or writing from R.L. Stein, magic from Penn & Teller or scientific thinking from Neil DeGrasse Tyson, this may become a favorite at your house (as it has at mine). Each

presenter is a master of whatever topic they teach, and each class comes with a downloadable workbook. Some of the workbooks, frankly, are better than others. These classes consist of 20+ 5- to 15-minute segments. Interested middle schoolers and up.

- **MIT Open Courseware:** (www.ocw.mit.edu) One of the oldest free online course options on the Internet, MIT Open Courseware is fun to browse. You can look at courses by popularity, by topic, or by department. No matter what your high schooler may be interested in, you should be able to find something that fits in this list.
- **Outschool:** (www.outschool.com) Do you need a change of pace? Outschool may be just the thing. These courses are designed for small groups, and they span Grades Pre-K to 12. Mental math facts, science careers, beginning guitar — not only are they affordable, you'll find over 10,000 of them! If you can think of it, you can probably find an Outschool class about it. If you can't, then perhaps you can sign up to teach your own course.
- **Ted Ed:** (ed.ted.com) These are lessons designed for classroom teachers. They are free, the lessons are video-based, and they address many different topics. Need a design or engineering topic? How about spending 19 minutes on new advances in bionics? Interested in science? Ted Ed offers a 20-minute video on coral reefs. You can filter by grade level or by video length; if you only have 5 minutes, Ted Ed has a video for you. These lessons also include downloadable resources you can use to further teach the information if you like. Covers elementary through university age learners.
- **Typing.com or Typing Club:** Your student can learn keyboarding skills while using these online courses, and better than sitting your child down with a typewriter and typing book, they actually track progress and repeatedly stress fingering positions. Look for Typing.com at www.typing.com (duh, right?) and Typing Club at — you guessed it — www.typingclub.com. Don't dismiss these if your kids tell you they can type. I took the test on Typing Club and it dropped me into Lesson 223. There's room for everyone here.

'Net-ting Resources

When one of your scholars needs to practice a particular math skill, when you want a unit study that teaches housekeeping to your little packrats (always a good idea!), or when the current history lesson calls for the Articles of Confederation, then fire up your Internet connection and browse the Internet for the paperwork that you seek. Lesson plans for preschoolers through high school, unit studies galore, and science sites all await your mouse clicks. No matter what you want, the Internet probably offers a viable version, and you can usually unearth it for free!



TIP Allowing some extra time is always a good idea if you need resources from the Internet. Just like redecorating the bathroom took longer the last time than you thought it would, unearthing wonderful Internet tidbits always takes more minutes than you think. If you get involved, it may actually take you hours — more because you find yourself interested in the sites that appear in your browser window than the actual time needed to find what you seek.

The easiest way to find sites on the Internet is to use a good search engine. Google (www.google.com), DuckDuckGo (www.duckduckgo.com), and Bing (www.bing.com) all return a good number of sites, but Google ranks as my current favorite. Although I may need to wade through several more sites than the number of sites that another search engine may throw to the screen, Google does a great job of ferreting out the sites that I know are out there somewhere in cyberspace but difficult to find. After you locate what you want, remembering it is easy:

- Email the link (or web address) to yourself by copying the web address into a blank email message and sending it to your email box.
- Mark the site as one of your favorites or as a bookmark.

You can even use your favorites list to construct a lesson. If, for example, you want to cover space science as part of your day's lesson, follow these steps:

1. **Use "space science" as a search term in your search engine.**

   When it returns a few thousand sites (they always suggest far more sites than the number that actually applies to the topic at hand), look at the first

10 or 20 to see if they meet your specifications.

2. **Mark the sites that you really like as favorites.**

   Your lesson's already half done.

3. **When the time comes to teach your space-science lesson, open one site after another from the favorites list. Talk about what you see.**

It really is that easy. You may wish for a larger monitor screen as the group crowds around, but as with all computer skills, the person who controls the mouse controls the lesson. Open the sites that you want the children to see and watch video, read and discuss text, and utilize the "virtual textbook" for all it's worth. With a little advance planning, Internet sites open your children's eyes to the wonders of science, technology, wildlife, and more.



TIP When you want something specific and the search engine doesn't seem to understand what you're asking for, try using "kids" or "homeschool" (one word) as part of the search term. Using the word "kids" in the search term returns only those sites designed for juveniles. If you're trying to locate educational sites on advanced topics, such as neurology or economics, try adding the word "kids" to the search term. "Homeschool," on the other hand, gives you only those sites that were designed with homeschoolers in mind. (If you type "homeschool" as two words instead of one, the search engine gives you all the sites that contain references to either "home" or "school," which takes you forever to wade through.) Neuroscience for Kids, by the way, is a great site. Find it at www.faculty.washington.edu/chudler/neurok.html.



TIP Think about your local library when you fire up the computer in search of materials for your homeschool. Your library website may offer digital book downloads, access to databases like Newspapers.com (do I hear the history choir singing?), and even video and music streaming. You already carry that library card around in one form or another. Use it to its fullest.

Touring the World without Leaving Your Desk

Desktop travel is one of the great benefits of your computer/Internet combo. Want to visit a world-renowned museum? It's only a click or two away. Interested in animals around the world? You can find them on the Internet. Need foreign language resources, a particular country's maps, or ideas about festivals and entertainment? Go no further than your computer.

Museums worldwide offer changing exhibits, and they often place the current (or last) exhibit online for anyone to enjoy. (What do you care if it's current, if you won't be traveling to see it in person anyway?) Visit The Louvre in Paris (www.louvre.fr/en/visites-en-ligne), the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea (https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/national-museum-of-modern-and-contemporary-art-korea?hl=en), or the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam (www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/explore-the-collection). Each of these, plus many more, awaits your children's fascinated gaze.

Here are some other ideas for sites to visit online:

- **Visit Google Earth.** (google.com/earth/) Almost everyone knows about Google Maps and its delightful way to guide you where you're going when you drive, but have you ever visited Google Earth? View some of the most famous streets in the world. Look at amazing waterfalls. You can even swim with sharks. While you're visiting Google Earth, see if you can track Carmen Sandiego and her league of V.I.L.E. henchmen!
- **See the animals.** The San Diego Zoo (zoo.sandiegozoo.org/live-cams) several live webcams, where your kids can see koalas, giraffes, butterflies, and tigers. With a visit to Explore (www.explore.org) you can watch tropical fish, bears, animals of Africa, and more (we may, or may not, have been completely mesmerized by jellyfish from the Aquarium of the Pacific).
- **Find Food and Festivals.** Where there are festivals around the world, food sits close at hand. Whether you're currently studying Germany (www.germanfoods.org), India (www.crazymasalafood.com/top-20-

festival-foods-in-india), or even a particular worldwide festival, like Carnival (www.jamieoliver.com/features/carnival-around-the-world), you can locate any food and festival combination by searching with the term "Food and Festivals of [*place*]."



TIP Regardless what you want to find in your world search, use terms like the country's name along with the topic, or "kids" along with the subject, topic, or language. You may want to fix a fresh cup of coffee for this one. It may take a while.



TIP Don't overlook YouTube, covered in the next section, in your romp around the world. You can find foreign language children's shows (a gold mine), videos of worldwide music, foods (with recipes), crafts, traditions, movies, clothing, sights, and so much more.

Enhancing Your Subjects with Electronic Errata

Let's face it: Textbooks can be dry — very dry. In fact, some texts that I've seen make saltine crackers taste juicy. If you think the text contains good information and you feel you should go through it, how do you spice up the learning so everyone (including you) manages to stay awake?

Once again, your computer slides to the rescue. (It would run, but as everybody knows, computers don't have feet.) Turn to the Internet to find video, animation, and other eye candy to introduce and reinforce your youngster's skills. Of course, some offerings succeed at this better than others. But overall, a supervised romp through the 'net is a pretty good way for your student to work on a skill and keep his attention at the same time.

If you want to produce something on paper or practice a few skills, then you want to turn to software. When you look for software for your home computer, keep in mind the subjects that you teach or want to teach. If your

computer came with nothing but an operating system, you may want to consider these:

- **Productivity software such as Apache OpenOffice:** This package includes a word processor, spreadsheet, presentation software, drawing package, database, and math equation creator. Think of this as equivalent to Microsoft or Apple products, but free. The open software (free to download and use) solutions sometimes take a bit of time to learn, but in general they work similar to their higher-priced counterparts. Other options include LibreOffice and Microsoft's Free Office for the Web. If you feel better with a name-brand product, by all means go ahead and purchase one for your computer. They are stellar.
- **Simulation or strategy software:** If you've ever tried to teach a child the strategies behind a game like chess, you'll welcome the computer version. It patiently waits for your child's next move without anxiety. In much the same way, simulation software like Roller Coaster Tycoon, Sid Meier's Civilization, or Oxygen Not Included give your child control over a simulated world. She spends money to create an amusement park, for example, and then watches to see how it does. All these titles are available on Steam (`store.steampowered.com`); if the price makes you gasp, keep an eye on them. Steam holds periodic sales on most of its titles. And about that chess game: Look at Chess Kid, `www.chesskids.com`, for rules and to play against the computer.



TIP If you find that you have several programs or online learning opportunities that you want your kids to work through this year or you want to teach computeresque skills, you may want to think about making one day a week Computer Day. We designate Computer Day as Friday, and the kids do much of the day's school work on the computer that I set aside for that purpose.



TIP Do you own an iPad or another similar tablet? Educational apps and ebooks can calm the jittery small one. We had one iPad that only

contained educational apps and videos. No one fought over the opportunity to use it, but it provided a nice diversion during driving trips or on those days when we needed a break from the everyday routine.

Marking a day every week or two as Computer Day tends to cut down on the when-can-I-play-on-the-computer whines because you've already answered the question before anyone asked it. Are you together or what? Plus, it gets good use out of the computer, and the kids get to advance their skills in untraditional ways. Jot down the names of the programs, websites, or videos the kids use under the appropriate subject headings, and you account for the day's school time.

While you're flitting about the Internet, playing games and digging up resources, here are some stops you may want to make along the way:

- **Internet Archive:** (www.archive.org) More than just digitized books, the Internet Archive offers old software you can sometimes play online. Remember the Oregon Trail? It's here. Your kids' characters can die from dysentery just like yours did when you were younger. Also look here for old radio shows, movies, magazines, religious materials, an archive of children's books, and a television news archive. Really, if you want something and you think it may be digitized, look here first. (If you plan to read *Cheaper by the Dozen*, you can find Frank and Lillian Gilbreth's original time-motion-study films here as well.)
- **Library of Congress:** (www.loc.gov) Planning to cover art, history, photography, or writing, and you want something to spice it up? The Library of Congress is a treasure trove of old newspapers, videos, photos, and books. How about using a copy of the leaflet "An Act" fixing the time for the next annual meeting of Congress from 1791? Or perhaps you'd like to show a selection of what constituted *movies* in the years 1897–1899? Interested in the art of photography from the 1910s? Use this site for digital copies of actual historical primary sources that you can plug into all kinds of lessons.
- **Smithsonian Learning Lab:** (www.learninglab.si.edu) Use this collection of images, texts, videos, and more from the Smithsonian to create your own learning units. When you register and perform your first search, take the minute or two to watch the introductory video offered to you. In it, Tony shows you how to search for materials, find collections of

resources others already assembled, and narrow your searches — a very useful skill indeed, since my first search for materials on World War I returned 27,756 items. This could be a very long information dive.



USE COMPUTER TIME TO CONCENTRATE ON OTHER STUDENTS

Putting one student to work on the computer means that you have time for the other students in your life. While one child works with math drills or typing proficiency, you can review science concepts with another one. This may not be incredibly important to you if your children are close enough in age that you teach everybody the same thing at the same time, but if your kids span a wide range of years, then you learn to cherish the quiet moments that you spend with one child concentrating on a particular skill.

With three or more children who are all at the beginning reading stage or above, one computer, and a bit of patience, you can schedule individual time with everyone in 10-to-20-minute intervals. Install one child in front of the computer with an appropriate program or task, work with a second, and assign reading to the others. When you're finished with the first student, you can rotate everybody by replacing the student (and perhaps the program as well) on the computer and working with another student.

This allows you to schedule drill or learning through the computer at the same time that you cover the regular classwork. If you hold your normal classes five days a week yet you want to include computer skills too, this may be a viable option for you.

- **YouTube:** (www.youtube.com) Although it seems like the endless video hole of no return, you can find some very educational clips on YouTube. I've used videos of Ford's Model A factory showing his vision for assembly-line manufacture. We've listened to the physicist behind A Capella Science sing about string theory and genetics. If you decide to study a place, such as a country, look up YouTube videos on the culture, food, fashion, and pasttimes.

  While perusing YouTube unattended one evening (I know, why would my family ever let me onto the Internet alone if they expect me to surface and feed them again?), I located a retired U.K. news anchor who bought a narrow boat and spends his time traveling the British waterways. A few of these very short segments could drop into a lesson on international cooking (he shows his kitchen setup and how he uses it), a lesson on

British culture (many of the segments discuss his morning cup of tea), and a lesson on wildlife (you watch the flora and fauna on the banks as the boat glides through the canals). Because his professional life was spent in front of the camera, these clips are very well narrated and edited, they are classroom appropriate, and they don’t meander much in topic. (You want to watch them too? Search for “Cruising the Cut,” which is the name of the YouTube channel.)

Chapter 26

Connecting with Like-Minded Souls

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Finding other homeschoolers**
- **Attending homeschool conferences**
- **Joining an organization**
- **Learning and discovering as part of a team**

How do you find people who do what you do? I found one of my homeschool buddies while I was walking across the cul-de-sac to the gray house at the end of the court. I'd just moved into the neighborhood and in neighborly conversation mentioned that I homeschool. My next-door neighbor announced that the family in the gray house homeschools their children, too. During the next thaw, we introduced ourselves in the middle of the street (you know how neighborhoods are), and a friendship was born.

Although situations like this do happen, more often than not you have to put a little more effort into finding other homeschool families than simply walking across the street. Locating a homeschool association, meeting people online, and attending organized homeschool events all help connect you with the homeschool community. Sometimes meeting one homeschooler introduces you to three more, and farther down the line, you *really* connect with a family that so-and-so introduced you to.

This chapter looks at some of your options for meeting other homeschool families. Although it certainly doesn't cover all available options, such as contacting your local parks department for scheduled homeschool activities, it does mention the most common methods of connecting with other homeschoolers.

Finding Homeschoolers Online Who Share Your Passions

Thanks to the flowering online universe, your new homeschool best friend may be only a click away yet live halfway across the world. Or you may navigate your way to another homeschooler in your town or neighborhood. A haven for lonely (or alone) homeschool parents, online gathering places give you a place to ask about curriculum, discuss your difficult day, or praise your budding genius.

Facebooking your way to friends

If you belong to Facebook (www.facebook.com), you're already halfway to more online chatter than you can fit into your day — and still get anything done. Do you homeschool three kids while babysitting your sister's cat and one of your grandchildren? There's probably a Facebook group for that! — not really, but you get the idea. Some of these groups are quite large, with tens of thousands of members, and others are quite small. A few are local, but most open their doors to members from everywhere.



WARNING Most of these Facebook groups are private, but some are public. In other words, when you join, anyone in the world who finds the group can see what you've posted. This may not be important when you ask about next year's math curriculum, but if you want to discuss your son's recent medical diagnosis and its impact on his education, you do not want that information broadcast through a public forum. Join whatever you want, but pay attention to the security of any group you're about to post in. It's good practice that keeps you out of family-and-friends trouble later. Does Aunt Gertrude Matilda really need to find out that you were miffed over something she said about homeschooling? Nah … keep those rants in the private homeschooling chat forums. Other parents will commiserate with you there. They probably have an Aunt Gertrude Matilda, too.

To find these wonderful bastions of sanity and bickering — let's be honest, all

Facebook groups aren't filled with sunshine and cupcakes — you need to do a little searching. Here's how:

1. **In the Facebook search bar at the top of the browser window, enter your search term, such as "Idaho Homeschoolers."**
2. **When the results appear, click Groups.**

   It's in the topic strip underneath the blue search bar band.
3. **Scroll through the results and find the perfect group to join, or try another search.**

When you assemble search terms to find a group to join, combine "homeschool" or "homeschooling" with your city or homeschool method (Charlotte Mason, Waldorf, unit studies). If you use a particular curriculum, you can search with that, say, Shiller Math Homeschoolers — in this case, I got no results; however, when I dropped "homeschoolers" off the end, it turned up the very active Shiller Math Facebook Group. Using "Build Your Library" as a search term returned a full dozen different groups. Your people are out there. They're waiting to find you.



TIP If you want a group that meets specific content or religious requirements, such as secular, Catholic, atheist, or classical (as in education), those make good search terms as well.

Keep in mind that some of the large Facebook groups, like Secular Eclectic Academic (SEA) Homeschoolers, may have several offshoot groups you can join. Want to chat off topic? They may have a group for that. Struggling with meeting the needs of an exceptional learner? You may find a subgroup that fits. Interested in high-school curriculum and activities? Check to see if your favorite large group offers a subgroup just for teen or high-school issues. Often the subgroups are more lenient than their larger parent gatherings, simply because of the number of people involved. If you belong to a special needs curriculum group, for example, and a topic like independence concerns you, there's a good chance that the group will welcome your question and chime in with suggestions, whereas in a large, general homeschooling group the question might get lost or trodden upon because it doesn't fit the theme of

the group. If that happens, be assured that it's not you. Without stringent posting rules in place, the very large groups can spin off into chaos frighteningly fast.



WARNING Be aware that the Facebook groups are like any densely populated city. There are places you do not want to be. If you join a group and after a few weeks it seems that you see skewed posts, controlling leadership, or bizarre opinions celebrated as fact, and this makes you uncomfortable, then *leave*. Find a group more toward your tastes. It may take a few tries before you find a really good online fit, and you may decide in a few years that your views have changed. If that happens, quietly bow out of the groups you joined at the beginning and find new ones that suit your new teaching philosophy and beliefs.



AT OUR HOUSE A change of philosophy happened to me. I started out a classical homeschooler, and made it eight years before life circumstances and teaching such a full load each day completely burned me out. Then I switched to unit studies and did that for eight years. (Do you see a pattern here?) Now, as I see my schooling years nearing an end, with only a few years to go, I'm more of an eclectic-yet-not-classical homeschooler who occasionally throws in unit studies and special projects, but who looks longingly at Montessori materials and sometimes wishes the kids were all little again. (Can you tell that I love curriculum, any curriculum?)

Finding the best blogs

Following a homeschooling blog is a bit like reading your favorite book or peering into someone's front window on a clear night while they have a party for your benefit. You're there, but not entirely there. You can watch and interact, but mostly in a one-sided way. This is not to say that blogs aren't beneficial; I've found some wonderful ideas, inspiration, and encouragement from well-designed homeschooling blogs. They can be quite useful; however, they won't provide the one-on-one interaction you'll get from an online

group.

The blogs that you love will depend completely on what you hope to gain from them. Are you looking for teaching ideas? The will and resolve to teach another day? (It's okay. It happens to all of us.) Inspiration to carry you through another year? You can find all this and more from a carefully selected set of homeschooling blogs. Many of them even offer free materials you can download and use in your own homeschool, or they sell materials they've made for a reasonable price through their own website or a site like Teachers Pay Teachers (www.teacherspayteachers.com).

Blogs come and go at the blogger's whim. With the click of a button, an article or even an entire blog can disappear if the developer wants it that way. This is something you need to understand about blogs. Sometimes they last for years, their information is solid, and people rely on them. In other instances you may find a blog you really love, only to discover it gone the next time you try to read the updates. In this case there's nothing to do but search for another blog to love, perhaps checking the website of your past love every now and then to see if it comes back online. (Sometimes they do. Everybody needs a break now and then.)

Here are a few blogs to get you started. Some of these are known for curriculum help, others for inspiration and encouragement.

