

Today's Catholic Homeschooling Resource Guide

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Today's Catholic Homeschooling Resource Guide

Dear Homeschooler,

Welcome to the Today's Catholic Homeschooling Resource Guide. It is my great hope that you will find these pages full of information and inspiration regardless of where you are on your homeschooling journey.

Maybe you are just thinking about homeschooling, dipping your toe in the uncharted waters, trying to determine if homeschooling is right for you and your family. Maybe you have some homeschooling experience under your belt, but are eager to learn more in order to have a more positive homeschooling environment for both you and your children. Maybe you are a homeschool veteran, but are now facing new questions as your children grow up. Life is constantly changing and none of us have all the answers.

Catholic homeschoolers are far from all the same, which is as it should be. God made each one of us unique with our particular gifts and personal challenges. Our children are unique as well. There is no one size fits all in education. We are blessed to be able to adapt our homeschool environments to best serve the children God has entrusted to our care.

Catholic homeschoolers embrace different educational philosophies from unschooling to classical education and everything in between (and if you don't know what those terms mean, not to worry - we have an article explaining them on p.14), practice different Catholic devotions on a regular basis, attend either the *Novus Ordo* or the Traditional Latin Mass, have small or large families, live in cities or in rural areas, but we share a common love of our faith and our families. We want to serve God and be the best parents and educators we can be. It is my humble hope that this resource guide will help you do just that.

Wishing you many blessings,

Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur

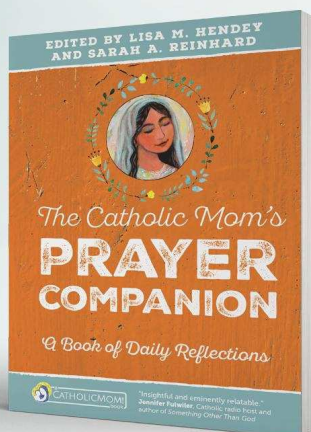
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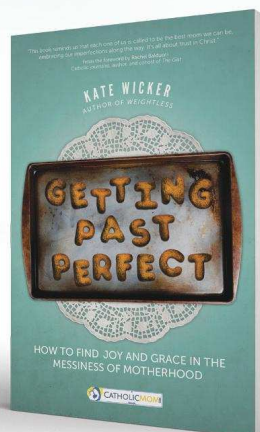
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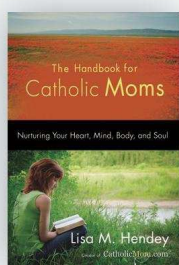
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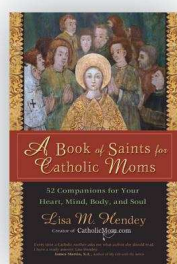
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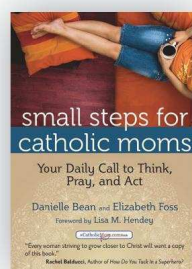
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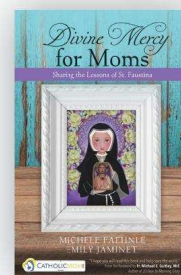
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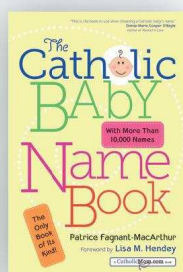
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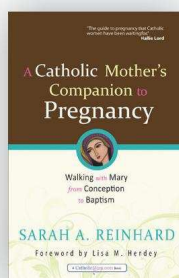
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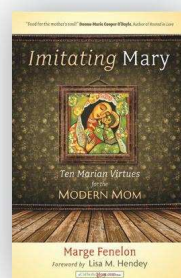
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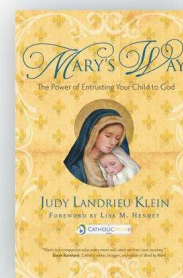
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Today's Catholic Homeschooling