- **123 Homeschool 4 Me:** (www.123homeschool4me.com) Look here for activity ideas, printable worksheets, and tips and tricks to make your journey easier. This Christian homeschool blog has been around since 2007, so you'll find a lot to peruse.
- **The Canadian Homeschooler:** (www.thecanadianhomeschooler.com) Looking for Canadian resources, inspiration, and teaching ideas? This blog is really well done; I found it hard to stop reading.
- **Home|School|Life:** (www.homeschoollifemag.com/hsl-blog) Looking for help and inspiration as you work with elementary, middle, or high-school students? What about yourself? Could you use a bit of encouragement? If any of this strikes a chord, check out this blog.
- **Living Montessori Now:** (www.livingmontessorinow.com) This Montessori-themed blog talks about homeschooling, education, Montessori, children, and grandchildren. Also browse through the site for

some awesome printable Montessori activities.

- **Practical, By Default:** (www.practicalbydefault.com) Are you working and homeschooling at the same time? Practical, By Default gives you ideas on how to balance it all, plus some great seasonal suggestions for activities that build memories.
- **Secular Homeschooler:** (www.secularhomeschooler.com/blog) Run by a small group of homeschoolers, you can find reviews, resource suggestions, and discussions on topics like teaching your youngsters about banned books and national elections.

Search for your new favorite blog by using online search terms like "homeschooler," your favorite curriculum or learning style, your religious preference, and words like "inspiration" or "free printables." You'll soon unearth a few go-to sites that seldom fail to encourage you or point you toward the right resource at the perfect time.

Pointing toward podcasts

Podcasts, if you aren't familiar with them, are the radio shows of the 2000s. Some of them tell stories; others feature interviews with interesting people. A great many of them feature the podcasters chatting about whatever they find interesting at the moment, as long as it falls within the topic of the podcast.

You can listen to podcasts through your browser, or you can download a podcast player to your phone or tablet. Once you find your best way to listen, search through the thousands of options using terms like "homeschool." While the number of podcasts (and podcasters) is vast, and you could spend the rest of your life listening to great (as well as less-than-stellar) recorded audio, this list gives you a place to start:

- **A Brave Writer's Life in Brief:** This podcast, by Julie Bogart of the Brave Writer curriculum, tackles everything from procrastinating learners to finding time to care for yourself as a busy homeschooling parent.
- **Exploring Unschooling:** If the idea of unschooling interests you, or you simply want to investigate the possibility of introducing more freedom into your days, this podcast will fill the need. And with over 200 podcasts, you'll be listening for awhile.
- **Honey! I'm Homeschooling the Kids:** Each episode introduces a new

guest speaker, and this podcast touches a myriad of topics. From homeschooling in Hong Kong to self-directed learning, and from homeschooling off the grid in Costa Rica to dealing with grief as a homeschooling family, "Honey! I'm Homeschooling the Kids" will take you through the versatile wonderland that is homeschooling.

- **Sage Family:** If gentle parenting, natural homeschooling, family adventures, and simple living excite you, you may love this podcast. Look for a new episode each fortnight (every two weeks).
- **Stuff You Missed in History Class:** A popular podcast among homeschoolers, Holly and Tracy take you into the bowels of history: Want to know the history of poison control, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, or Disneyland's Haunted Mansion? Look no further. You found it.



We enjoy listening to podcasts, and several made their way to favorite status at our house. "Clear+Vivid" with Alan Alda (of *M*A*S*H* TV series fame) talks about science and communication, and along the way Alda invites old Hollywood friends to stop by and chat. "Welcome to Night Vale" introduces a fictional desert town where all the conspiracies are real and there's a light shining over the Arby's … about 100 feet in the air. Be prepared for creepy tales. "Start With This" (from the makers of Welcome to Night Vale) is a creativity and writing podcast that encourages the listener to jump in and begin to write.

Networking Isn't Just for Computer Geeks

When you meet friends on Facebook or other online forums, you're networking. You also network when you attend a homeschool conference and talk to the people you see. You meet the most interesting people at homeschooling conferences. You see the same faces year after year. Some become more than faces as you exchange business cards, email addresses,

and curriculum ideas over a vendor's table or at the end of a presentation.

Each state or region conducts a yearly homeschool conference. (For a list of organizations in your area that may offer a yearly conference, see Appendix B.) Although developing lifelong friendships probably isn't what you have in mind when you attend a conference, meeting another person that you click with is a possibility. If you find yourself sitting next to the same person presentation after presentation, you have a likely candidate on your hands. (Unless, of course, you're already friends and came to the conference together. That doesn't count.)

You'll find several things at a conference:

- **Speakers:** Conference organizers try hard to collect speakers who provide information and encouragement at the same time.
- **Vendors:** Many offer new curriculum or teaching ideas. This gives you the opportunity to see what you're buying before you send the money off to a publisher or wing through the Internet. You may even locate a local museum or field trip opportunity that you didn't know about if that organization appears as a vendor at your local homeschool conference. Contact your local organization or visit the organization's website for information on individual conferences, including fees, length of conference, and the like.



REMEMBER When you attend a homeschool conference, you're bound to find speakers you agree with and others you don't. As you look over the speaker schedule, if a particular speaker's topic interests you, give the talk a try. On the other hand, if you see a speaker and immediately chalk his topic up as sheer lunacy, you aren't going to get anything out of the talk. Don't waste your time or notebook paper listening to educational views that you know you don't agree with before you walk into the session. That hour is better spent attending another talk or visiting the vendor hall.



WARNING Most of the large conferences are decidedly religious in nature. Their vendors have signed a statement of faith in order to attend, and they promise to leave everything off their table that conflicts with that statement, including science topics like evolution. If you're looking for a *secular,* or non-religious conference, you may need to go online. Although secular conferences are gaining steam, at this writing only a few occur each year across the United States at an in-person venue. Several, however, take place online each year. Search for "Secular Homeschool Conference" or "Secular Homeschool Convention." (You don't have to capitalize it; I did that so you could locate it later in this paragraph if you need it.) With an online conference, you still listen to speakers and you usually get a "goodie bag" filled with digital curriculum samples and savings coupons, just like the paper and plastic versions. Best thing: You don't have to carry it all weekend as it gets heavier and heavier. Win!

Associating and Consorting

Meeting people in your own community who homeschool gives you someone to call once in a while without incurring long-distance charges. You suddenly know a family who may be interested in meeting you at the park for lunch without driving four hours. You may meet another homeschooler who wants to take swim lessons at the YMCA or YWCA when you do. Social outlets take on a local flair when you spend time with people in your own area.

Homeschool associations and support groups provide a great method of meeting others. You may need to poke around for a while before you actually locate them, because homeschool groups tend to hide — after all, they know where they are. Why should they tell anyone else?



TIP You may find information at your library, religious community, or state homeschool association. (For a listing of state associations, see Appendix B.)

Local associations, sometimes called *support groups,* can be big or small. They can incorporate hundreds of families throughout a region, meet once a year for a huge introductory meeting, and in turn spout smaller support groups that cater to the needs of teens, special-needs learners, or parents of preschoolers. On the other hand, some associations gather only a few families from a specific area together and offer monthly meetings and actual homeschooling *support:* They bring in veteran homeschoolers to talk about planning, organization, subject matter, and more. Sometimes your state organization can point you toward a local support group. Browse through the associations listing in Appendix B to get started, or search Facebook for a support group in your area. Whether you join a support group depends on what you need at any specific time. You may find that you don't need any of them. Or you may go through a period when belonging to several different groups helps you homeschool effectively. Like everything else in the homeschool realm, your membership and attendance hinges most on your personal family needs.



REMEMBER Especially in the support group realm, stand your ground and resist the everybody-is-doing-it syndrome. Just because your three homeschool friends join a support group, you don't have to join, too — especially if the group doesn't give you something that you need. Few things are more frustrating than sitting through meeting after meeting, only to realize that you're wasting your time. If you think your time is better spent at home playing a game with your family, punt on the homeschool group and stay home.

You also may find that a support group that meets your needs today wanes in significance next year. That's okay — as you spend time teaching your kids at home, your needs will change. Go with the flow and seek out the support you need *today*. Next year's needs may be different.

Praying for Guidance

Don't overlook your own religious community when you search for possible homeschool friends. Even if your community operates its own private school (which your children don't attend because you teach them at home), you may

still find a homeschooling family or two nestled somewhere in the membership rolls. After all, you decided to homeschool your children. What stops another family in your tradition from choosing the same thing?

Connecting with another homeschool family in your own religious tradition offers you some distinct advantages:

- **You don't have to explain anything.** If your holidays differ from the national norm in some way, you're saved the problem of describing — one more time — why and how they differ.
- **This gives you someone to celebrate those holidays with.** Arranging daytime holiday parties for your children is plenty of fun, and these gatherings teach tradition and values at the same time. These events give your children great memories of homeschooling, childhood friendships, *and* religious tradition.
- **Gathering with homeschoolers whose values match yours actually removes a good deal of stress.** You don't have to wonder what comments you'll have to explain to your children on the way home. You can refer to things important to you without defining them. And — perhaps most importantly — if you enjoy your religious tradition, you're going to find it enjoyable to spend time with another family that shares the same values.

Getting Together for Socialization

Sometimes you just need to socialize. These are the days that you call your favorite homeschool family and schedule an afternoon together in the near future. Meeting for lunch and a play day (or games if your students are older) gives your children a chance to hang out with other homeschoolers at the same time that the adults relax with some well-deserved iced tea.

Now, if you've known any diehard homeschoolers for long, you may wonder why you need to schedule free time with all the scout meetings, ballet lessons, go-kart racing, roller skating, music lessons, and group bike riding that generally goes on. Fitting a free social afternoon in among all those other homeschool activities can be tough, I agree. But once you do it, you may place this activity on your monthly to-do list. (On the other hand, my

socialization excursions led me to teaching a homeschool art class each Friday for a year, so maybe you want to rethink that.)

Actually, hanging out with another homeschool family once in a while, even if it's to send the kids outside to play or share games and videos on a rainy day, helps to sharpen your perspective. Watching all these kids together, taking note of their likes and differences, and enjoying their company reminds you why you're doing this in the first place. When you get together with others on a regular basis, you watch other children develop in a way that you sometimes overlook with your own because you're with them every day. Then, when a friend says something like, "Wow. Your Madison's attitude has really changed over the past few months," you realize that it's true.

CURLING UP WITH A FRIEND IN PRINT

If you find a homeschool magazine that you like, whether print or digital, discovering it in the mailbox (or email) each month or two gives you an educational shot in the arm. These magazines feature articles on organization, teaching methods, and making it through the school year. This is definitely not a one-publication-fits-all world; different magazines focus their efforts on reaching various portions of the homeschooling world.

Some magazines present homeschooling information with a religious flair. Other magazines cater to a particular learning style: Parents who prefer the unschooling approach can find a magazine or two designed to meet their needs, and others who rely on curriculum or use a classical approach can also find appropriate periodicals.

The trick is finding the magazine that fits your family best. An Internet search may help you decide. To help your search, the Cheat Sheet in the front of this book lists several of the magazines available to homeschoolers and gives you some basic information about each of them. Don't overlook digital-only magazines. Their production cost is lower, but their articles and art still can be quite savvy.

For more information about socialization and homeschooling, flip over to Chapter 1.

TEAM: Together, Everyone Achieves More

Homeschooling doesn't have to happen in a vacuum. For most families with a couple years' teaching under their belts, staying home and concentrating on the books is much harder than joining together with other families for times

of learning, fun, and frolic. One of the most instructive and enjoyable ways to gather with other families is to share in *cooperative learning*, also known as a *co-op*. A co-op introduces some very different dynamics into your homeschool.

We can't all be experts at everything. If we were, the sheer amount of stuff required to organize our vast information vaults would overwhelm us and overfill our homes. Perhaps specializing is good for homeschool parents.

When you find another homeschool family that you click with, joining together for various educational activities means that you can both pursue the same topic with twice the fun. You may schedule a trip to the local zoo, an excursion outdoors to look at trees and their leaves, or even a trip to the local library to decipher the Dewey Decimal System as a combined adventure. You've just entered the world of cooperative learning.

These informal experiences eventually bridge into the healthiest co-ops. If you find yourself scheduling these outings on a semi-regular basis, you actually have the beginning of a small co-op without a huge amount of effort. Add another family here, one there, and before you know it a certified group forms. Although this is the most informal method of cooperative learning, it's definitely a good start if you want to share the excitement with another family once in a while. Joining with other families also gives you the energy to pursue a topic more deeply than you may otherwise. Building a working volcano may seem like a great effort for your own brood alone. If you add another parent and a few more children, the audience gets bigger and you suddenly have an extra pair of hands to form the volcano base and keep track of the vinegar.

Co-ops by nature incorporate other homeschool families, so you can mark off the week's socialization requirement when your classes meet. They also give you an opportunity to teach children other than your own because many co-ops require you to take your turn teaching one or two sessions of a course, assist the head instructor in a course, or teach an entire course of your own while your children attend someone else's class.



Holidays make a great time to join together cooperatively because

holiday celebrations are always more fun with a small crowd. One year, I created a piñata for our Christmas celebration, and we still giggle over the photos and memories that day produced. Pictures of small children diving after the candy as it flew through the air come to mind to this day as we recall that celebration, and gathering the co-op group together certainly made the experience memorable. Plus, my children alone could never eat all the candy in the piñata, and it took all 14 kids' efforts to break the thing!

Gathering informally

Most homeschool co-ops, if you count the number of members, consist of a few homeschool families who gather together for a particular purpose. These groups usually meet in someone's home once a week (or once every other week) and concentrate on the subjects that homeschoolers generally don't enjoy teaching themselves. They may last only a semester or a year, or they may continue for several years until the members grow beyond whatever subjects the co-op was designed to teach.



WARNING Art, music, drama, speech, science, history, and (in some cases) religion all make good co-op subjects. If you plan to teach religion, it's a good idea if all your co-op members come from your own community. Otherwise, tempers tend to flare after a few weeks when the resident adults find they don't exactly agree with the instructor at hand.

Although you can find out about these small (usually private) groups through a friend of a friend, generally you learn about them because you're one of the homeschoolers who wants the children to learn such-and-such. You gather with a group of like-minded parents, designate one of them the resident teacher for a particular course (or perhaps join together and hire a tutor to teach the group as a whole), and a co-op is begun.

Even the small co-ops periodically have openings, as families drop out due to scheduling conflicts or changes in interests. If you want to try a learning experience like this, joining an existing group gives you a taste of cooperative education without the hassles of beginning and managing a group on your own. The best way to find an opening is to mention to other homeschoolers

that you're looking for a co-op to join. You may follow a few false leads at first, but sooner or later, you'll land a group that fits your needs.

Because these co-ops are small and unadvertised, you may hang out with homeschoolers for quite awhile before you find out a co-op exists in your area. Your friends aren't trying to exclude you; the group meets once a week or so for a few hours so it probably doesn't warrant much conversation time away from planning sessions or the co-op itself. They get together, do their thing for two or three hours, and then adjourn for another week of schoolwork, soccer games, and the myriad details of life.



REMEMBER When I first started homeschooling, I spent some time looking for a large area co-op. Well-meaning homeschoolers gave me phone number after phone number, and looking for a group that I knew existed (and later actually joined), I called them all. The phone calls generally ended with the person on the other end of the phone saying something like, "Our co-op is full. We're not accepting any new families at this time." If you get someone like this on the other end of the line, be assured that they're not actually trying to be rude. What they're *trying* to say is "Our co-op is a private group of five or so families who meet for a specific purpose. We met as friends, and we'd really like to keep it only among ourselves. Good luck forming a co-op of your own." They just may not be able to articulate it well.

Formalizing your group

Imagine a school away from school, and you get close to the picture of a large co-op. These groups may incorporate as many as 50 or more families at a time, or as few as 10. The classes often resemble college courses more than the small, intimate cooperative classes I mention earlier. You may fill out a registration form for the classes that you want your children to take, pay a course fee to the co-op treasurer, and follow the co-op rules (which usually include statements such as "Keep your children under control. Please don't run in the building," and so on).

Finding a large co-op

The easiest way to find a place in a co-op like this, of course, is to offer to

teach a class to other homeschool children. However, the best co-ops are designed to incorporate nonteaching options as well. That way, those who need a course in introductory biology, for instance, can find one without hiring an individual tutor.



TIP Sometimes locating a large co-op can be tough, but during other seasons, co-ops may seem to appear out of nowhere. When you want to find a large, formal co-op, your best bet is to contact someone who may know where it meets. Try one or more of these options:

- The homeschoolers you know who have taught their kids the longest
- Your state homeschool association (run independently of your state department of education)
- Any area Facebook homeschooling groups
- Other homeschoolers you run into at baseball practice, tennis lessons, or other hobbies about town
- An area or citywide homeschooling support group that may sponsor or provide a co-op like this

Asking around eventually points you to large support groups.

Dissecting a large co-op

Because these learning opportunities occur on a grander scale, they tend to take on a life of their own. Group physical education classes may last years after the founding homeschool family graduates the last progeny. Co-ops that offer several different courses at one time simply change the course offerings as the students grow older and require different information. Instructors who move in and out of the system also determine the courses offered.

A large co-op usually meets once per week for a semester or a school term at a time and can offer courses in anything from high-school nutrition to first-grade art. Most of the time, because these groups cater to families with several children, you see a large range of classes. Sometimes the courses offered span preschool through middle school, and others may go all the way to high school.

These organizations usually require registration paperwork that helps keep track of everyone. Parents volunteer to teach the classes a semester or two at a time, and the co-op places their children into appropriate courses taught by other parents. Then the co-op often opens its doors to anyone else who wants to register, attend, and pay the course fee. Some of these groups charge materials fees for particular classes, and others actually charge enough to give the volunteer instructor a little spending money for his efforts.



HOME(SCHOOL)-MADE

Several years ago, I sat around a table with three other homeschool parents. We all wanted to join a co-op, but couldn't find one that met our needs. We shared bagels and cream cheese while the assorted collection of children (who had already scarfed their bagels down) played outside. A plan formed in our minds.

Why not start our own small co-op, and see how it went? Between us, we had a financial wiz who loved everything to do with science, a former speech and drama teacher, a mom fluent in French, and someone experienced in teaching art (and arts and crafts) classes. We decided to teach art, drama with music, science experiments, and French. A cooperative was born.

We divided the 14 children into four roughly equal groups (it took a couple different divisions before we found the groupings that helped the children work together the best), and each of us taught our little classes four times at the various age levels. Sometimes, for example, the art class presented the same lesson to everyone. During other sessions, the 5- and 6-year-olds learned a different skill than the 12-year-olds.

That co-op lasted over a year, and we all learned plenty from it. We learned about each other (some of the families didn't know each other well when we began), we learned about working together (kids and adults, too), and we learned a little about art, drama, French, and science. Sometimes thinking up a new weekly project for the kids was a bit of a pain, but overall, we had a great time.

That's my co-op story. If you decide to start a co-op of your own, your story will be different. You can teach any classes you want and meet for any reason you like. Some groups meet once a month only for field trips. Others concentrate on the "extras": physical education, music, and art. Many co-ops contain only three to seven families because that's a manageable number of children when you attempt to do something as a group. Other co-ops contain hundreds of families, and they all sign up for 20 or more different courses as they need them.

No matter what you decide to teach and how you want to teach it, the important thing is that you give it a try. If you really want to join together with other families, then gather them together for a brainstorming session and see what comes of it. The kids may have some decided ideas about what they want to learn. Or maybe you'll find that you all want to cover one subject, such as physical education, but you aren't really sure how to go about it as an

isolated family. Discussions like these were made for birthing co-ops.

Part 5

Making Your Year Sing with Extras

IN THIS PART …

Incorporate art, music, speech, physical education, and foreign language to your routine. These special classes, and others like them, add excitement to the day and break the boredom of the English/math/science/social studies routine.

Explore special projects. Volunteer. Join an organization like Navigators USA or 4-H. Explore a martial art. These adventures are the ones your student will remember, and talk about, long after the school year is over.

Chapter 27

Adding Spice with Special Classes

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Fitting the extras into the schedule**
- **Delving into art, music, speech, and drama**
- **Managing physical and sex education**
- **Following a foreign language**
- **Teaching life skills via home economics**

English. Math. Science. History … English. Math. Science. History … Hey! There's more to life than the core four subjects. Isn't that great? I'm glad, too — without a break every now and then, the core four get pretty boring. Besides, with a little inventiveness, you can use carefully scheduled additional courses to liven up even the English, math, history, and science classes.

How about investigating art and music from a particular time period as part of your history class? That way, it counts as two courses: You fit the artists within the framework of their times, and you cover both art and history. Or you may want your students to look at music through the eyes of math, and study musical notation as an exercise in fractions. How about studying the connections between music, math, and science? That takes care of three subjects with one topic.

This chapter looks at the various elective classes that schools sometimes offer and gives you tips for including them in your homeschool if you choose. Although you probably won't want to include all these subjects (at least at the beginning), they all do double duty in that they give you a break from the normal routine, and they enlarge your children's repertoire of knowledge and skills at the same time.

Making Time for the Extras

At the very time that school administrators are busily eliminating the electives that they commonly term *the extras,* homeschoolers embrace the opportunity to include them in the school year. Generally, *the extras* refer to physical education, art, and music. Some of the other subjects covered in this chapter, such as foreign language and speech, are so far outside the range of most public school systems (especially at the elementary level) that they only find a place in specialized magnet or international schools.

The fact that the extras are sometimes absent from the public school curriculum actually makes them prime targets as homeschool subjects. Without the benefit of home education, these subjects would be available to only a select few. In this case, homeschooling helps to level the playing field because, in most cases, you can choose (or at least add on) any subjects that you want to teach.

Before you decide that you, too, are too busy teaching the core four to incorporate any of the extra classes into your schedule, let me suggest a few reasons for including any of them in your homeschool:

- **Additional classes mean well-rounded students.** Although I'm certainly not an advocate of *doing the circuit,* which is a term meaning filling every available extra hour with lessons or extracurricular activities, there is something to be said for a variety of experiences.
- **Varied courses give you a break.** You can structure many of these classes so that you don't need to hold your children's hands so much as guide them along the way. For example, you don't have to sit with your children and help with art class. At least, after they reach an age when they can follow simple directions, work from a model project, and hold a pencil without poking their little sisters, your children should be able to work on their own. This takes less mental energy on your part.
- **The extras round out resumes and portfolios.** Although not every part-time employer or educational system portfolio reviewer looks for a student who can translate Spanish into Latin or present a ten-minute speech without hiding under the desk, incorporating subjects such as these into your curriculum gives your student an edge. It proves that he's

willing to move beyond the core four and pursue some knowledge and skills for their own sake. That always looks good on a resume.

- **The more you learn, the more you can learn.** If your student is exposed to softball and soccer, she learns the basics of working with a team. Likewise, if she takes art now and picks up photography later, she already knows the basics of viewing an object with an eye toward its surroundings. These courses give your students a foundation that they may need for later learning.
- **You may rouse a latent interest or talent.** Many students begin a subject reluctantly, only to learn that they have an interest or a real talent at it. If I hadn't incorporated art early as a subject in our homeschool, I wouldn't know that my daughter, at age 4, could take red, yellow, and blue paint and effortlessly mix mauve and lavender for painting. She liked mauve and lavender, you see, but wasn't too crazy about red, yellow, or blue. Seeing this made me focus more on art than I may have otherwise.

Fitting an elective subject into your curriculum doesn't mean that you need to include it every day. In fact, incorporating some of these options into your week more than once or twice may be a great recipe for parent-child burnout. If your student does high-school-level work, then creating a daily class or two from this chapter is reasonable; however, trying to incorporate speech, art, music, and physical education each day leaves little room for the math and English that you need to teach. The thought makes me tired, and I'm not even part of your homeschool!

Select one or two additional courses to begin with, and delve into them once or twice a week where you need them most. If you find that Thursday is a low-energy day all around, for example, perhaps adding a fun class like art or music can spice up the day. When your students have a hard time getting started on Monday, maybe that's the time to include physical education.

In much the same way, if lunchtime drags and energy levels feel low for the next half hour or so, you could incorporate a few minutes of foreign language listening to build skills. While you are adding one of the extras each day in this case, you can limit the class to 20 minutes or less (depending on your children's ages) and still cover the same amount of material that you would if you declared a special class twice a week.



TIP Remember that this is your school and your program. If the very sound of these subjects makes you think, “Oh, no! More work!” then shelve this chapter for a while until you have the emotional energy to tackle the idea of adding more into your school day. These courses are all available to homeschoolers; this doesn’t, however, mean that any of them are right for you and your school right now (or in some cases, ever!). Keep your own needs foremost as you read. Take what sounds good to you and throw out the rest.

Bringing Out Their Inner Artists

Culture and education go hand in hand. Without some kind of culture you really don’t have a civilization: If you look at any civilization in any time period (including our own), you see that its people pursued some type of art and music. Although you may not consider Industrial Grunge an actual music form, this musical style does speak to a particular portion of the population.

Which brings me to an important point: As a homeschooler, you can focus on whatever art and music forms speak to you. If, as far as you are concerned, *music* means baroque chamber pieces, then introduce your children to them by all means. If, on the other hand, the term *music* conjures up memories of folk music and campfires, teach them those folk tunes instead. As you share your musical loves, you pass on your culture to your children — a precious reason for homeschooling in itself.

Music

Many homeschoolers use outside music lessons to fulfill their music requirement, but you don’t have to. Music instruction actually comes in two flavors: music appreciation and music performance. Although music performance (as in learning to play an instrument) is nice, it certainly isn’t necessary for you to enjoy music. Children without a lick of musical talent can learn to enjoy music in other ways.

Music appreciation

All you need for music appreciation is a set of ears. Other components, such

as a radio or CD player, may help, but all you really *need* are ears. At its most basic, the goal of music appreciation is to expose your children to music that they may otherwise overlook and hope that their musical understanding will be broadened as a result. Music comes in so many different forms that you could appreciate music for years and never hear the end of it. Generally, *music appreciation* means classical music, but it doesn't have to. I know several classical musicians who don't know a thing about blues, calypso, or zydeco. Yet my children love all these — in addition to Beethoven, Mozart, Gershwin, and light opera.

You can find books on true music appreciation, but if your children are still little (in other words, you don't actually need a high-school credit in this), simply exposing them to different types of music works wonders. In your quest for listening materials, in case you don't already own at least one CD of every music type ever produced, you may try

- **Library lending:** The library music departments usually lend folk music, classical, opera, musicals, jazz, blues, and sometimes calypso. Rummage through your library's stacks and see what you can find. (You also may want to look in the video section for ballets, operas, and composer biographical documentaries.)
- **Classical Kids Series:** Follow a mysterious violin around Venice as you learn about Vivaldi and his music, listen to the observations of a young boy who lives below Beethoven, or meet Handel just as he finishes the *Messiah*. These CDs introduce children to one composer's music while unfolding a radio drama that teaches them about the man's life and works. Look for titles like *Beethoven Lives Upstairs, Vivaldi's Ring of Mystery,* or *Hallelujah! Handel*. You can find them on the Internet at The Children's Group, www.childrensgroup.com, or Amazon, www.amazon.com.
- **Free community concerts:** Many towns and cities offer free spring and summer concerts that feature local musicians. Check into your parks' department schedule and see if your community may be one of them — they usually offer an entertaining evening. Some of these groups are really good!

Music performance

Not everybody grows up to be Chopin. Perhaps this is a good thing. In the

same way that not every child desires to play on the football team (some are perfectly happy to sit in the stands and cheer), every child does *not* desire to learn to play an instrument. I know this may be hard for some of you to comprehend, but it's true. And those who do want to play something may find certain objections to your instrument of choice.

For example, maybe your progeny wants to learn a portable instrument, yet the piano provides your only vision of musical performance. These two goals do not mix. Who ever heard of slinging a baby grand into your backpack for that next long hike? Music performance can mean playing as part of a homeschool or community orchestra. It can also mean solo performance on a piano, violin, or flute.

But if you want your child to learn notes and timing, and not specifically orchestral arrangements, why not introduce the recorder? Or even the Irish tin penny whistle? An instrument doesn't have to be expensive to make music or provide sheet music that your child can learn to read. Music is music.

Here are some ideas for incorporating music instruction into your homeschool:

- **Sign the children up for piano or violin lessons.** If you don't feel comfortable enough teaching music, note reading, and theory on your own, you can probably find someone in your area who will do it for a fee. If you select one of the smaller instruments, you can often rent one instead of purchasing it outright.
- **Introduce the recorder, flutophone, or tonette.** These little flutes have been used to teach basic music classes for years. All are relatively inexpensive, and they give you an idea whether your child is even interested in music before you swing for a piano or violin. If you can read music, you can teach the tonette or recorder.
- **Use YouTube for instruction.** Several YouTube producers, such as Hoffman Music, Piano Video Lessons, and PGN Piano, offer free piano lessons with an option to purchase more material. You can find similar instruction for almost any instrument. Want to learn to play bassoon? You can find YouTube lessons for that. Head to www.youtube.com.



I realize that outside piano lessons are the normal homeschool way to teach music, but we don't do it at our house. My husband plays piano more than adequately — after taking piano lessons for 13 years as a child — so I purchased the introductory volumes of a standard piano curriculum that you can find in any good music store, and now we teach them ourselves.

Art

Like music, art also falls into two categories: appreciation and creation. A trip to the nearest art museum immerses you in art appreciation, and you may go to every art museum in the country and still not be able to draw a tree that looks like a tree. That's okay. In this case, you put much effort into appreciation, but not much into performance, so to speak.

Art appreciation

To appreciate art, you need to look at art. Much like music appreciation, art classes assume that you want to appreciate the great artists: the Van Goghs, Rembrandts, Vermeers, and Titians of the world. If you want to explore the world of art one artist at a time, take a trip to the library and see what it offers. You'll probably find biographies as well as bound reproductions of the artists' most famous works.

Another way to investigate art is by time period. Each time you cover a period in history, look up the artists that lived during that time. What did they paint, sculpt, or draw? Why? Which artists and works were the most popular within a particular time period? Have they become more or less popular throughout the years? You can answer these questions and more that you'll undoubtedly come up with on your own at the library — the place to start you and yours off on a pretty healthy pursuit of art.

A third way to look at art is by type of work and the influences on the artist. For example, your daughter shows an interest in impressionism from a calendar page she sees. From there, you and yours investigate impressionism as an art form. When did it occur? Who created using this style? How was it received by the culture of the time? The library can also guide you here.



TIP Don’t overlook the more unconventional art forms in your pursuit of art appreciation. If your children don’t embrace the great artists and their works, then you may want to make a special effort to find out-of-the-mainstream art forms that your children can relate to. Cartoon animation qualifies as art, as does the lowly cereal box (usually referred to as graphics, but still art). Use your imagination and see what turns up.



TIP Physical books are great for investigating art, but if your library has a less than robust art collection or you find yourself stuck in the house, an Internet search will happily produce artworks, artists by historical period or country, and histories of art movements. Turn to Chapter 25 for some tips on online art galleries that deserve a visit.

Art creation

Finger paints. Water colors. Pencil drawings. Cut-and-paste. Creating art yourself encompasses everything from construction paper and glue to oil pastels on canvas. You can delve as much or as little into art creation as you like. Let your students’ interests be your guide more than any external must-do list.

Although watching a tremendous artist develop through the art classes that you teach your children may be nice, what you really want to aim for is a release of creativity. When they begin to see beauty in ordinary objects, they think like artists. When they want to capture the lines of a leaf with a pencil on paper because they love it, they think like artists.

While participating in art classes, your children also learn project creation and completion, especially if your students are at the crayon-and-scissors stage. Through beginning an art project, creating the project, and finishing the project, your students learn that even something fun has a beginning, a middle, and an end. If they leave the art project unfinished on the school table for a week and a half instead of finishing it and taping it to the side of the bookshelf (which is where all our great art projects end up), they soon learn what happens. They find themselves resurrecting a crumpled piece of paper

from underneath a pile of books and paperwork. Poor, sad art project.

If you want to incorporate art class into your homeschool:

- **Look for a homeschool parent who can teach art.** Someone out there either had art training in school or actually works as a graphics artist or the like. Maybe he would enjoy (or at least be willing to) teach art basics to a group of homeschool students.
- **Purchase and work through an art curriculum.** Mark Kistler spent years teaching kids to draw on his PBS network show. He has several books that teach drawing skills in a kid-friendly way. Check out *Mark Kistler's Draw Squad* to start you off. Artistic Pursuits offers a full preschool through high-school curriculum. See it at www.artisticpursuits.com.
- **Check out books from the library on pencil, watercolor, and pen-and-ink drawing.** Unless your library staff just finished purging art books, your library may stock some pretty good options. If you like, you can even check out books with famous works of art in them and attempt to copy them on your own paper. This teaches you plenty about the artists and their sense of perspective.
- **Please, please, please buy decent materials.** Nothing is more frustrating than spending hours on one picture only to find out that it looks awful when you're finished because you used the same pencil that you usually use for math problems. A good drawing pencil costs about $1, and I'm still using the ones I purchased in college … um … *several* years ago. They really do work better for drawing.
- **Take a look at online art lessons.** A quick search turns up several options, including one by Mark Kistler. YouTube abounds with quick art lessons for kids, beginners, high-school students, and more.
- **Have your materials sent to you.** This is one place that you really do save time shopping online or through catalogs, primarily because art supply stores are so hard to find these days. MisterArt.com (www.misterart.com) sells all kinds of art supplies over the web. The Nasco Arts & Crafts catalog (www.enasco.com; phone 800-558-9595) offers over 550 pages of art materials, and one of the longtime suppliers, Dick Blick Art Materials (www.dickblick.com), still carries a dizzying

array of fabulous stuff.

Go Ahead — Be Dramatic

Maybe the whole idea of standing in front of a group of people and expounding on some deep thought makes you queasy. Before your audience arrives, you wonder whether you can fit into the hall closet. Or perhaps you love speaking in front of people and can't imagine why your child declines the offer. After all, that last mime routine that someone talked you into remains a gratifying memory.

No matter which way you personally see it, giving a speech, participating in a debate, and developing drama skills help to round out your homeschool curriculum. Your child will find herself called on to deliver a short explanation, detailed analysis, or rousing wedding toast sooner or later. Because you know that situations involving public speaking are going to come up, your best bet is to prepare your students for them before they descend on your life and wreck your kids' nervous systems.

Speech and debate

Speech can be formal or informal, funny or serious, planned or impromptu. What you say and how you say it depends on your audience and the occasion — not the speaker's current whim (much as we wish that could be true). Learning to gauge what speech would be most appropriate for a particular occasion is part of formal speech training.

Debate, on the other hand, is a particular form of speaking that takes a particular topic and argues for or against it (depending on your assigned side). It incorporates two participants and one topic, often called a Lincoln-Douglas debate, or four participants and one topic. With four debaters, you speak with a partner instead of going it alone.

As you explore the various topics included in speech and debate, you find that you absolutely love some forms though you may loathe others. Personally, I always hated giving impromptu speeches, but my husband loves it. So we trained our kids in both prepared and impromptu speaking. Introducing your children to as many of the forms as possible in their 12 to 16 years of school gives them the experience to say they enjoy public speaking or they don't.

Toastmasters International

Originally designed to teach business people how to speak in public in the 1920s, Toastmasters now happily takes anyone interested in improving their public-speaking skills. According to the charters, a member must be 18 years old before she joins, but I've known clubs to informally "adopt" younger students who showed an interest in the club's activities. My husband, for example, began attending a very patient club with his member father at the tender age of 8, and then returned to become an informal groupie at age 16. Toastmasters also occasionally runs junior-level clubs for teens.

The Toastmasters well-written manuals cover basic public speaking, gestures, humor, speaking to inform, after-dinner speeches, and a whole collection of other speaking topics. Although they prefer that you enroll in the clubs to purchase the manuals, Toastmasters sell their speech manuals online, including the youth Interpersonal Communication manual, at `www.toastmasters.org`.



TIP If you (or a homeschool parent you know) is interested in learning about speaking skills and intrigued with the idea of teaching a homeschool speech class, the interested party could always join Toastmasters International and then pass along what he learns to the children.

Reader's Theater

Also known as *choral reading*, reader's theater gathers a group of willing students together, and they read (in parts or together) some literature form. Reader's theater can be a blast, especially if you work with kids who enjoy doing this type of thing. The selections usually last no more than 15 to 20 minutes at the most, and they incorporate up to 15 or so students at a time. This actually counts as a form of speech and drama because the kids usually end up performing this in front of someone sooner or later (besides you), and they learn to incorporate inflection and suspense into their words as they read.

To pull off a reader's theater selection, you first get a copy of something everyone will enjoy reading. Children's books and poetry both make excellent selections because the language used to tell the tale is descriptive as well as easily understood. Possible selections for reader's theater include

- **Dr. Seuss books,** including *Yertle the Turtle* and *The Cat in the Hat.* Stick to the Seuss books that use the most words in your native language at first, and reserve the books with phonetic nonsense for your more advanced performers.
- **Shel Silverstein poetry:** Imagine a group of 10- to 12-year-olds performing a poem like "Someone Ate the Baby." What a scream!
- **Nursery rhymes and poems:** Although "Jack and Jill" may prove to be uninspiring, other lesser-known nursery rhymes, such as "Wee Willie Winkie" could work well as reader's theater selections.

After you have a copy of the story or poem that you want to use, here's how to do it:

1. **Make a copy for each child.** Every child needs her own copy so she isn't trying to read over someone else's shoulder and still speak at the appropriate time.
2. **Give each child a part.** Some lines a student can read individually, and other lines work better if read in unison.
3. **Highlight each child's "lines" with marker.** This tells him when to jump into the story.
4. **Keep a master copy for yourself with initials or names next to each line.** Now you know who speaks when, and silences don't leave you asking who has the next line.
5. **Read the selection with inflection.** You may need to go over it several times before the children "get it."

Drama

There's much more to drama than full-scale plays, and you can do plenty with drama in your homeschool without 41 students milling around your living room waiting for their lines. Drama is, at its most basic, the ability to pretend you're something or someone else for a short time. When your 4-year-old crawls around the house with the baby's bottle in his mouth, that's drama. Likewise, when your 6-year-old creates some fantastic scenario for her doll collection to act out, that's drama, too.



TIP You should be able to find books on all these drama forms at your local library or through an online source like Amazon.

Puppetry

Most children learn about puppetry instinctively as they wave their dolls in the air and screech some earth-shattering cry. If you want to formalize the learning a bit, you can always make puppets out of paper, cloth, wood and string, clay, or whatever else you may have handy. Then enact a childhood story that your little ones know well.

A table or chair turned on its side becomes an easy puppet stage. Watching a beginning puppet show, it's hard for the audience to stifle their giggles when they hear the muffled laughter coming from the other side of the table. Puppetry teaches vocal inflection, story development and ending, and general stick-to-itiveness.

Mime

Think of mime as drama without words. Mime artists enact emotions, movement, and a story's entire lines without uttering a sound. For some reason, mime intrigues some small children, and they take to it easily. By the age of 3 or 4, my little one enjoyed some of the basic mime moves: climbing in a window, picking up things and setting them back down, and so on.

You can act out the words to songs, nursery tales, parts of fairy tales, and more with mime. Perhaps your area offers a mime troupe sponsored by a local arts school or church. Taking your children to see a mime (or watching a Marcel Marceau video) may be all it takes to inspire them. Street mimes seem to sprout from the very sidewalks of larger cities, especially in the summertime.

Theater games

These are popular with the kindergarten-through-sixth-grade crowd. Playing theater games basically can teach one, tiny portion of drama in a fun way. Although your children won't make it to Broadway doing nothing but theater games, these pastimes certainly introduce the rudiments of drama and you can use them with as large or as small a group as you like.

Some theater game ideas are

- **Mirror:** Stand two children facing one another. One is the *person* and the other the *mirror.* The mirror's job is to copy, as identically as possible, the movements of the person facing it.
- **Emotions:** Pair up the children or place them in groups of three (if you have at least six), and have everybody make a sad face, a happy face, and a puzzled face.
- **Mime:** Act out reading a book or pouring a drink without words or props.



TIP Beat by Beat Press (www.bbbpress.com/dramagames/) provides an extensive list of theater (or drama) games for your budding actors.