c/o Spiritual Woman Press

P.O. Box 81064

Springfield, MA 01118

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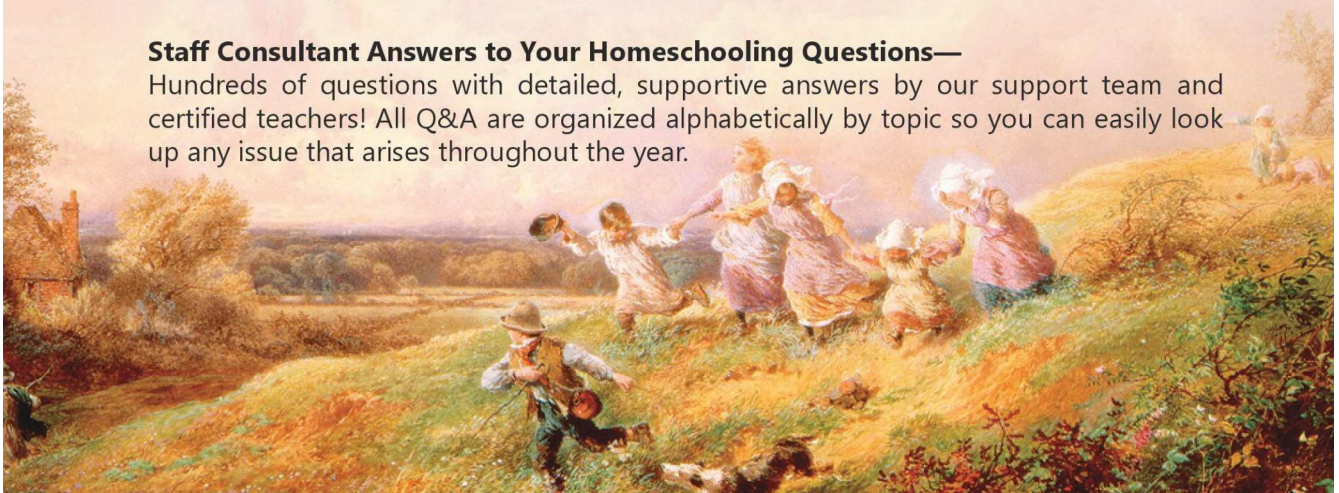


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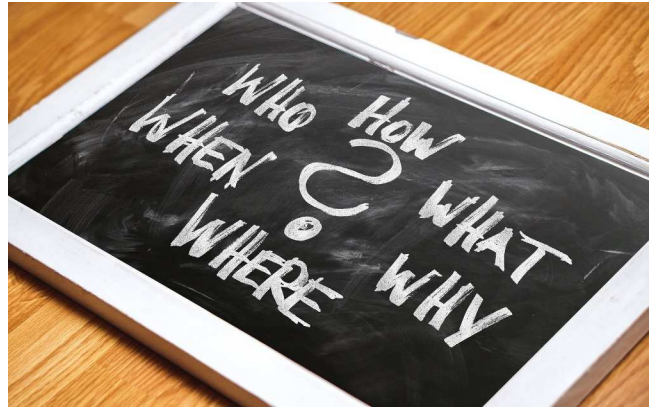
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FAQ's on Homeschooling



by Sonja Corbitt

There was a time I vociferously maintained that everyone should homeschool. I was ignorant and immature. Homeschooling is not for every mom or every family, but when faced with the success of homeschools and the profound privilege of educating one's own child, some parents become interested in the possibility of home education. For our family, it was the single best parenting decision we ever made.

What about socialization? Since it is always the first question “inquiring minds” want to know, this is surely the most important function of institutional school. Homeschoolers are rarely asked how they will teach kids to read, solve equations, or use the scientific method, so presumably they can be trusted to convey these important skills. For our family, the “socialization” issue was primary; we wanted our kids socialized differently than what we saw in our local schools.

For instance, after a whole-school assembly, our oldest came home from kindergarten asking how you get AIDS from sex. Later that kindergarten year, he

was almost suspended for carrying around an unexploded bullet he had been given by another student. Our public-school system is consistently in the top five in the state for drug use and pregnancy.

Private schools seemed to simply conceal many of the same root issues under a veneer of achievement and affluence. We wanted a classical education with strong religious formation for our kids, and that was unavailable.

Why do you homeschool? Language barriers, second or third language interests, pure history and primary source learning, classical education preferences, socialization, religious education, special needs, resistance to teaching methods that conform to standardized tests rather than individual children, accelerated or slow learning, specialized education or interests, trauma or tragedy, bullying, lack of affordable or quality public or private education, physical or other handicaps, resistance to political or social indoctrination, one-on-one instruction – there are as many reasons as families.