Skits

These short, usually humorous, acted-out stories give your students a chance to memorize dialogue (which mime, theater games, and even reader's theater do not) and learn about actual acting and stage business. (*Stage business* is the term for nonspeaking actions that the cast pursues while on stage — picking up the hairbrush, gazing out the window, and tugging at a sweater are all stage business.)

Usually 10 to 15 minutes in length, sometimes containing a moral of some sort, and relatively easy to pull off, skits require far less planning than a large-scale play. You limit costumes to what you have on hand, sets consist of a chair or two and maybe a table with flowers, and you memorize a few pages of dialogue and actions. That's it.

And they're fun. They give the director in you a chance to direct, the actors in your children a chance to act, and you don't spend months preparing for three performances. If you find that you love doing skits, you could easily do several a month and perfect your skit skill.



TIP Look for prewritten skits in the drama section of your library, the language-arts section of your local educational store, or online using

"drama skit" or "kids drama skit" as the search term.

Formal plays

The big brother to all these other drama forms, a play incorporates sets, costumes, numerous people, lights, and a huge amount of time. Now that I've given you all the downers, let me also say that a play is loads of fun to do, both from the acting and backstage perspectives, and it provides some great memories if your children enjoy doing something like this.

A big advantage of a formal play is that everybody can become involved, even if they're not terribly inclined to act or dance on stage. My particular specialty in the theater world, for example, is costuming. I love designing, creating, or assembling the costumes that help tell the story. A relatively large-scale production gives me, and homeschool students like me, the opportunity to create sets, lighting assemblies, and more. The stage crew can feel as though they are part of the action without needing to experience the warmth of the footlights.



TIP Check into community theater in your area if the footlights call your name. These are volunteers who routinely put on plays because they love theater, and they enjoy working together on a large project. Sometimes a scheduled play calls for young players as well as adults, and the community groups always appreciate a hand with sets, costumes, and props.

Homeschool groups

Almost every local high school sports a speech-and-debate team and drama class. Taking their lead, many area homeschool groups are starting to offer classes in speech or debate. Homeschoolers may also get together to produce a play each semester. Joining together with a large local homeschool group gives your children hands-on drama training — the opportunity to speak before others and refine their skills.



TIP Check with your state organization or area support groups if you're

interested in group speech or drama classes. They may be able to point you in the right direction.

Taking Some Laps

Physical education (PE) has long been a bane to homeschoolers unless one parent specialized in recreational sports in high school or college. Most homeschoolers understand that their kids need some type of PE, but they aren't sure how to get it. If you count yourself as one of the most, don't worry — you're in good company.



TIP Fourteen states currently specifically list physical education as a required course for resident homeschoolers. If your state's requirements say "equivalent to the public schools" and your state requires PE for schoolchildren, then that means you, too — in addition to the listed 14 states. Most homeschoolers incorporate some type of individualized physical training (such as ongoing dance or gymnastics classes) or summer team sports into their schedule, and call it done.

Is that enough? Well, it depends on what your state law says and whether you are bound by it. Using your state guidelines as an example, you can always devise a complete homeschool PE program on your own.

Another option is to do what many homeschool families across the country do: Enroll your children in ongoing physical education classes that meet in various places throughout your community. If the ultimate goal is to guide children into a love of physical movement, then here are some ideas for reaching that goal:

- Enroll in a gymnastics class.
- Explore Little League baseball or team soccer.
- Join the local parks' department tennis class.
- Learn to juggle.
- Sign up for skating lessons.
- Take courses at the local YMCA/YWCA in swimming, basketball, and so

on. (Some Ys even offer a Homeschool Physical Education class.)

- Take horseback riding lessons.
- Take ongoing dance classes, such as ballet, tap, jazz, modern, or interpretive dance.

Although these may not *seem* like a well-rounded curriculum individually, if your student explores several of them over a multiyear period, she can amass all the skills necessary to play with a team, refine gross motor skills, and demonstrate proficiency at a sport. This is actually the heart of the national physical education standards that guide the local and state standards.

Finally, you can purchase a physical education book specifically written for homeschools. Practicing and degreed physical education specialists who homeschool their own children usually author these books, which outline a complete physical education program for kindergarten through Grade 12. I warn you: Not many homeschool PE titles exist. You may want to try *Homeschool Family Fitness: A Complete Curriculum Guide* by Dr. Bruce Whitney, available at Amazon or your favorite homeschool outlet. Another option is the Operation FitKids fitness curriculum at www.acefitness.org/education-and-resources/lifestyle/blog/6611/operation-fitkids/. This program covers Grades 3 to 8.



WARNING Before you and your children jump into a full-scale physical education program, checking with your family's physician is always a good idea. Your doctor may offer recommendations or cautions specific to your family situation.



AT OUR HOUSE When it came time to schedule high-school physical education, I took the easy way out. Since many states currently focus their high-school PE classes on lifetime fitness, I thought that was a great thing to do as well. We learned bowling with a local pro, rudimentary basketball skills, jump-rope tricks, and various dances. My son complained throughout

every second of the dancing classes — and then went on to join his college ballroom dance troupe and compete.

Cooking Up a Storm

You have to cook to eat. Why not turn it into a class and have fun with it? Cook your way around the United States — one of the many regional recipe cookbooks would help here — or explore the cuisine of one or more countries. If you have young scientists at your house, explore the science behind cooking and food. Some of the most interesting chefs and recipe designers were scientists first.

International cuisine

Does one particular country make your heart thrill? Do you, as a family, find yourself turning to one continent again and again to study its geography, history, art, and literature? These make wonderful jumping-off points for investigating international cuisine. You can spend weeks diving into one nation's cookery, making main dishes, desserts, and everything in between. A continent could provide the basis for an entire year's kitchen study as you work your way through country after country.

Recipe websites provide a wealth of new tastes to try. Begin with the All Recipes website and its vast collection of international foods at www.allrecipes.com/recipes/86/world-cuisine. If you don't find what you like there, then search the Internet by entering the country name and "recipes." Bon apétit!

Food science

Depending on their interests, kids can look at food more from a science perspective than that of a chef. If you have one or more of these discerning scientific individuals at your house, perhaps a course in food science is in order. This can be as complicated or as simple as you like; if you visit the Penn State website Food Science for Kids (www.foodscience.psu.edu/youth/resources-for-teachers), you will find links to several experiments and lesson plans. Some of them take you to other universities, such as the University of Utah's Ag in the Classroom site.

High-school students may prefer an in-depth study. The book *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen*, by Harold McGee, is part

science, part history, and all of it is interesting to someone who loves the topic of food and science. You can find many food science textbooks to use as your guide, but almost all of these are designed for university students and many of them cost $100–$200 apiece, which is a bit pricey for a fun high-school elective.



One of my high schoolers is deeply interested in food science. I put together a course using a Glencoe High School Food Science book (which is out of print), the McGee book listed in the preceding paragraph, and *The Food Lab*, by J. Kenji Lopez-Alt. Each one of these books is very different, and my student weighed the information in each as he read.

Bantering about Birds and Bees

Whether we like it or not, as homeschoolers the birds and the bees discussion falls to us as parents. You may farm it out to a close friend, or sign the student up for a class — and that is fine, however you want to get it done. The gravity of the subject, however, rests with you because no sixth-grade teacher is going to swoop down from the skies with her 1970s filmstrip projector in hand and offer to do it for you. Sorry.

Actually, when you stop to think about it, do you really want your child's sexuality instruction completely in someone else's hands? Or would you like to guide the conversation yourself, barring those heart-stopping moments when your tiny student isn't really asking the question you *think* she's asking? (You give the least intrusive, albeit truthful, answer possible, and see where that leads. Usually, depending on the tininess and tenacity of the child in question, that information is enough for the day's query.)

If your children are still small, you need to ask yourself the question: How many birds and bees are enough, and when? You may like to take a look at the books *It's So Amazing* and *It's Perfectly Normal*, both by Robie H. Harris. *It's So Amazing* (for age 7 and older) looks at body parts and babies, while *It's Perfectly Normal* (age 10 and older) talks about changes, growing up, and sexual reproduction.

Would you like a video-based curriculum? Amaze and Amaze Jr. discuss sexuality and gender topics appropriate for ages 4 and older. An online age guide marks each video with a colored stripe so that you know the appropriate level. Some are marked for caregivers, and these videos are designed for you. The Amaze videos have lesson plan and question options that help you extend the lesson beyond the short video segment. Look for them at www.amaze.org.

Parents looking for an inclusive sexuality curriculum that covers development, gender, disability, reproduction, safety, and a whole lot more should take a look at the Unitarian Universalist series *Our Whole Lives* (known as the OWL curriculum). Beginning with young children, the lessons discuss sexuality, development, and gender in age-appropriate ways, and the courses are taught by specifically trained Unitarian Universalists. The material is divided into developmental ages (so one of the books covers Grades 7 to 9), and the series begins with kindergarten and continues through adulthood. Local Unitarian Universalist churches periodically offer this curriculum, which is completely secular. You can also purchase the manuals yourself and go through the material on your own, although it does require a bit of reworking since the course is designed for small group instruction. Call your local UU church or check it out at www.uua.org/re/owl.

Parlez-vous Greek?

If you decide to include a foreign language or two in your subject mix, then your children's education (at least this part of it) resembles European schooling much more than it does that of the United States. English-speaking children abroad learn at least French from the time they are little, and often they pick up Latin and another language or two (German, for example) along the way.

One of the reasons they learn so many languages, of course, is that the countries are so close that it makes living together much easier on everybody if most people share a language in common. Around the world, in fact, it is unusual for people to only know their native tongue. Many cultures in Africa and Asia know several languages: One language is spoken in the home community, but residents use another language for trade and business dealings and sometimes even a third to communicate with people in the

towns and villages not all that far away.

If you decide that you want your children to learn an additional language or two, you aren't weird (even though your neighbors may find the idea a little odd). Think of yourself as global, trans-metropolitan, and culture current.



TIP We've found that one way to learn the cadence of a language like Spanish is to attend lectures delivered in the target language. Will you understand everything spoken? Almost certainly not. However, you may be surprised at the words that you pick up from extended listening. And unlike a preprogrammed, foreign-language curriculum, a live speaker uses real language spontaneously, so you actually hear a much wider variety of spoken words during a lecture than you would following a program.



AT OUR HOUSE

SPEAKING IN THE *LINGUA FRANCA*

We began our foreign language journey with French, mostly because that's the language I took in high school and I could translate some words and phrases for my children on the fly. Plus, French is the first additional language that's usually taught in England. The English have much more experience teaching children than I do, so I adopted their practice.

We recently moved to a city that functions as a gateway to the nations — I still haven't quite figured out why it's so attractive. Not many French-speaking people stroll along our streets, but we regularly hear Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and a whole collection of languages that I can't begin to identify.

After our children met other children who were bilingual (or beginning to be bilingual), the impetus to learn the language that these children speak became much stronger. Talking with 3- and 4-year-olds in their own language thrilled my kids — even though their foreign language vocabulary may be limited to, "Hi. How ya doing?" and "See you later." *Now* the reason for learning a new language isn't just so they cram more knowledge into their brains. They understand that the reason for learning a new language is so that you can talk to new kids. Eureka! It was a blinding flash moment in their lives.

So which language do you learn first?

- **Start with a language that means something to you.** Does the kids'

great grandmother speak Croatian? Then teach them rudimentary Croatian so they can talk to Grandma. She'll love it, and so will the children. In a situation like this, you're actually meeting two homeschooling goals: You're teaching a new language, and you're doing it in a way that brings your family closer together.

- **Start with a language you like.** Has Greek always fascinated you? Then learn Greek. It means learning a new alphabet, sure — but I taught the Greek alphabet to a 5- and 6-year-old. If they can learn it, you can! (And if you try hard, I bet you can also imagine the looks I got in restaurants with two bored kids chanting alpha, beta, gamma, delta, epsilon.)
- **Select from the languages that have good instructional materials available.** Several companies produce language curriculums in various formats, and of course each company thinks their method is the best. (If they didn't, they wouldn't be in business long.) Today you can learn a language through video, audio and books, or online. The choice is up to you.
- **Start with a world language.** Especially if you have high schoolers or students nearly at the high school level, and your students are interested in college or university work after homeschooling, you will want to look at a world language. This is a language currently spoken and written in the world, unlike a dead — no longer spoken — language such as Latin, ancient Greek, or Biblical Hebrew. Modern Greek and Hebrew, however, are often accepted without hesitation. Call your intended college if you're unsure.



TIP In order to count in high school for college admission, a foreign language needs to include listening, reading, writing, and conversation in the target language. Although it may sound like fun, your student cannot sit and watch Disney reruns in Spanish or Italian and call it a complete language course. They have to hear the language, speak it, and be able to read and write it in order for a university to accept it on the transcript. Some colleges have stricter rules about this than others.

Foreign language learning is tough in the homeschool. If you are fluent in a

language, you can wing it almost without materials. Without fluency, however, locating decent language resources can be difficult. Some ideas for you:

- **Muzzy:** (www.muzzybbc.com; phone 888-999-4670) This animated video program from the BBC teaches a target language to children ages 2 through 12. The Muzzy videos use complete immersion, which means that the videos feature dialogue in only the target language. Each Muzzy kit does include identical videos in English to use if your children don't understand the words from the animation sequences. Languages include Spanish, French, German, Italian, Korean, and Mandarin Chinese. How can anyone resist a green, clock-eating monster?
- **Salsa and Irasshai:** (www.gpb.org/salsa) Salsa and Irasshai (www.gpb.org/irasshai) are both foreign language learning programs from Georgia Public Broadcasting and available online. *Salsa* is for beginning Spanish learners. The 42 episodes are all online for you to watch. Each episode includes an activity and a bilingual transcript you can download. Near the bottom of the Salsa home page you'll find a link to an educational scope and sequence document from the Wyoming Department of Education. *Irasshai* is Japanese for high-school students and older. This is a three-year program that also includes two texts and workbooks that must be purchased in order to complete the program. See the website for details.
- **Easy Languages:** (www.youtube.com) This YouTube channel offers an introduction to Catalan, French, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Spanish, and Turkish. Other languages, like Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, and Swahili, have a few videos available. Each short video is captioned in both the target language and in English so you can figure out what's going on. This would be a good accompaniment to a high-school language course.
- **Open Culture:** (www.openculture.com/freelanguagelessons) None of these lessons are going to make your kids fluent. But you may be able to find enough to assemble an introductory course in a language so you can gauge whether the kids are really interested in it.
- **Community College:** If you want your high schooler to learn a language and you can't teach it yourself, your best alternative may be one or two courses at the local community college or university. One semester of

college foreign language is equivalent to a year of high school, so although it moves quickly, your student would have to take two semesters of a beginning language to gain the credit necessary for high school, if your local colleges and universities expect to see a world language on the transcript.

- **Teachers Pay Teachers:** (www.teacherspayteachers.com) Look here for various downloadable resources related to foreign language learning. Many of these are designed for younger learners, but some pieces are useful through Grade 12.

While there are homeschooling curriculum providers who produce foreign language materials, they are either not secular, they are very simplistic, or both. A program that concentrates mostly on nouns and identifying all the objects that you see will builds a personal word bank but will never lead to fluency. Verbs build fluency: Children say "I eat, I run, I sit, I sleep," not "Chair! Book! Cookie!" (Well, yes. They do yell *cookie* and *ice cream* without accompanying verbs.) Verbs are also more difficult to manipulate than nouns in an unfamiliar language. It's a lot easier to write a curriculum about nouns than it is to teach a child to use verbs in a meaningful way.

Cleaning the House and Calling It Schoolwork

If one of your goals in homeschooling is to turn out a productive, useful member of society, then somewhere along the line you want to incorporate life skills into the educational mix. An ace student, who spouts philosophical theories yet appears clueless in front of a washing machine, missed something along the way. These students manage to finally function in the real world — I know several of them — but learning rudimentary skills such as clothes-dryer manipulation, soup-can opening, and button sewing takes much more time and effort than it needs to if you begin early. (Okay. You're right. Some of them never get to button sewing.)

Some life skills, such as tooth brushing and face washing, fall into the normal preschool routine of your day. Unless these skills need to be actively taught (as with a special-needs student), they probably don't qualify as homeschool

subject material. Cleaning, cooking, and mending or sewing, on the other hand, definitely count as school-worthy subjects. Schools call these topics Family and Consumer Science (also known as home economics) and award a credit or more to students who pursue this information in high school.

Teaching home skills as part of your homeschool offers a couple distinct advantages.

- **If you set aside specific time during your week to accomplish something, it's more likely to get done than the projects you plan to get around to sooner or later.** At our house, "sooner or later" never comes, and the pile of laundry continues to sit in the corner unsorted and unloved.
- **If you set aside a particular portion of your day or week to tackle certain tasks, you can teach them in a somewhat organized manner.** Showing your 5-year-old how to wipe down the baseboards with a warm, moist cloth takes a bit more time than demonstrating to a 12-year-old, but 5-year-olds think wiping baseboards is fun, and they're closer to the ground than 12-year-olds to begin with.



TIP You can teach an abundance of skills as Family Science. A few ideas to get you started follow:

- **House cleaning basics:** Making the bed, picking up clothes, sorting and shelving toys in the children's bedrooms. Also includes dusting and vacuuming.
- **House cleaning advanced:** Closet organization, baseboard dusting, bathroom and kitchen cleansing.
- **Cooking skills:** Measuring ingredients (also math), oven and microwave use, dish washing.
- **Cooking skills advanced:** Meal preparation, meal planning, nutrition, gourmet holiday dishes.
- **Sewing skills:** Sewing on buttons, mending holes, cutting off pants to make shorts, and so on.

- **Sewing advanced:** Creating a garment from a pattern, making household items, such as placemats, napkins, and simple curtains.
- **Needle arts:** Crochet, rug hooking, knitting, needlepoint projects to decorate the house. These projects count as home ec and recreation at the same time.



We use Friday afternoon as Home Ec day. (I still use the older term. *Family and Consumer Science* doesn't roll off my tongue as nicely as Home Ec does.) From the time after lunch to whenever the cookies come out of the oven, I focus on wet and dry measurements, food preparation, table settings, nutrition, kitchen organization, meal planning, and other aspects of cooking. Currently we concentrate on making fun foods, such as crisp rice treats, peanut butter cookies, and snack mix because I want my children to enjoy their time in the kitchen before they begin creating vegetarian meals or meat extravaganzas.

Saturday morning, although not officially a school day, functions as Home Ec day number two: We spend a couple hours picking up the house and doing the cleaning jobs that don't get done during the week. The vacuum, carpet cleaner, dust rags, and other implements of organization make their appearance and do their duty. Then we sit down to lunch in a much cleaner atmosphere than the one that greeted us over breakfast.



ARRANGE YOUR WEEK AROUND AN ARTS DAY

One way to incorporate the arts into your schedule is to set aside an entire day or afternoon to pursue art, music, physical education, or drama. Art, music, speech, and drama fit together into a nice four-subject package that fills an afternoon. PE can take up an entire afternoon on its own if you let it.

Too much creativity at one time tends to fry your learners, so select your classes with care. Scheduling all the extras on one day may be a little bit of arts overload, but you can certainly incorporate two or more — depending on the classes you choose — without much brain

strain. And the change in coursework gives your children a break from the endless round of math, English, social studies, and science.

If you know a parent who specializes in one of the areas who you want to teach, ask her if she'd like to join with you and teach the class. Her children then become part of your arts day classes, and the kids have someone to share the day with. If you like, you can teach the classes on your own and keep the learning within your own family.

Whichever way you choose to go, everyone benefits from a day spent away from the daily grind. In much the same way that a field trip revives low spirits, an arts day keeps creative juices running. Who knows? Your children may even think of this as a "free day" each week because the subjects differ so much from the daily routine.

Chapter 28

Making It Adventurous with Activities and Groups

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Completing great projects with busy hands**
- **Making the world goes 'round with volunteers**
- **Finding your place in an organization**
- **Strategizing and engineering the day away**

Homeschooling doesn't have to take place at home each and every day. Perhaps you want to augment this week's art class, so you load up the kids and take them to the nearest art museum. You and yours have spent some time studying pointillism, and your scholars want to see an actual specimen or two. Or maybe your child shows an interest in machines. Instead of working through a textbook on machines and how they go, your students take a few afternoons to build a model engine that demonstrates how engines actually work.

Perhaps you want your kids to learn skills you don't currently possess, or you want to join a group that does things. Finding those organizations can prove a challenge, but they can be important (especially if you homeschool an introverted only, as I do right now). There comes a point, with some families, where socialization does become an issue.

Homeschool gives you the flexibility to add the not-so-typical educational opportunities into your family's week. These adventures may last an afternoon, a week, or a whole semester. If you and yours find them extremely worthwhile, they may even take a permanent place in your planning.

This chapter delves into the excitement of outside-the-box learning, those times that you pursue information for its own sake. These experiences create both memories and knowledge. Your students remember what they *do* more

than the words they read every time. Give one or more of these ideas a try and create memories at the same time.

Dirtying Your Hands with a Project

I know, I know. Projects take time. They take space. And they're messy.

But what provides a greater sense of "I did it myself" than a good project? Whether you choose a relatively clean plastic model or definitely messy papier-mâché, projects get your students involved in doing rather than reading. They experience instead of passively watching. And you hope they have fun in the process.



REMEMBER Not all these ideas appeal to every student. Go with your family's likes and dislikes; in fact, you'll probably come up with a possible project list on your own that includes a few of the options that I describe in the following sections. After you discover a worthwhile project, schedule it and give it a try.

Dissecting an owl pellet

People feel strongly about owl pellets. They are either in the this-is-truly-cool camp or the how-gross-can-you-get camp. There seems to be no neutral ground.

Owl pellets are inexpensive, they often come two or more to a package, and they're … um … well, I guess you could call them owl hairballs. The idea is that the owl eats something, such as a small mammal, and then regurgitates the animal's bones, which the owl's digestive system has already wrapped into a neat bundle. A helpful science company locates these pellets, disinfects them with heat, and then sells them to willing students.

If your child shows an interest in skeletons, bones, or the insides of living things, then she may enjoy disassembling one of these and finding out what the owl ate. Along with the pellets, most owl-pellet companies give you a chart that helps you identify the skeleton.



TIP If you want to see how this is done before you attempt it at home, you can undertake a virtual owl-pellet dissection online at www.kidwings.com/virtual-pellet/. Any science supply company or good teacher education store should sell owl pellets. Online, Genesis Inc. sells an Owl Pellet Investigation kit (www.pellet.com; phone 800-473-5538), and Mountain Home Biological (www.pelletlab.com; phone 800-958-9629) sells individual pellets.

Playing amateur archaeologist

Short of a local 2,000-year-old burial pit, amateur archaeology is actually as close as your local toy or educational store that sell "artifacts" actually embedded into blocks of hard clay that your child can spend the next several weeks uncovering. Those toy people are helpful. Aren't they?

You may shudder inwardly at the mess that such a project makes. (And it does make quite a mess. Think dust. Little piles of dust. Layers of dust. Now you get the picture.) However, if you can get past the dust, these kits leave your children with much more than the stones or trinkets they uncover.



AT OUR HOUSE One of my children is currently recycling an archaeology kit. The first child, the actual recipient, was excited about the idea of archaeology until he realized that this particular scientist spends much more time with a toothbrush and pocketknife than in front of the press announcing amazing discoveries. A few weeks with the tool and paintbrush, and he was happy to pass the kit to his little sister. I rejoice to think of the thousands of dollars and extra years in college this little kit may save me. Now, you see, archaeology no longer appears on my son's list of possible college majors. (Good thing he found out *before* taking advanced courses.)

The child that the kit was passed down to, by the way, loves the process as well as the promised booty. So I prepare myself for several more weeks of red dust.

Creating a garden

What better way to explore botany than by planting, managing, and harvesting a small garden? Daily trips to your garden can involve as little time or as much time as you like, yet through those visits your child watches as seeds sprout (or fail to), leaves appear, stalks grow, and finally fruit and seeds make an appearance. She also learns firsthand that plants need water and sunlight, zucchini grow as big as you let them, and spearmint smells great but takes over the entire yard unless you hem it in.



TIP Gardening doesn't require a huge space of land. A couple small pots on the windowsill with herb seeds in them make a great garden! That way, you don't even have to go outside to watch the plants grow; checking their progress becomes as easy as walking by the kitchen window. And if you're not into gardening personally, the smaller the garden, the fewer plants you … er … your children need to care for.

Building a train layout

What's educational about a train layout? In addition to being just plain fun and a great way to pull family talents together, train buffs learn some basic electricity skills, physics, and spatial skills. With loose track pieces, for example, the current ceases to flow and the train goes nowhere. A home-built trestle that doesn't take load into account will *not* defy the laws of physics. Instead, it will crash. And the layout enhances your child's spatial skills because the whole design needs to take building size; terrain features, such as mountains; and track flow into account.

Train and track size, optional model building kits, and sculpting terrain all add interest and skills to the hobby. Train sizes range from the tiny Z scale that fits into the palm of your hand to the G scale that you may see wandering around Christmas trees or outdoor gardens. Learning to create scenery and buildings opens yet another fascinating hobby for your child at the same time that it trims the overall railroading costs. You also save when you purchase model car kits that your railroad lover can assemble himself rather than buying the ready-made variety.

This is a hobby that easily includes the entire family or anyone who happens

to be interested in it. Train cars and layouts fail to thrill me, for example, but I thoroughly enjoy creating the buildings that complete the scene. And the train lovers at my house are happy to let me do it because that way Mom's involved in a hobby they love, and they don't have to mess with the small plastic house parts. They much prefer messing with track pieces than assembling buildings with glue.



TIP If you decide to pursue model railroading in earnest, keep in mind that the most important (and most expensive) part of the train should be the engine. Because the engine does all the work, you're better off to purchase all your cars separately and pay a little more for the engine than to buy a train in a box that contains all the parts the manufacturer thinks you need.

Burying yourself in papier-mâché

Although papier-mâché may not be your medium of choice, your children can still create an amazing number of things with soggy paper. Bowls, platters, piñatas, masks, volcano forms, model train layouts, draped decorative figures, and much more emerge under their hands with the help of paper and watered-down glue (if they're doing it the second-grader's way, watered-down flour).

Although incredibly messy during the creation process, papier-mâché generally cleans up with warm soapy water — as do mâché-covered children. An excellent opportunity for getting your children's hands into your work if the children enjoy that type of thing, papier-mâché tends to be a multiday project. Your children assemble a layer of wet paper strips over a form, let it dry, and repeat the process. After it's dry, it can be painted, decoupaged, decorated with strips of tissue paper, or whatever.

Assembling a model

Putting a paper, plastic, and/or wood model together can teach your kids project completion and attention to detail at the same time that it reinforces history or science. Your children learn much more about the *Titanic,* for example, when they take the time to assemble and paint a scale model of the *Titanic* than they will learn from browsing through pictures of the ship on the Internet. There's something to be said for involving your hands in the

process.



TIP You can find most models of animals (with or without visible internal parts), boats, planes, vehicles, historical armies, the brain, buildings, and much more at your local hobby store.

Pretending It's Le Louvre

Whether you go to an art museum, natural history museum, science museum, or children's museum, or even if you include a truly unusual museum during your vacation travels (such as the Hallmark [Greeting Card] Visitors Center in Kansas City), your children come away with new knowledge. Even if the museum becomes a monthly event, you can concentrate on a specific part each time you visit.



TIP If you find yourself visiting museums much, you may want to look into a membership. Many museums offer a membership exchange that automatically grants you entrance to museums across the country. For example, the passes we received when we joined our local science museum got us into Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. This little perk turns into quite a deal if you enjoy road trips *and* museums.

You can incorporate several museum-going strategies that enhance the educational benefit that your children receive from museum visits.

- **Equip each child with a sketchbook and pencil.** Sketching an exhibit or two in a museum is popular among students in England. My children thoroughly enjoy carrying their sketchbooks with them when they travel. They return home with illustrations of Charlie Chaplin's hat and cane and dinosaur feet. Do they actually look like hats and canes and feet? Don't ask. The kids had fun.
- **Study the exhibit before you get there.** Many museums these days offer educational supplements online that you can use to bone up on the exhibit

contents before you arrive. This way, you do some of the investigation beforehand, and your children arrive prepared.

- **Study the exhibit after you get home.** Carry a flyer home with you or download an online educational guide to increase your student's knowledge after the trip has ended. Look up the exhibit topic in the library or in reference books. This turns a one-day trip into a memorable, knowledge-gathering adventure.
- **Ask your student to write you a short synopsis of the exhibit(s) she enjoyed the most.** Why were these the favorites? What did she learn that she didn't know before? What would she like to know next about the exhibit if she were to continue studying it? Questions like these help your student process new information, and they give you an insight into what your child truly enjoyed about the trip.

Getting Past Bugs Bunny

Give history class a new twist when you fire up the DVD player or stream video online. Sometimes the best way to explain a concept is to show it. Thankfully, movie reels exist from before 1915 to the present, and some of them (transferred to DVDs or available online) provide excellent, dated footage that allows you to use the films for their cultural content — not necessarily their movie magic.

Old movies and cartoons do a great job of presenting the views of their times. This, in addition to the great historical information that you can glean from costuming and sets, makes them a treasure trove. You do, however, need to sit close so you can explain what the children see and how views change through the years.



TIP Every now and then, you may run across a video that takes one subject and treats its use throughout the years. We have, for example, a video that shows the development of movie special effects while incorporating several early film snippets to tell the story. When the video mentioned the 1902 movie *A Trip to the Moon* as a landmark in early special effects, we dug up a copy of the 1902 classic and showed it to the

kids. Thus, our children received a good introduction to the topic as well as an in-depth look at historical footage.

Cartoons also provide a great look at the development of color and animation in addition to cultural history. Watching the cartoons of the early ’30s, when animation studios were only allowed to use music that they already owned, gives your students a great peek into a different time. If you have the opportunity to see some done with early Technicolor, it shows you how inventive the artists could be with only shades of red and green.

You may want to look at

- **Cartoons from the ’30s and ’40s:** Watching cartoons from this time period gives the viewer an understanding of the development of color in animation. Watch a few of these to see how many movies reflect American culture during the Depression and World War II years. You can also use them as examples of social propaganda.
- **Silent movies from the 1920s:** These take you back to the time when cars were new and the ice truck still plodded down the streets. *Metropolis*, *The Black Pirate*, and *The General* are examples of classic silent movies. The best-known actors and actresses of the era included Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks.
- **Musicals from the ’40s and ’50s:** Musicals specialize in the art of escapism, and the gems of the ’40s and ’50s weren’t any different. In the 1940s, the film industry, combining escapism with patriotism, gave us *Holiday Inn, Blue Skies,* and *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. The 1950s tried to keep the ball rolling with *Oklahoma, The King and I,* and *Pajama Game*. By the end of the 1950s, the heyday of the screen musical was mostly over.
- **Movies created from books:** Because most books take place during a specific, identifiable time period, either present, past, or future, they make good launching points for cultural studies. And although a movie made from a book may not remain letter true, it does add a visual component that the pages sometimes lack. For books-made-into-movies that provide historical chewiness, you may want to look at *Rebecca* (still considered one of the best suspense novels ever written), *To Kill A Mockingbird* (set in the south during the Depression), or the 1951 version of *A Christmas*

Carol, starring Alastair Sim.

Volunteering Builds Compassion

Compassion happens in your children when they reach out and help someone or something else. If you want your kids to care about those around them, introduce them to volunteering. Although they can probably volunteer at the local museum after a certain age, museum work won't enlarge their ability to care quite as much as some of the other available options.

If you want to know if an organization or institution would be interested in working with your children, give them a call. Some organizations, such as nursing homes, welcome weekly or semi-weekly visitors as long as a parent comes with the children to keep them on track. Other groups prefer to work with the students directly without parental help.

Some organizations love to work with homeschoolers because they're available during the day when other helpers aren't. This is definitely a mark in your favor because many groups keep business hours and would prefer help in the 9-to-5 range rather than the 5-to-9-time period when most students are actually available.



TIP To jump-start the volunteering bandwagon, you may want to contact

- **The local animal shelter or Humane Society:** Especially if you have an animal lover at your house, the Humane Society and its kin provide a great place for helping out. It may quell the protective instinct in your child without you giving every stray turtle, snake, and puppy dog a home. (Be aware, however, that shelters routinely euthanize many of the sick, dangerous, or unadoptable animals that they take in. If visiting Fufu's cage the next week and finding it empty will upset your child, then you may want to choose another volunteer option or seek out a no-kill shelter.)
- **A nursing home or retirement center:** Sometimes the administrators and staff at these institutions enjoy providing small programs or ongoing companions for residents who may appreciate someone to talk to.
- **Assist with a local food drive:** The folks at food pantries need help

unpacking crates, checking off products, shelving products, and sometimes even packing baskets that go to families or groups.

- **After-school programs:** Students who are willing to tutor or help younger children are often welcome.

Although this isn't an exhaustive list, you can see from the variety presented that many opportunities exist. You may find a few of them in your own local community. Search the Internet, locate a few local nonprofit organizations, and see what you can find.



TIP If volunteering doesn't fit neatly into any other subject category, then record it under Volunteer Experience. Portfolio reviewers, college admissions staff, and potential employers appreciate students who spend time helping others.

Packing Up the Minivan

Schedule the family vacation to do double duty as school time. Of course, if you want to teach on the road, you have to schedule an educational destination of some sort or pack schoolbooks for the hotel room. Simply piling everybody into the car and announcing the trip as official school time doesn't really count — unless you're an unschooler, but then you know how to make it educational.

To use Las Vegas and its environs as an example of an educational romp (perhaps not one of the cities that you thought about taking your children to), you can

- **Visit the Paris! Paris! Hotel and talk about the cities, villages, and culture of Europe.** While you're there, grab a pastry from one of the small restaurants and eat "outside" at one of the small tables next to the walkways. It's not quite lunch on Avenue des Champs-Élysées, but it conveys the idea.
- **Visit the Hoover Dam and its Depression-era exhibits.** We talked quite a bit about the 1930s as we toured the exhibit and discussed the various

stories and memories passed down to the children through each family line.



VIVA LAS VEGAS

Part of the reason we travel is to teach the children about the world around them. Therefore, each time the kids pack their bags, we consider it schooling on the road. We always take math and spelling because they're ongoing subjects whose lessons we never seem to finish. I also pack their flight bags with books (usually biographical histories that they love) that I want them to read on the way. If we travel more than six hours by car or plane, most of the week's reading is done before we ever reach our destination!

Usually we try to work at least one learning destination into the trip because others tend to pop up along the way. A trip to the Orlando Mouse House probably counts only as walking exercise, but visiting the reproduction of Tutankhamen's tomb in the King Tut Museum (at the Luxor hotel) counts as history. (And it's much less expensive.)

Last spring, we descended on Las Vegas with the sole intent of exploring the city's educational attractions. Believe it or not, Las Vegas offers plenty of educational content. In the three days we were there, we racked up about eight hours of purely educational adventures each day. (The other four hours probably counted as play.)

- **Identify desert plants on the way from Las Vegas to the Hoover Dam.** Although my children have read about deserts, they had never seen one. So the trip through the Mojave Desert provided some lively conversation.
- **Tour the dolphin exhibit at the Mirage hotel.** This tour includes several small dolphin tanks as well as an optional tour through the tank water purification systems and science rooms. Great for budding engineers.
- **See the white tigers and lions at the Mirage hotel.** In back of the dolphin exhibit, you can tour a garden full of exotic animals at Siegfried and Roy's Secret Garden.
- **Visit the Venetian Hotel and discuss Venetian and Renaissance life.** Though they think a city with canals would be grand, my children have never seen Venice. We wandered through the hotel and discussed true Venetian architecture, culture, and civilization.

And that’s only the beginning. With this partial list alone, you spend time in history with the Hoover Dam; science with the Hoover Dam, the desert, and the animals; and culture with the Venetian hotel. Add the conversations (this counts as social studies) that your children inevitably get into with various residents, such as store clerks, and you have a full week’s work. Set aside some math time each morning before you set out, and you’re there!

Of course, some destinations start out more learning-oriented than others. If you look at things creatively, however, you can find education in many places:

- A trip to the coast counts as ocean science (or oceanography if your students are beyond third grade).
- A trip to the Northeast counts as history when you spend time in Boston, Philadelphia, and a number of other cities that played a part in the founding of the United States.
- If you leave the house to visit a different culture or part of the country, it counts as social studies and geography, no matter what else the area may offer in historical or scientific worth.



AVOID TEXTBOOK BOREDOM

If you ever went to school, you probably remember how boring textbooks could be — page after page, chapter after chapter, problem after problem. That shiny new book that looked so inviting in September lost its appeal sometime around January (or even before). Some books are well written, but even the best texts drag in spots. I always thought they were *supposed* to read that way.

If your child feels the way I do, then you begin to see that unmistakable "Oh, no! Not again!" look in her eyes when you present The Textbook for school day number 153. Can you blame her?

When you schedule a little break now and then, it revives interest in the text when it reappears. Breaks can be just as educational as textbook learning, even if they don't exactly match the material covered on page 688 of said book. (Some homeschool families avoid what they consider the textbook problem altogether by reading almost exclusively from library books and what they term *real books*. Chapter 12 tells you more.)

Look at learning through a wider lens than grade-level textbooks, and you begin to see a big, useful world out there. Did anyone give you a parenting handbook when you began the journey? Probably not. You learned about baths and bedtimes the hard way, maybe with the help of a more experienced person at your elbow — or on the other end of the phone.

Likewise, learning encompasses much more than the narrow fields assembled in most textbooks. The books have their place, but there's something to be said for real-life learning as well. What constitutes real-life learning?

If you take a break for a few days, you could

- Take a hike and learn about the trees and plants around you.
- Fly a kite and notice when and why it flies — as well as when it doesn't.
- Visit a museum and learn something new.
- Seek out a video from the library or online about a topic that you always wanted to explore.
- Design and plant an outdoor or container garden.

If you use textbooks, walking away from them for a few days won't kill you or your student. And, if you use the time to embark on other educational adventures, you both return to the book routine with new information as well as refreshed.

Seeing the Sights or Staying at Home

Homeschoolers who've been at this long enough to develop a network of friends can readily tell you that finding something other than homeschooling to do is easier than staying at home and teaching. Not that working with the kids is boring, but the thought of spending the afternoon with other people always raises interest. We could be ice-skating with friends or lunching at the park. Maybe it's not too late to attend that field trip. But no, here we sit, finishing the daily math assignment. It's enough to give one the doldrums.

Math assignments have their place, but so do relaxation, volunteering, and group activities. All of anything makes your student lopsided. As Aristotle once said while gazing out the window at the other homeschool boys whose work was already finished for the day, "Moderation in all things is good."

Although your social adventures are only limited to your imagination and the number of hours that you're willing to leave the house each week, here are some general ideas to get the thoughts churning:

- **Play ball, tennis, or golf.** Regardless of your favorite sport, the local parks and recreation department probably offers some kind of spring or summer classes. It's a great way to meet other people and maybe even find someone to play with. After signing up for tennis lessons last summer, the parents in my time slot sat around the picnic table to get acquainted. It only took us a few minutes to realize that all but one of us taught our kids at home.
- **Meet a playgroup at the park.** Homeschool park groups incorporate all ages from preschoolers on up. Some families pack a lunch and stay most of the day, while others drop by for a bit to spend some time and then wander off to other activities.
- **Play in the homeschool orchestra.** And brush up on your note theory at the same time. If your community doesn't offer a homeschool orchestra, maybe it organizes a theater group, choir, or some other artsy conclave.
- **Join or create a field trip group.** Some homeschool groups meet once a month or so only to participate in field trips together. This is a way to meet other families, see new sights, and not feel like you're committed every week for the rest of the semester.

Finding an Organization That Helps

You Grow

Once upon a time, there was a small boy who thought he was an only child — he wasn't. One of his first questions consisted of pointing to his much older brother and sister and asking who their parents were and then suggesting they might want to go in search of them. He didn't know many words, but his siblings got the drift. He loved being an only child, and he loved being alone. His loving and doting parents allowed this for many years and then one day decided that he was now 12 years old and things needed to change. So they started to search for available options.

The child, of course, was my youngest. I didn't want to turn him into a social flutterby — far from it. But he did need to learn how to communicate with other people who weren't almost 30 years old. Part of the joy of homeschooling is that kids get to work and hang with other children of all ages, and this wasn't happening. His nearest-age friends were freshmen in college. I needed to find an organization to join, and I did.

If your littles need a little more interaction too, as well as picking up some very useful skills, several great organizations exist just for that purpose. You can

- **Get your hands dirty with 4-H.** Thanks to the land-grant universities, which reside in every state of the United States, 4-H is a nationwide program that teaches all kinds of knowledge and skills to kids ages 8 to 18 (Grades 3 to 12). Although farm animals play a big part in 4-H, kids can also learn cake decorating, forestry, genealogy, weather and climate, and wildlife, to name only a few. 4-H is for city kids as well as farm kids. Available projects will vary by state. 4-H groups each have their own personality and vibe, so you may want to try a few different ones before you settle into a club. If your child finds a club where she fits, she'll be more interested in following 4-H for multiple years. (www.4h.org)
- **Recite the Scout pledge.** Both Boy Scout and Girl Scout clubs abound in almost every city and town. Learn camping skills and earn badges for trying and mastering new things. Within the Boy Scout framework, kids ages 14 to 20 can join Venturers or Sea Scouts for adventure, and 10- to 20-year-olds learn about careers in Explorers. Boy Scout groups begin with kindergartners for both boys and girls and go through high school.

Girl Scouts welcomes girls from kindergarten through high school, and the program concentrates on STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), the outdoors, life skills, and entrepreneurship. (www.scouting.org; www.girlscouts.org)

- **Gather round the Camp Fire.** This organization, which used to be called the Camp Fire Girls when it began in 1910, now welcomes both boys and girls into its circles. Open to any child from ages 5 to 17, Camp Fire offers both after-school programs and clubs, and depending on your location, they may offer several special interest camps. (campfire.org)
- **Experience nature as a family with Navigators USA.** This scouting group enlarges the scouting circle to include entire families and members of all ages. While you might already have a Navigators group in your area, the organization is happy to help you start your own. (www.navigatorsusa.org)
- **Put environment first with Spiral Scouts International.** Dedicated to the environment and the turning of the seasons, as well as personal development, Spiral Scouts is for children ages 3 to 18. While they exclude no one, their materials emphasize the pagan cycle of the year. (www.spiralscouts.org)
- **Seek balance through martial arts.** Perhaps the gentle movement of tai chi interests you, or your kids are interested in the movement of aikido, judo, or another martial art. A martial arts studio can be a place where children not only gain physical ability but friendships as well. Be sure to look for reviews in your area or seek a friend's referral: Not all martial arts studios are the same, and not all art forms will suit your family.
- **Earn adult badges with Quest Scouts:** If all this sounds interesting and you're feeling a bit left out, take a look at Quest Scouts. Designed for adults or adult/kid teams, these activities explore a particular topic and then you get a badge when it's complete. I can think of small groups of older teens who might enjoy pursuing these quests together. Maybe you can, too. (www.questscouts.com)

Thinking about Playing or Playing to Think?

Dig into the toy box and drag out some fun! Whether you play a good board game, spend some time building robots at the computer, or build the greatest K'NEX contraption known to man, you're actually learning as you go. And so is your child — unless you "help" by building or playing while your child looks on. Be a good parent and buy your own building set if you find yourself "helping" for hours on end. Or at least play with the toys after your child goes to bed in the evenings. (That's what I do.)

Educational mavens and even some homeschoolers eschew games because they're not *educational* enough — these people have a problem with fun in education. They believe that if it's fun, it can't be educational. But think about it: Which do you remember more? That science chapter you read in sixth grade that discussed the ins and outs of force and planes? Or the last track that you built for your small, metal racing cars that started with a magnificent hill?

The point is that you learn more when you enjoy it. Although playing with a game or toy actually takes more time than simply reading a page of information and checking the topic off your list, your child probably won't remember that reading assignment tomorrow. Let her spend an entire afternoon building with (or without) some general parameters, however, and you may be surprised what she learns by trying things out.

For instance, how do you learn logic and strategy? Well, you could work through an introductory logic book. (If you use a classical curriculum and you want to teach formal logic skills, you'll probably do that anyway. Classical curriculum is described in Chapter 11.) Another option is to learn to play chess, the game of Go, or even checkers.

To play these games, one player is pitted against another player with playing pieces in the middle. Strategy games come to us from all corners of the earth and all time periods. The ancient Chinese and the Vikings played strategy games to sharpen thinking skills and while away extra hours, as did the English knights and Japanese strategists. Participation in strategy games can help your child

- **Build math skills.** Games such as chess transfer to better math skills because students learn to think ahead. If they play a game where they work with patterns, solve a puzzle, or think through a problem, that

game's learning will translate to better math thinking.

- **Learn to think ahead.** Strategy games rely on logical progression; if you want to win, you need to move your pieces in the right way while always keeping your final goal in mind.
- **Learn to be patient.** You can't sit down to a game of chess and finish in ten minutes, unless you play a variant of chess, such as Tic-Tac-Check, where the board is only 16 spaces square and your goal is to move your pieces into 4 spaces vertically or horizontally. Your pieces, however, move the way they do on a regular chessboard. (The last time I played this game, I got slaughtered by a 12-year-old, but I digress.)



TIP If you don't know how to play strategy games on your own but you want your children to play, you have several options. You can

- **Learn to play the game together.** This adds another game to your arsenal of knowledge, and it ensures that you both have someone to play with.
- **Join a local chess or Go club.** These clubs often offer tournament play for members of all ages, so a strategy club membership may be an option if your child enjoys competition.
- **Play on the computer.** You can find strategy games of all kinds online, both free and for purchase.

Ante Up

There's more to board games these days than Monopoly and Clue. For the past 30 years or so, game manufacturers have produced games that actually have learning value, and they're not the ones stamped "Educational Game" on the side. Who wants to play an Educational Game? No one at my house, and probably no one at yours!

Games come in all different price ranges and complexities. The one thing they have in common is that you aren't going to find most of them at your local Target or Walmart. These games are produced for the specialty game

market, and they're sold exclusively through stores that specialize in games.

They also take a varying amount of time to play. You can pick up a German game that plays out in 40 minutes to an hour because almost all German games do. Or you can assemble a group of your favorite cronies and spend three days building ancient civilizations (minus time to run home for sleep and a shower). It's entirely up to you. Check out Chapter 29 for some games to fill your closet.



TIP There's a whole subgenre of homeschoolers who use games for teaching. They call themselves Gameschoolers, and their game arsenal encompasses everything from a normal deck of cards to involved games like Evolution, from Northstar Games.



TIP If you can't find a game store in your area, a few vendors sell these games online. One of the benefits of finding a local game store is that you meet other people who play the same games you do. Another perk (if the staff is worth its salt) is that the game store personnel can point you to new or additional games that are similar to your current favorite, and they may even have an inkling about the educational value of the games that they sell.

Thrilling the Engineer's Heart

What way-cool thing can I build today? If your child thinks along these lines, then you may want to decide on a building system and accumulate a set from here and there. One of the nice things about the various building systems is that after you select one, the individual components intermix so your child's only boundary is the realm of the imagination.



TIP Although science toys certainly aren't limited to building sets, playing with science toys provides an excellent means of instilling

creativity and learning about simple machines and some physics. Chemistry sets, microscopes, and weather stations are also available, but they're more educational in scope and this chapter focuses on learning while you play rather than buying a box marked "Educational Toy" and expecting the children to play with it for hours on end.



TIP

Several companies produce a few science toys and building systems:

- **Architecture blocks:** Whether your child builds with a simple set of wooden blocks or a reproduction of a 19th-century stone set, she learns about arches, support, and structures as she goes. Building some fantastic structure counts as science; telling you about it in lavish detail is language arts.
- **K'NEX:** This building system makes everything from moving vehicles to roller coasters. Like LEGO, K'NEX offers both a consumer division and an educational division. If your child has already fallen in love with K'NEX, you can add simple machines and robotics to the collection that you already have. For more information, see their website: www.knex.com.
- **LEGO:** Who doesn't have enough LEGO bricks to build a life-size shed behind the house? If you have a LEGO lover at your house, then you already have the makings of great science learning. Write down what they do as they do it and count it as school time. If they build a bridge, that's engineering and physics. Playing with moving robots becomes a part of small machines class. Taking small parts and building larger objects out of them is math because your student then works with parts to make a whole.
- **LEGO Education:** The educational arm of LEGO, this division specializes in creating LEGO pieces that your child can put together in such a way as to learn about science. Your child can learn a special set of science skills — the workings of simple machines, industrial machines, and so on — from putting together individual sets that are topic-specific. Although not sold as a toy (and certainly not priced like one), if your child already learns through LEGOs and you want to add a motor and specific scientific parts to your collection, this may be a good next step.

Although we have a few problems keeping the LEGO Education pieces in their educational box (so I can find them the next time that I want to teach a lesson on simple machines during school time), my pre-engineer loves these sets and has learned enough through them to be well worth my money. For more information, go to www.education.lego.com or call 800-362-4308.

- **Snap Circuits:** Components snap together to form circuits. Designed for children age 5 and older, each color-coded piece snaps onto the clear base to complete a project. Working with this set, your child can learn about the principles of electricity, schematic reading, and develop creatively as he builds doorbells, burglar alarms, fans, lighting, and more. Several sizes are available: We saved time and money and bought the big one. Find out more at www.elenco.com.
- **ZomeTools:** Scientists designed this building system. Watch your children create DNA strands, molecular structures, or giraffes with the Zome System. My husband stumbled across this set years ago while on a business trip, and my children have used it for a long time. Look on the ZomeTools website, www.zometool.com, for lesson plans that you can download for free or purchase as a printed set. We used this set through high-school geometry; with the geometry book the students constructed various solids as an add-on to their geometry class.

VIEWING THE WORLD THROUGH CREATIVE EYES

When you walk down the streets of New York City, do you see the trash on the sidewalks and the pollution in the air? Or do you see the beauty of the skyline, the busyness of the sidewalks, and catch the excitement in the air? Two people who trot down the same street in New York can see two entirely different scenes. It all depends on your perspective.

Looking at the world through eyes that see potential is much more fun than being a fuddy-duddy. Believe me, I know a few of each, and the creative people enjoy life more. They can always think of something to do, whether that means dragging out the tissue paper to decorate the main room in paper flowers or using every piece of green construction paper in the house to design a piecemeal landscape for the model train layout. It may even mean gathering up a few of your best quilts to create a tent outdoors. Whatever they're up to, they're always busy.

Using games and toys as educational tools helps to foster that kind of thinking. Basically, it shows your children how to think outside the box without ever stating that today they must think outside the box. They figure out that learning is much more than completing workbook

pages; that learning has more to do with living life and working with what you're given than writing the correct answer on a blank line.

Your job is to walk with them, praise their progress, and quietly determine where the activities fit into your planner. If you do it this way, it may be years before they realize that they're really learning. By the time they figure it out, your children will probably be so used to having fun that they'll keep on doing it — one game at a time.

Part 6

The Part of Tens

IN THIS PART …

Discover ten educational games to incorporate into your homeschool.

Answer ten common questions that often plague homeschoolers, from curriculum choices to out-of-school friendships.

Chapter 29

Ten Educational Games That Enhance Your School Day

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Building your species and keeping up with the ecosystem**
- **Discussing your perspective on the world**
- **Combining monsters with spelling in a hilarious dungeon crawl**

What do you pull out when you want to play school rather than actually teach? Why, one of these games, of course! The games in this chapter offer you much more than Monopoly or Connect Four; in fact, you can substitute any one of these for a subject lesson once in a while with no regrets. From electrical circuits to business conglomerates and from food chains to famous battles, these games cover math, science, social studies, and language arts in the finest tradition of play. Although playing these games may take longer than it would to present a 10-to-20-minute lesson in whatever, there's something to be said for variety in the home schoolroom. Some of them can even be played solo, an unusual boon for games.



TIP You should be able to find all (or most) of these games at your local specialty game retailer. If your city manages to exist without a game store, you can usually order directly from the manufacturer from the website listed with each game, or try the following websites:

- Boardlandia: www.boardlandia.com
- Funagain Games: www.funagain.com

Anti-Monopoly

This is not your family Monopoly game. Invented by Ralph Auspach, a retired economics professor, you start the game as a monopolist or small business. You get two parallel sets of rules and two ways to play the game; it's designed to show the difference between how a large corporation works and how a small business functions. Will you be a monopolist or a free market competitor? This is a game we pull down for high-school economics class; it is an update to the Landlord's Game invented by Elizabeth Magie on her dining room table. For two to eight players; ages 8 and up; from University Games, www.universitygames.com — if you lose your instructions, you can download more here. You can purchase from AreYouGame, www.areyougame.com.

Evolution

In Evolution you create, evolve, and sustain your species. Applying trait cards to a base species allows it to adapt to the ever-changing climate of the table. This game requires a unique strategy not found in many other games, and you can upgrade it with its expansion, Flight. You can also find Evolution in digital form through Steam (store.steampowered.com) and App stores. If you love this, you might also like Evolution: Climate, a stand-alone game (not an expansion to the original game). Recommended for ages 12 and older; for two to six players; www.northstargames.com.

Forbidden Island/Desert

Forbidden Island and its kin, Forbdden Desert and Forbidden Sky, are *cooperative* games that pit you against the board. You need to work together as a team or you will lose. Forbidden Island, the first of the series, traps you on an island that slowly sinks into the sea. You need to collect four treasures and escape before the water engulfs you. Each game in the series presents different challenges and contains slightly different rules. If you absolutely love this series, you may also want to look for Pandemic, a more complicated game by the same designer. For 2–4 players; ages 10 and up; www.gamewright.com.

The Garden Game

What do you get when you cross seeds, pollinators, predators, and the weather? Well, if you do it outside, you may get a garden out of it. If you do it inside, you'll probably find yourself in the middle of The Garden Game.

Your goal is to plant and pollinate your seeds before the predators or nasty weather gets the better of you. At the same time, you move around the board through the seasons. This game includes a nice, multipage discussion on plant pollination and gardening, and it definitely fits within an upper elementary or middle-school science curriculum. (My garden lover, however, loved playing this from age 5.) For two to six players, ages 8 and up; Ampersand Press; www.ampersandpress.com.

How Do You See the World?

Ths card game comes closer to traditionally educational than anything else in this chapter. Choose one of 100 cards, roll the die, and answer the open-ended question. Categories include reflections, relationships, aspirations, life's purpose, and beliefs. Typical questions for the game: How much do you want to work in a week? What is one meaningless activity you engage in? How does your past influence your future?

If you want your kids to reflect and communicate about all kinds of issues and thoughts, this may be a game for you. How Do You See The World? would also make a great downtime game, whether you use it after dinner, while you travel, or at a family gathering between activities. For one to however-many players; ages 12 and up; Authentic Agility Games; www.authenticagilitygames.com.

Into the Forest

This card game explores the food chains of the forest. From the animal and plant cards in your hand, you pit one portion of the food chain against another, much like the game of war. So if you lay down a Grass card, and your opponent places Millipedes on the table, your opponent gets your Grass card because Millipedes eat decaying grass.

Rather than win by point accumulation, players compete against a timer to simulate the never-ending cycle of life in the forest. List this game under

science. (If your students really enjoy the game and its concepts, this company also produces the game Onto the Desert, which focuses on survival in the desert climate.) For two to six players, ages 7 and up; Ampersand Press; www.ampersandpress.com.

Krypto

Krypto is one of those classic card games that people muse over. “Oh yes, I remember Krypto …” and they lapse into silence, wondering if it’s still available. Although kind of difficult to locate, the game is still around.

Each player gets five numerical cards, ranging anywhere from 1 to 25. Then a target card is turned face up; this is your goal card. Using all five cards, you need to somehow equal the target number through addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division.

Krypto also comes in a fractions supplement (fraction cards that you add to the regular Krypto game). Kryto accommodates one to ten players of any age; MPH Games manufactures the game; www.mphgames.net. You can also find this game on Amazon.com.

Periodic

Genius Games is known for its real science games, by real scientists. Periodic is no exception. In this game you create compounds by visiting each of their elements on the periodic table. Once you gather all needed ingredients, the compound becomes yours and it marches you toward victory.

This is a great game for learning about elements and compounds, not to mention memorizing the periodic table. In the box you’ll find the game instructions, but you’ll also see a booklet that discusses the science behind the game. Other games by Genius include: Ion, Covalence, Cytosis, and Tesla vs. Edison. For two to five players; ages 10 and up; Genius Games; www.geniusgames.org.

Spell Smashers

In Spell Smashers you play as a rugged adventurer, descending into dungeons

and defeating monsters. You use gold that you gain through your exploits to purchase upgrades that make you a better adventurer. And oh yes, this is a game about making words. You draw letters as you go into battle and use them to construct words. Just for fun, each monster that you encounter marches onto the board with an adjective card. A nasty elemental, you say? A tiny minotaur? The adjective cards modify the monsters, and each monster carries a letter that you can use in words after you defeat it.

This game makes spelling and word construction fun. Because of its fantasy wrapper, this is more appealing to kids than “Hey guys, wanna spell some words?” For one to five players; ages 12 and up; Renegade Game Studios; www.renegadegamestudios.com.

Wingspan

This is visually a beautiful game. You are a bird enthusiast: a bird watcher, ornithologist, or researcher. Your goal is to discover and assemble birds according to their habitat, and to do this you need to feed your birds, gather eggs (which allow you to access upgrades that help you gather more birds), and build your habitat.

This is an engine-building game. You have a certain set of cards, these cards all have certain abilities, and those abilities work together like a machine to help you win the game. Engine building is a particular genre of game; if you love this game, you may like Gizmos (less involved than Wingspan), or Terraforming Mars (more involved than Wingspan). For one to five players; ages 10 and up; Stonemaier Games; www.stonemaiergames.com.

Chapter 30

Ten Common Homeschool Fears

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Making friends as a homeschooler**
- **Purchasing the right curriculum**
- **Finding free time as a homeschooling parent**

Every homeschooler has fears that nag and whisper in the night. Maybe going with the flow would be better. Whether you're contemplating taking the leap into homeschooling, you're a first-year homeschooler, or you've been doing this for ages, one or more of the fears that I discuss in this chapter is bound to hit you sooner or later.

The good news is that they're only fears and nothing more. When the sun shines again and you look into those bright eyes that live at your house, you reach for the math book and know you're doing the right thing for your family. For the benefit of your middle-of-the-night uneasiness, this chapter contains the answers to classic homeschool fears.

My child will never make friends if I homeschool.

Actually, the truth is that it's harder to stay at home and actually do the work than it is to pile everybody into the car and trek across town to another homeschooler's house for the day. When I began teaching my children at home, I had it easy: Another homeschooler lived four houses down. However, keeping everybody inside until the day's work was done was still hard. Play sets longed for company, bikes sat idle, and five pairs of inline skates (belonging to the other children as well as to mine) cried for attention.

As long as you involve your child in activities with other homeschoolers or in the community and let him out of the house once in a while, your child will

make friends. Due to the nonsegregated nature of homeschooling, your child's friends may surprise you: Some will probably be a bit older, others younger, and she may even take a liking to the grandma down the street. (Who wouldn't like a woman who cultivates gorgeous flowerbeds and serves great cookies?)



TIP One of the easiest ways to meet other homeschoolers is to hang out where they hang out. Join a homeschool co-op. Participate in the local library homeschool activities. Call your YMCA, YWCA, or other athletic club and ask about daytime classes for homeschoolers. Sooner or later, you're bound to meet another family or two like yours.

I don't know enough to teach my child.

If you took it, you can teach it. Did you make it through second grade? Then you can teach second-grade math and reading.

Remember that I'm not talking about lecturing to a 30-member class. Picture yourself with your second-grader reading words and sentences while snuggled on your lap. Perhaps you sit next to your fourth-grader and talk about fractions while you cut an extra-large, chocolate-chip cookie into sixths for a tasty math lesson.

After awhile, when your child brings questions to you that you can't answer off the top of your head, you learn together. Hand in hand with your child, you read through the textbook or research at the library or on the Internet. You'll want to stay a bit ahead of your student in some classes, and you can pursue other subjects together. If you have high-school-age students, they can do the legwork and bring you the answers.



AT OUR HOUSE I already find myself relearning or reading ahead a bit to cover lessons in our homeschool. For some subjects, such as French, I actually keep a bit ahead of the children so that I can answer questions as they arise. (I also happen to enjoy French, and I work through the lessons

myself to keep my mind sharp.) In other subjects, such as world history, I wing it as we go, and I look up information that I've forgotten as the need arises.

My child will miss out on socialization.

That depends. What kind of socialization do you want your child to have? If you're talking about being herded into a room with 20 or more other children and told not to talk all day, then your child's probably going to miss that experience. If you mean the socialization that your child receives during ten-minute lunches in an impersonal school cafeteria where a monitor walks around the room constantly so that children remain silent while they eat, then your child probably won't experience that at home, either.

If you mean the kind of socialization that arises from the opportunity to interact with other humans in a natural environment, then homeschooling provides a sterling chance to gain the social skills that can prepare your child for a well-adjusted adulthood. Homeschooling gives your child the chance to experience life as it is lived, rather than institutionalization for six hours each day. Your child gets to socialize with people of all different ages and various walks of life throughout the day as he accompanies you to the post office, greets the FedEx-delivery person at the door, and participates in co-op classes across town.

Homeschool children don't feel threatened when they come into contact with younger or older children because, in their world, people come in all shapes, sizes, and ages. A 12-year-old homeschooler can interact just as easily with a 5-year-old as she can with a 16-year-old because, in her eyes, age doesn't segregate people. Isn't this the kind of socialization that you want your kids to experience?

I will buy the wrong curriculum.

Take a deep breath. Homeschoolers buy the wrong curriculum sooner or later. It happens. It happened to me, it happened to nearly every homeschooler I know, and it's part of life.

A problem occurs only if you *keep* buying the wrong curriculum even after

you know it doesn't fit your child. Because every child is different, some books, approaches, and projects work better with one child than they do another. Often you have the extremes right in your own household, like I do. I purchase the curriculums for a few subjects with both children in mind, but I need to buy other curriculums from separate publishers because my children learn differently.

If you have more than one child, and you buy the "wrong" curriculum for the oldest one or two, you can always keep it around in the hopes that a younger child may use the curriculum. When I purchase something for one child and it doesn't work, I try it with the other one awhile to see if it clicks. With children only one grade level apart, I can do that, and it minimizes my off purchases.

Purchasing one year's books at a time also helps to minimize the damage. If you buy a language-arts curriculum that does *not* click with your child this year, you can always struggle through (maybe with some homegrown modifications) and try another publisher next year. Deciding that a new curriculum is the best thing since sliced zucchini and purchasing all eight years' worth without testing it out first may be a waste of money if your little darling doesn't like it or if the new curriculum presents information in a way that your child doesn't comprehend.



TIP If you find yourself with a stack of unusable books after the beginning of a school year, you can always pass them along to a homeschooler who needs them, donate them to your local homeschool lending library, or sell them used through your area vendor or an online swap shop, such as a Facebook homeschool book exchange. Although the curriculum doesn't fit your child, someone will be delighted to get it because it matches that child's needs.

My child will learn less at home than he does at school.

If you took your child out of school because he wasn't learning, then you

already know how little information your child amassed at school. You also know that with a little effort you can match or exceed that level at home. Good for you!

Most parents who worry about a child's learning levels are the ones who never sent their children to school in the first place. They somehow think that those hours spent poring over math books, learning parts of speech, and dissecting tulips this past spring count for less because they were done at home. Or maybe they believe that the schools teach something that they can't duplicate at home.

Relax. As long as you select a grade-level book for the year and follow it, your child can learn at least as much as her school-aged peers. Because you don't have to keep pace with the slowest child in the class, you actually have the freedom to work at your child's pace. In some courses, that may mean taking a year and a half to finish a textbook, but when you're done, you know that your child understands the material. He didn't simply read the words and move on.

In other classes, you may stay right on target or even do a book and a half within a year's time. If your child assimilates science quickly, and you find yourself moving through the science book faster than you thought, you can always take the extra time to incorporate experiments into the class instead of moving to the next book.

One way to keep tabs on your child's grade levels, even if your state doesn't require it, is to give your child a standardized test each year. That gives you a general idea how your child regurgitates information and applies knowledge based on the current national norms. If your child scores above 50 percent on a standardized test, that means that he performed as well as or better than half the students who took the test. Not a very detailed way of measuring progress, but it may ease your mind.

I'll never have free time again.

Oh, sure you will. And it may even happen before they graduate!

Actually, one of the best things you can do for your kids — as well as for yourself — is to carve out a niche of time each week especially for you. Maybe that means watching a movie *you* want to see one evening after the

kids go to bed. Perhaps you leave all the darlings in the care of your spouse and go shopping for a couple hours.



Because I rarely get away during the daylight hours, I tend to do my shopping at stores that remain open all night or at least until ten. Thus, I find myself wandering the scrapbook aisle at Walmart more often than not, picking new colors and gathering ideas for my next *pièce de résistance* the next time I drag out the paper and scalloped scissors. Wouldn't it be nice if other stores catered to nocturnal shoppers?

When you take a couple hours to do whatever you want to do (within reason, of course), you return to the job-at-hand refreshed and ready to go. You don't have to take a really long break. Sometimes soaking for an hour with your favorite novel does the trick. The very fact that you thought enough of *you* to schedule some alone time does your heart good.

My child may not be learning at the right pace.

As long as your child is learning, adding new skills to the ones already mastered, then you're doing fine. After all, what is the "right" pace for learning? That depends on whom you talk to.

If you want your child to actually learn the material, it may take a bit longer than breezing through the pages and marking them with checks to show you read them. The best learning involves active participation. Instead of reading through the sample math problem, your child needs to complete a couple problems on his own so he really knows how it's done.

The parent of a special-needs scholar takes learning at the child's own pace. This student covers material one concept at a time until it's all mastered. Sometimes it moves quickly; on other days, it goes pretty slow. As a tutor, you can do the same with your child. If she catches onto a concept quickly and gives you that bored I've-got-it-already look, you can safely move on. If she struggles to master another concept, then you can take as long as you

need to master it before you continue. If you stick with it day after day, you'll probably still get through the book before the end of the year or close to it.

I won't be able to do it all.

Of course you won't be able to do it all. Nobody does it *all* and stays sane. It's impossible to homeschool every day, cook a six-course meal each evening, mow the lawn twice a week, clean the house till it's spotless on the weekend, wax the dog on Saturdays, and hand buff the car every other week while running a home business and decorating the house to look like a million bucks.

Lives like this only happen with A-squared personalities or in the movies. A-squared personalities have way too much stress in their lives to be healthy, and the movies don't happen in real life. In real life, you find yourself cleaning up the spilled cereal milk while engaging in a futile effort to catch the dog — futile because you waxed him yesterday. I can't tell you the last time I went out to dinner with a Hollywood star (well, I could tell you but you wouldn't believe me). However, I do recall the day that I homeschooled for four hours, mopped the kitchen floor, and made a dinner that was more than a casserole with a side salad.

So rest in the knowledge that nobody real gets it all done every day. Pick your priorities and go with those. If a spotless house is high on your list, make that a priority and encourage everybody to pitch in to make it happen. On the other hand, if you'd rather wax the dog and run a home business while you homeschool, the house will probably look lived in most of the time. (Is that so bad, if you truly live there?) The dog, however, consistently shines.

After I start, I have to do this forever.

Nope. Not so. You don't even *have* to finish the year out, although sticking with homeschooling one year at a time is probably the wisest thing you can do. Giving up on a three-month-old experiment doesn't tell you much except that you quit before the end of the year. Sticking it out until spring tells you more — you have an idea where your strengths lie, what your weaknesses may be (in curriculum, planning, or even other areas), and the facets of your homeschool that you may change next year — if there is a next year.

Most homeschoolers teach one year at a time. Very few start out in preschool declaring that they plan to do this through college. Your child may only need to be home for a year or two before you send her back to school. Or you may decide to teach for the first eight years at home and send him to high school.

What is the best plan for your family? No matter what the plan looks like, that is the plan you should follow. If it means taking it one year at a time until you look up one day and your oldest is nearing the end of her senior year, then that's great! But if you teach your child at home for the first three years and then decide he has enough of a head start to move into the school system, then that's just as good.



TIP As long as your decision strengthens your family and meets your needs as a family unit, then it's the right decision and you homeschooled just long enough.

I'm not keeping the right (or enough) records on my child's progress.

If you're tracking whatever your state asks you to track, then you're probably doing all right. Your state may require attendance records and immunization records only — keep those up-to-date and nobody can argue with you. On the other hand, if you live in a state that wants you to keep track of each book that you use, to keep a file for a portion of your child's worksheets and creative writing, and you do it, you're fine.

Most of us struggle with the paper concept: More is better — the more records, worksheets, poems, coloring pages, and construction-paper creations that are kept on file, the better. Actually, as long as you keep the *right* snippets of paper, you can happily throw the rest of the stuff away with a clear conscience. (You may want to do it while Junior isn't looking.)



TIP If you have a high schooler, then you need to track individual

courses, textbooks (with authors), course content, grades, and sometimes hours of instruction, depending on your state law. This is the information that you use to create the high-school transcript for colleges and other post-secondary schools, as well as a document that gives the admissions office a picture of your child’s high-school education experience.

Part 7

Appendixes

IN THIS PART …

Investigate various resources and curriculum options for homeschoolers.

Locate your state or area homeschool association.

Discover the educational language you may need to know as you navigate curriculum, websites, and resources.

Appendix A

Homeschooling Curriculum and Resources

Look at the following descriptions and contact information for those organizations and resources that I couldn't fit anywhere else in this book: national homeschooling organizations, homeschool book publishers, religion-specific curriculum, and gadgets to make your day easier.

Abeka

One of the classic Christian publishers and a division of Pensacola Christian College, Abeka sells student books, workbooks, and teacher's texts to interested homeschool families. These books cover a full curriculum from kindergarten through 12th grade. You can purchase as many or as few books as you like; their *Nation Notebook* and *My State Notebook* volumes have preplanned scrapbook pages to help fourth-graders on up construct a multipage report about a country or state. For more information, call 877-223-5226 or visit their website: www.abeka.com.

Artes Latinae

Artes Latinae gives students two full years of high-school Latin and plenty of reading practice. The book uses an audio CD for pronunciation, and this is a programmed, self-teaching Latin course. Two levels are available, and you can purchase them together or separately. While you're at this website, look around for a plethora of other Latin and Greek curriculum options. Contact Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers (also the producers of *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* in Latin) by calling 800-392-6453 or visit their website at https://www.bolchazy.com/.

Behrman House

Look to Behrman House for Hebrew textbooks on Jewish religious studies and for books to help you teach Jewish tradition to your children 5 years of age and up. The New Siddur Program offers a Hebrew prayer book primer that has excerpts of those prayers translated into English to help your child's

comprehension. To teach your third- or fourth-grader how to speak modern Hebrew, get *Shalom Uvrachah*, a new Hebrew primer. Companion flash cards and posters are also available. For more information, call 800-221-2755 or go online at www.behrmanhouse.com.

Brave Writer

Want to teach your kids how to write but not sure how to go about it? Brave Writer is a curriculum that leads you through teaching your kids writing, literary devices, literature, and much more. Brave Writer introduced us to the concept of the *Poetry Tea*, where kiddo and I, poetry books, tea, and snacks congregate around the living-room coffee table to read, discuss, and enjoy poetry each Tuesday afternoon. Brave Writer also offers suggestions for using movies to teach literary elements (plot, setting, characters, and so on). The how-to-teach-writing-to-your-kid book is called *The Writer's Jungle*. Find it online at www.bravewriter.com.

California Homeschool Network Records and Resource Guide

California homeschoolers may want to check into this digital download, which contains all the forms you need to file as a private school under California educational law. It also includes planning forms to help you keep your homeschool on track. Go to the California Homeschool Network website: www.californiahomeschool.net.

Christian Book Distributors

Long known for its large selection and discount prices, Christianbook may have that book or curriculum you're looking for, especially if it's a general homeschool resource or published by a Christian publisher. Find them online at www.christianbook.com or give them a call at 800-247-4784.

Cricket Media Magazines

For many years Cricket Media has published children's magazines that focus on science, history, and social studies. Look here for titles such as *Click* (science, art, and nature for ages 3 to 6), *Ladybug* (stories, poems, and activities for ages 3 to 6), *Ask* (science, general facts, and activities for ages 6 to 9), *Spider* (stories and poems for ages 6 to 9), *Cobblestone* (history for ages 9 to 14), *Cricket* (classic and modern stories for ages 9 to 14), *Faces*

(world cultures for ages 9 to 14), and *Muse* (science and arts for ages 9 to 14). Also look here for past issues of *Dig*, a magazine for 9- to 14-year-olds that focuses on world history. Find it all at shop.cricketmedia.com. If you want a particular topic, look in the back issues list. This publisher is good about keeping former issues available.

The Critical Thinking Co.

Interested in teaching your children problem-solving skills? Then take a look at the books from Critical Thinking. They offer logic, word problems, and other books that teach creative thinking. To order, call 800-458-4849 or go to www.criticalthinking.com.

Great Books Academy

The Great Books Academy online store is a great place to unearth Harcourt, Holt, and Glencoe (public school) science texts for various grade levels, if you're having trouble locating a secular science curriculum. You can also find some good classic reading material, divided by grade level; books to develop map skills; and much more. This site gives you a one-stop-shop alternative for many of the books usually sold directly to schools; this way you skip the potential hassles that come with educational publishers that aren't used to individual sales. Find them online at www.academybookstore.org.

Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA)

The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is a Christian legal group that defends member homeschool families in court if necessary. Membership is only open to Christian homeschoolers, and they defend a relatively narrow set of issues. (Need help with a homeschool-family divorce, for example? Sorry. They won't help you.) The association staff also lobbies extensively and sends out periodic legislative updates. Visit their website at www.hslda.com.

Mary Frances Books

You probably won't find these listed in any curriculum catalog. Originally written between 1912 and 1918, these little volumes taught girls about home arts: cooking, gardening, housekeeping, knitting and crocheting, and sewing. Each book covers one topic, and it does it in a story format. So, for example, Mary Frances learns about sewing as she enters into an adventure with the Thimble People; Sewing Bird and all her friends teach little Mary Frances to

sew by hand and make clothes for her doll along the way. Because these books are complete reprints, they're good tools to teach your students about the attitudes and customs of the time as well as giving you hands-on volumes to help with those home economics skills. After looking at everything available, I bought these for my daughter. To find out more, go to the publisher's website: www.lacis.com. You can also download most of these from the Internet Archive, www.archive.org.

MindWare

Interested in indoor activities for a rainy day? How about a handbook on theater games to stimulate creativity and movement? Maybe brain-stretching books on logic or a manual about teaching tessellations interests you more. MindWare carries all kinds of thought-provoking games and toys that add zing to your homeschool. Call 800-999-0398 or go online to www.mindware.orientaltrading.com.

MisterArt

Want to incorporate art into your homeschool, or maybe you need to replace some used art supply stash? Visit MisterArt online and revel in the colors. You can find pencils, crayons, paper, adhesives, paints, and more at www.misterart.com.

National Black Home Educators

Started in 2000, this support and resource organization exists to help African American families thrive in homeschooling. Members get a booklist, curriculum suggestions (including worksheets), consultations, and a discount card. Visit them at their website, www.nbhe.net, or on their Facebook page, www.facebook.com/nbhe1/, for more information.

Pandia Press

Looking for science or history for your kindergartner through 8th-grader? Pandia Press offers a sequential history program at two levels that goes through middle school, and a third level is in redevelopment. Visit them at www.pandiapress.com.

S&S Worldwide

Need a parachute for your homeschool co-op kids? Interested in beads, weaving kits, or other craft supplies? Perhaps you need to stock your

kindergarten art closet with construction and tissue paper. Look no further than S&S Worldwide, a company that sells education materials, arts and craft supplies and kits, and sports equipment. Yes, that is an odd assortment. You can find them online at www.ssww.com or call them at 800-288-9941.

Studies Weekly

Think of it as a weekly science or social studies newsletter. In 24 to 28 issues, *Science Weekly* or *Studies Weekly*, the social studies version, arrives at your house and takes the place of a yearly textbook. Each issue focuses on a different topic aligned to the social studies or science standards of each particular grade. A year of *Science Weekly* includes Earth Science, Life Science, and Physical Science. To subscribe, call 866-311-8734 or go to the website at www.studiesweekly.com.

Scotch Thermal Laminator

You may want to think about a laminator if you have more than a couple kids or you repeatedly find hot cocoa spilled on the manipulatives. With a laminator you can make your evergreen learning help or manipulative, send it through the laminator, and it will stay clean forevermore. Neither coffee nor cocoa shall diminish its usefulness. This type of machine laminates a page 8.5 x 11 inches or smaller. Look for it at your local office supply store or online.

SEA Books and More

While you will find evidence-based science books here, and academically rigorous history books, this site contains so much more. Would you like to approach math in a new way? Look here, the bookstore for Secular, Eclectic, Academic Homeschoolers. Do you need readers for a dyslexic student? Check in the Children's Books section. Want computer science–themed materials? Those are here, too. Check it out at www.secularecclecticacademic.com, and while you're here be sure to sign up for the *SEA Homeschoolers* magazine. It's free.

Teachers Pay Teachers

Need a set of worksheets on a topic, a unit study for a particular subject, or an idea for something new to spice up your homeschool? Turn to Teachers Pay Teachers, where other teachers and homeschoolers create resources you can purchase, download, and use in your own school. While the material here runs the gamut from art to zoology, most of the material is for Grades K to 8.

If you need resources for a high schooler, look here (especially in foreign languages) but don’t be too sad if the high-school options are slim. Find them online at www.teacherspayteachers.com.

Appendix B

State-by-State Homeschool Associations

The associations in this appendix usually offer support, tips, a monthly or bi-monthly newsletter, and can act as a clearinghouse for field-trip organization. Sometimes they organize statewide homeschool conventions each spring or summer. If you need a copy of your state homeschool law, one of these groups is likely to have one.



TIP As you read the listings (in alphabetical order by state) in the following Table B-1, you'll see the word *inclusive*, which means that the homeschooling association delights in diversity — you are not required to follow a specific religion, teaching style, or dress code to join. *Secular* in the same place means non-religious education. In those instances where the association's affiliation is left blank, however, the association claims none.

TABLE B-1 Homeschool Associations

Name of Organization	*Affiliation*	*Contact Information*
Homeschool **Alabama**	Christian	www.homeschoolalabama.org
North **Alabama** Secular Homeschooling (NASH)	Secular	www.facebook.com/groups/NASHomeschool
Alaska Private and Home Educators Association	Christian	www.aphea.org
Sonoran Desert Homeschoolers **(AZ)**	Inclusive	www.tucsonhomeschoolers.com
Arizona Families for Home Education	Christian	P.O. Box 2035, Chandler, AZ 85244-2035; www.afhe.org
Home Educators of Greater Little Rock, **Arkansas**		P.O. Box 21854, Little Rock, AR 72211; www.homeedonline.com.
The Education Alliance **(AR)**	Christian	www.arkansashomeschool.org
	Inclusive	2166 W. Broadway #266, Anaheim, CA 92804; phone 800-

California Homeschool Network		327-5339; www.californiahomeschool.net.
CHEA (Christian Home Educators Association) **(CA)**	Christian	12672 Limonite Ave, Ste. 3E #514, Eastvale, CA 92280; phone 562-864-CHEA; www.cheaofca.org
Home School Association of **California**	Inclusive	Phone 800-HSC-4440; www.hsc.org
Christian Home Educators of **Colorado**	Christian	19039 Plaza Dr., Ste. 310, Parker, CO 80134; www.chec.org
Colorado Springs Secular Homeschool Support Group **(CO)**	Inclusive	www.facebook.com/groups/264746426875329/
Connecticut Homeschoolers Inclusive	Inclusive	www.facebook.com/CTHomeschoolersInclusive
The Education Association of Christian Homeschoolers (TEACH) **(CT)**	Christian	Phone 800-938-6765; www.teachct.org
Delaware Secular Homeschoolers	Secular	www.facebook.com/groups/360369254064995
Homeschool **Delaware**		www.facebook.com/groups/118853418201199/
Florida Inclusive Secular Homeschooling	Inclusive	www.facebook.com/FloridaInclusiveSecularHomeschooling
Florida Parent Educators Association	Christian	255 East Dr., Ste. E, Melbourne, FL 32904; phone 877-ASK-FPEA; www.fpea.com
Georgia Home Education Association	Christian	www.ghea.org
Learners and Educators of Atlanta and Decatur **(GA)**	Secular	www.leadhomeschool.org
Hawai'i Homeschool Association	Inclusive	www.hawaiihomeschoolassociation.org
Homeschool **Idaho**	Christian	P.O. Box 45062, Boise, ID 83711; www.homeschoolidaho.org
Secular Homeschoolers of the Treasure Valley **(ID)**	Secular	www.facebook.com/groups/533214910172175/
Illinois Christian Home Educators	Christian	P.O. Box 617, Antioch, IL 60002; phone 847-603-1259; www.iche.org.
Illinois H.O.U.S.E. (Home Oriented Unique Schooling Experience)	Inclusive	www.illinoishouse.org
Indiana Association of Home Educators	Christian	8106 Madison Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46227; phone 317-859-1202; www.inhomeeducators.org
Indiana Foundation for Home Schooling	Inclusive	www.indianahomeschooling.org
Central **Iowa** Secular Homeschoolers	Secular	www.facebook.com/groups/141801785984487/
Homeschool **Iowa**: Network of Iowa Christian Home Educators	Christian	Box 158, Dexter, IA 50070; www.homeschooliowa.org

Christian Home Educators Confederation of **Kansas** (CHECK)	Christian	www.kansashomeschool.org
LEARN Home Education Network **(KS** and **MO)**	Secular	www.kclearn.org
Christian Home Educators of **Kentucky** (CHEK)	Christian	www.chek.org
Homeschool **Louisiana**	Christian	Phone 255-263-3933; www.homeschoollouisiana.org
Homeschoolers of **Maine**	Christian	P.O. Box 159, Camden, ME 04843; www.homeschoolersofmaine.org
Secular Homeschooling and Unschooling Families of **Maine**	Secular	www.facebook.com/groups/497350033656409/
Maryland Association of Christian Home Educators Network	Christian	P.O. Box 417, Clarksburg, MD 20871; www.chenmd.org
Maryland Home School Association	Inclusive	www.mdhsa.com
MassHOPE (Homeschool Organization of Parent Educators) **(MA)**	Christian	www.masshope.org
Voyagers **(MA)**	Inclusive	55 Middlesex St., Ste. 220, N. Chelmsford, MA 01863; www.voyagersinc.org
Michigan Christian Homeschool Network	Christian	Phone 517-481-5994; www.michn.org
Michigan Secular Homeschoolers	Secular	www.facebook.com/groups/483764614980857/
Minnesota Homeschoolers' Alliance	Inclusive	www.homeschoolers.org
Minnesota Association of Christian Home Educators	Christian	Phone 866-717-9070; www.mache.org
Mississippi Home Educators Association	Christian	Phone 662-494-1999; www.mhea.net
PEAK Homeschool Network **(MS)**	Inclusive	www.facebook.com/PeakHomeschoolNetwork
Missouri Association of Teaching Christian Homes	Christian	www.match-inc.org
Montana Coalition of Home Educators	Inclusive	www.mtche.org
Nebraska Christian Home Educators Association	Christian	P.O. Box 57041, Lincoln, NE 68505-7041; www.nchea.org
Northern **Nevada** Home Schools	Inclusive	www.nnhs.org
New Hampshire Homeschooling Coalition	Inclusive	P.O. Box 2224, Concord, NH 03302; www.nhhomeschooling.org
New Jersey Homeschool		

Association	Inclusive	www.facebook.com/NJHomeschool
New Jersey Homeschool Support	Inclusive	www.facebook.com/groups/NewJerseyHomeschoolSupport/
Christian Association of Parent Educators — **New Mexico**	Christian	P.O. Box 1506, Moriarty, NM 87035; www.cape-nm.org
New York City Home Educators Alliance **(NY)**	Secular	511 Avenue of the Americas #332, New York, NY 10011; www.nychea.org
Loving Education at Home (LEAH) **(NY)**	Christian	www.leah.org
North Carolinians for Home Education **(NC)**	Christian	Phone 844-624-3338; www.nche.com
North Dakota Home School Association	Christian	www.homeschool-life.com
Christian Home Educators of **Ohio**	Christian	www.cheohome.org
Ohio Homeschooling Parents	Christian	www.ohiohomeschoolingparents.com
Homeschool **Oklahoma**	Christian	www.homeschooloklahoma.org
Oregon Christian Home Education Association Network (OCEANetwork)	Christian	www.oceanetwork.org
Oregon Home Education Network	Inclusive	OHEN, P.O. Box 82715, Portland, OR 97282-0715; phone 503-893-2744; www.ohen.org
Christian Home School Association of **Pennsylvania** (CHAP)	Christian	231 N. Chestnut St., Palmyra, PA 17078; www.chaponline.com
Pennsylvania Home Educators Association	Inclusive	www.phea.net
Rhode Island Guild of Home Teachers (RIGHT)	Christian	www.rihomeschool.com
ENRICHri **(RI)**	Secular	www.enrichri.org
South Carolina Home Educators Association	Christian	www.schea.net
South Dakota Christian Home Educators	Christian	www.homeschool-life.com/sd/sdche
Tennessee Home Education Association	Christian	www.tnhea.org
Texas Home Educators		www.texashomeeducators.org
Texas Home School Coalition	Christian	P.O. Box 6747, Lubbock, TX 79493; phone 806-744-4441; www.thsc.org
Utah Christian Home School Association	Christian	Phone 801-432-0016; www.utch.org
Utah Home Education Association	Inclusive	www.uhea.org

Vermont Homeschoolers and Unschoolers Unite	Inclusive	www.facebook.com/groups/305422002936927/
Homeschooling **Vermont** Chat Group		www.facebook.com/groups/402431733150160/
Home Educators Association of **Virginia** (HEAV)	Christian	Phone 800-278-9200; www.heav.org
The Organization of **Virginia** Homeschoolers	Inclusive	P.O. Box 5131, Charlottesville, VA 22905; phone 866-513-6173; www.vahomeschoolers.org
Christian Heritage Home Educators of **Washington**	Christian	Phone 360-726-2600; www.christianheritagewa.org
Washington Homeschool Association	Inclusive	Phone 425-251-0439; www.washhomeschool.org
DC Home Educators Association **(Washington, DC)** Secular		dchea.org
Christian Home Educators of **West Virginia**	Christian	www.chewv.org
West Virginia Home Educators Association	Inclusive	Phone 800-736-9843; www.wvhea.org
Wisconsin Parents Association	Inclusive	Phone 608-283-3131; www.homeschooling-wpa.org
Homeschoolers of **Wyoming**	Christian	www.homeschoolersofwy.org

Appendix C

Speaking the Language: Educational and Homeschooling Terms

Once in a while, you stumble across a term that may as well be written in a foreign language. Like any group of people who concentrate on one thing, both education and homeschooling have a vocabulary of their own. (It happens everywhere: Have you been to an engineering conference recently?) This is where you turn when you come across a word or concept that you hear thrown about in homeschooling (or educational) circles. If you're looking for a word that you can't find here, see the index.

2E

2E refers to *twice exceptional*. This is a term for a child who is gifted and something else. These kids test as gifted, but also have something else going on. They exhibit another challenge or disability that masks the giftedness, or that together prove a unique educational challenge. Children who are gifted and autistic, gifted and dyslexic, gifted and deaf — all these are 2E students.

accelerated learning

Accelerated learning means to run through a certain set of materials faster than normal. Sometimes this happens almost by accident. Perhaps you have an 8-year-old child who is already learning high-school algebra because she assimilates the information so quickly. Most of the time, however, accelerated learning is structured. One way to structure accelerated learning is to teach year-round without taking a summer break. Teaching year-round gives you about three school years for each two calendar years.

advanced placement (AP) course

These are advanced courses in practically every high-school subject, from biology to Spanish. Advanced placement courses delve deeply into a topic past what a normal high-school course would contain, and they include a test

at the end of the course to assess proficiency. Students who score well on an AP test may find themselves placed into advanced courses in that subject once they go to college.

auditory learner

An *auditory learner* (someone who learns best by listening) parrots song lyrics, memorizes radio shows, and relates movie dialog effortlessly. If you have an auditory learner at your house, you'll find that music, tapes, videos, and computer programs — anything the child can hear rather than see — work best for teaching your child. Most psychologists don't believe in this; most teachers do.

CLEP exam

This actually stands for College Level Examination Program, but nobody actually calls it that. Everybody calls it a *CLEP exam*. These are tests that rank a student's knowledge of a particular subject. Students need to score a set number of points on each exam to pass; once they pass they can get college credits for their first-year courses. Designed as a way for adult learners to show proficiency in a subject after being away from school, these are now being used by high-school students to shave some of the cost of college. A class you test out of is a class you don't have to pay for.

consumable

If a book is *consumable*, the author expects you to write in it as you use it. Consumable books do *not* carry a permission-to-reproduce statement because the publisher wants you to purchase one for each child who uses the book. In fact, most consumables contain two or four color pages, which makes photocopying less than satisfactory if you do attempt it. (Some of them are completely full color, which makes black-and-white copies a total bummer.) Take the plunge. If you plan to use the book this year, buy it and use it as it was intended. Or find a nonconsumable book that offers the same information.

correlated to state standards

Big phrase, eh? If a book is *correlated to state standards*, it means that the content of that book matches what an individual state (or group of states) determined should be taught at a specific grade level. You also may see *correlated to national and state standards*. For example, "This book on dog

grooming is correlated to state standards." This means the book meets or exceeds the requirements for your state's mandatory fourth-grade course on pets.

distance learning

If you physically take classes somewhere other than the school that offers them, it's called *distance learning.* Basically, distance learning is the new term for correspondence course, but it also can incorporate much more, such as interactive Internet tutorials, videos, and so on. Usually, organizations that cater to homeschools use the term *satellite school* or *independent study* rather than *distance education* or *distance learning* to describe their programs. You see the term *distance learning* sometimes at the high-school level, and definitely beyond. For example, "My distance learning course takes place in an online chat room this semester."

dual credit

When your teen enrolls in a dual credit course, she takes a class at the local community college or university that also counts as a high-school class. This is a way to get a head start on accumulating college credits at the same time that you prove to the college of your choice that your student can handle the work. Some colleges offer a discount to high-school students seeking dual credit courses, while others don't.

educational game

Educational games are teaching tools poorly disguised as entertainment. Some companies produce games specifically for the educational market, and these are the games no one wants to play. An educational game designed to teach geography, for example, takes geography terms and facts and incorporates them into game pieces that shove the details down the player's throat — *not* to be confused with a game, such as Ticket to Ride, where the student learns geography almost as a side issue while playing a great game. As a general guideline, if the box says, "An Educational Game" along the side, avoid it like the plague unless someone you trust recommends it to you.

elective

These are the extra classes that make life worth living. In elementary and middle school, classes like art and music count as *electives*. In high school, *electives* are any course that isn't required for graduation, such as

photography, philosophy, sculpture, or something even more interesting.

fine arts

Several states suggest that high schoolers taking *fine arts* courses may be a really good idea. So what does that mean? Any course in animation, art, dance, music, photography, theatre, or video production counts as a fine arts class. Interested in art? That class can be in drawing, jewelry, painting, pottery, sculpture, textiles, or any other artsy class you can dream up. While it sounds like a very narrow area, if your student shows even a glimmer of interest in any of these topics, you can create a fine arts class to meet the requirement.

grade level

A student who does fourth-grade work when in fourth grade is working at *grade level*. Reality is that sometimes students are above grade level in some subjects while they're at or even below grade level in other subjects. You want your students to work at grade level in language arts (reading) and math, if possible. If they are below in these areas, it may affect them later. Otherwise, grade level is a way to rate textbooks and reading books so you know the difficulty of the words inside.

inclusive

Just as you may surmise, this means that everybody's invited. The term *inclusive* arose from the frustrations homeschoolers felt at being excluded from this support group or that organization due to religious or educational beliefs. The inclusive groups try to welcome everyone as long as they homeschool. Inclusive groups state no religious, ethnic, or educational methodology stipulations on would-be members.

intent to homeschool

This is a simple letter or form that you send to your educational officials, usually the superintendent of your local schools. It explains that you plan to remove your child and teach them at home. Not all states require an *intent-to-homeschool* letter; so be sure to check your state law or call your state homeschool association before you send anything.

kinesthetic learner

The *kinesthetic* (also *kinetic*) *learner* understands best when he does it

himself. This is a hands-on child who learns by doing. If your child gives you a blank look when you talk about fractions, for example, but understands after you hand him construction paper halves and help him to fit them together into a whole, then you have an example of kinesthetic learning. A child who responds well with hands-on exercises time after time, subject after subject, probably qualifies as a kinesthetic learner.

Many schools aren't well equipped to deal with kinesthetic learners because school education is basically a book-and-lecture experience. Teaching a kinesthetic learner requires creativity as you devise physical explanations for the subject matter that you need to teach. But it can be plenty of fun — fractions become particularly tasty when you apply them to cooking class. Psychologists say this isn't a real thing; teachers swear that it is. Take it or leave it, as you please.

lesson plan

Basically, a *lesson plan* is a list of what you plan to do today for a particular subject. If your state requires lesson plans (this would occur if you're assigned to an oversight teacher from the local school district as part of state regulations), then you jot down what you do during class time.

Lesson plans can be formal or informal; the most informal lesson plan is abbreviated, such as Sci pg 5–6; q. 1–4. Translated, that means you open the science book to pages five and six and cover those, and then complete questions one through four as a review.

More formal lesson plans include a title (the name of the lesson plan), an objective (what you plan to teach), and a procedure (how you plan to get there). The procedure is the longest part and usually consists of several steps. I know very few people who go to this level of detail when they plan their day. If you want this kind of planning, enroll as a satellite school and let the school send you completed lesson plans.

living books

This is a Charlotte Mason education method term for *not textbooks*. *Living books* usually cover one subject, they're written by authors who are passionate about their subject, and you find them in the library in the nonfiction or biography sections. These books are available at all reading levels. *Titanic: Lost and Found* is a beginning reader, but as a history book

it’s a living book.

low for grade level

I find myself explaining this one a lot to new homeschoolers, so I want you to understand this term in case you ever need it. Textbooks are written at various levels. You would think that a textbook that says Grade 5 on it would contain Grade 5 words, but that’s not always true. Sometimes it’s written with end-of-Grade-4 concepts and terms. In that case we would say that the text is *low for grade level*. It’s supposed to be at Grade 5, but it’s really not. Some publishers consistently put out books that are low for the grade levels they are supposed to teach. If you look at a book and think *Wow, my kid was reading that stuff last year,* then skip the book and look at the publisher’s other offerings with a shrewd eye. The one place this type of thing really shines is when a child is half to a full grade below her peers and giving her a book that says Grade 5 keeps her self-esteem intact. In that case, go for it. I did, and it worked well.

neutral science

This is a relatively new term. Science used to be science, right? Well, not any more. *Neutral science* is a term for textbooks that never come out and say that evidence-based science (which we used to call *science*) is real and verifiable. These books do not teach evolution, dating techniques, or anything else that may offend their audience. As a result, you can’t depend upon a neutral science book to teach true science. The issue isn’t what the book teaches as much as what it leaves out. It’s hard to build a true understanding of science if a student is never exposed to the underpinnings and years of research that make us call it science in the first place.

online education

Online education means taking a course, or all your courses, via your Internet connection. This may consist of pre-recorded videos that stream to your computer, live classes that you attend at a particular time, or a mix of the two. Online education also may be a website that you sign into and then complete whatever work or reading that site assigns for the day. Because it’s difficult to learn everything by watching a video, online courses often include reading or writing sections that you need to complete after you watch the day’s instructional video. Then the course isn’t strictly online, but we still refer to it

as an *online class.*

PSP (Private School Satellite Program)

Students enrolled in a PSP contract with a private school that provides oversight to a homeschooling family. This option is popular in California because it allows families to escape the paperwork headaches of forming their own private school. PSPs may provide curriculum along with the oversight, or they may simply keep paperwork and offer their accredited credentials to anyone who asks for an enrolled family's homeschool verification. (This used to be known as an ISP, Independent Study Program, but that's a term for a student who enrolls in a school and does the work on his own.)

real books

This term refers to subject books as opposed to textbooks. A textbook on science, for example, may contain chapters on clouds, weather, planets, and trees. *Real books* for the same subjects would include an introductory volume on clouds, a book that discusses weather, a guide to the solar system, and a book about plants and trees. Also known as *trade books.* (Charlotte Mason homeschoolers call these *living books.*)

reproducible black line masters

Simply put, these are pages (usually in books) that you can photocopy and use as worksheets in your homeschool. If the book says *reproducible black line masters* on the front cover or title page, that means you have free permission to copy the pages as many times as you like to teach your children. *Black line* means that the pages are black print on white paper.

standardized test

A test has been standardized when it's given to enough children across the country that similar test scores appear no matter where the test is administered. A *standardized test* tells you how your child performs on *this test* compared to children throughout the nation. When you receive a percentile rank score, it does not mean that your child got such-and-so percentage correct. What it means is that your child scored better on this test than the percentage number of students who took the test. Basically, it tells you that on the national average, your child scored at a certain point.

teacher's guide/teacher edition

Sometimes you can wing a class on your own, and sometimes you need a little extra help. That's where the *teacher's guide* comes in. A good teacher's guide contains the answers to questions, additional topics to discuss, and information on how to lead the lesson. Some of them, especially those from public-school textbook publishers, feature a copy of the student's page with additional information written in the margins around the student pages to help you direct the students. Others feature more of a check-list-type format that points you to additional resources or tells you when to Incorporate a particular part of the lesson. Some teacher guides are *programmed*, which means they tell you exactly what to say in order to teach the lesson.

transcript

A *transcript* is a list of a high-school graduate's courses and her grades in each course. It takes up no more than one sheet of paper and gives anyone interested an overview of your graduate's high school years at a glance. College admissions officers require homeschool transcripts for admission, in addition to any SAT or ACT scores you may have. A quick Internet search for "homeschooling transcript" will show you several variations you can use.

visual learner

The *visual learner* predominately understands what he sees. You can tell a visual learner what you want him to do all day long and get little response, but if you write a little sticky note and post it to the bathroom mirror, he responds. What visual learners hear may pass through their ears without even slowing down, but they remember what they read. Visual learners respond well to videos, computer programs, and books, because all have visual components — but if you try to teach a visual learner through an audio series that has no accompanying book, you ask for a fiasco. Like its kin auditory and kinesthetic learners, psychologists have debunked this, but teachers still find it useful. If it works for you, use it.

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About the Author

Jennifer Kaufeld didn’t plan to homeschool for 25 years with only three children, but she always had talent for the unique. After graduating her first two homeschool students from high school one May, she started over again that August with a first-grader and did it all one more time. Those first two graduated with degrees from separate universities, one with honors (after K–12 together, they wanted some time apart). Between homeschooling the youngest Kaufeld child, working with area kids as a 4-H leader, and trying to catch up on much-missed sleep, Jennifer keeps plenty busy. She speaks on homeschooling or games in education, writes curriculum that meets specific needs, and knits intricate lace patterns for fun. Jennifer lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana, with her husband and the one remaining child who has yet to fly the coop. Occasionally she shares her home with pet crickets or Sea-Monkeys — the only pets she’s found that don’t mess the carpets.

Dedication

For John, who never stopped believing. This one’s for you.

Author's Acknowledgments

After the book is safely off my desk, I get to finish the fun parts, like the acknowledgments. This is where I thank all those people who work together to pull a project like this off. While my name may appear on the cover, a special note of thanks goes to all the people whose names grace the Publisher's Acknowledgements page, for without them this book would still be in my computer.

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