Isn't the education level of homeschooling inferior? Two decades of empirical evidence show that the exact opposite is true[i]. Homeschool student achievement test scores are consistently above those of institutional school counterparts, public and private[ii]. One-on-one instruction is the most effective form of teaching. No matter how capable a government or private school teacher is, he cannot provide daily one-on-one instruction.

Is it legal? Although laws and regulations differ from state to state, homeschooling is legal in all 50 states.

How do homeschool kids play sports? Many homeschoolers are part of umbrella schools that coordinate standardized testing, keep track of records, and provide a variety of competitive sports teams. In addition, Catholic schools, especially those affiliated with parishes, often seek homeschoolers for their teams. My oldest son, who is in college now, played basketball for years with a local co-op.

Can homeschoolers get into college? Many excellent universities court homeschoolers and develop admissions requirements specifically for them. SAT or ACT test scores and transcripts of completed work are usually required; beginning early in 9th grade, parents should take detailed notes and begin researching the application requirements for the schools their student is considering. Most universities accept any student with 12 community college credits.

How do you teach the higher maths and sciences? Among the resources available are: purchased curriculum with teaching videos, correspondence courses, co-ops or cottage schools with other homeschool parents in the area, local community college, tutors or tutorials, and online classes.

How do you afford all the different home school materials? On average, most home school families

spend between \$300 – \$600 per year. Between Amazon.com used books, the local library, public school resource centers, eBay, and Craigslist, many never spend more than \$200 for an entire year of curriculum. This is far less than the special fees, supplies, uniforms, tuition and other costs of institutional schools. Each year, you might plan to buy one expensive item, such as a good quality microscope. Consider your most important needs and buy those first, remembering that multi-level curricula often saves you money over the years.

How do you know how they're doing? How do you know if your child is healthy on a daily basis? Parents who are intimately involved with their children every day are aware of the weaknesses and strengths of each individual student. When homeschooled children struggle with a concept or technique, parents are available to offer concentrated, specialized help until they have mastered it. Standardized tests can be (arguably) a good barometer of basic achievement levels.

What if my child's current school or teacher discourages homeschooling? Homeschooling can sometimes be off-putting for professional educators, some of whom have only ever seen failed or negative homeschool examples that do a dreadful disservice to children who thankfully return to the public arena. But it can also offend those who were educated under the current institutional system who feel homeschooling is an indictment against public or private options; one necessarily feels some loyalty to any endeavor he spends the first half or more of his life pursuing. I don't take it personally.

Doesn't removing kids from the school system to teach them at home damage government schools? Although admittedly a simplistic answer, parents are regularly told that reducing class sizes increases the effectiveness of instruction; removing children from government schools reduces class size. Private schools also remove students from the public system.

Education is about inspiring children to a lifetime of learning and teaching them to think independently. One covers what is essential, and anticipates a lifetime of opportunities to learn more.

Finally, legalized abortion removes more children from institutional education than either.

Doesn't homeschooling children drain funding from government schools? Homeschoolers pay taxes, yet do not use the public system. Therefore, they add to the funding pool without using the services.

What if I'm not a teacher? A significant proportion of home school parents are, in fact, teachers or former teachers, but oddly enough, studies show that children with conscientious parents who have never obtained a teaching certificate actually do better on standardized tests than those of parents who have[iii]. Many teachers report that the environment and philosophy of the home school is so vastly different that they regard their training as more of an impediment than a benefit.

How do home schoolers get the special opportunities that public school children get?

Home education offers children an education uniquely tailored to ability, skill, interests, and need. The enrichment possibilities are literally infinite, and the flexibility inherent in home education provides abundant time to concentrate on special needs or prodigious abilities or interests. Homeschooled kids don't get all the special opportunities of public or privately schooled kids, but they are afforded their own unique opportunities.

For instance, when he was twelve, my oldest displayed keen interest in history after genealogy work with his grandmother, and joined several local historical societies. Soon after, he began giving costumed, guided tours at two local historical sites. Even now he drives the horse and buggy and does the lawn maintenance at these locations as he attends college for a degree in historical preservation.

Won't I be tied to my home? One of the greatest perks of home education is its flexibility. A broken leg is no obstacle to (or excuse from) education in a homeschool. Accidents or handicaps, inattentiveness or hyperactivity, physical, mental, or emotional challenges can all be effectively addressed on a daily, hourly basis, whether during formal instruction time or unstructured learning. Although structure is almost always necessary for homeschool effectiveness, field trips, doctor's appointments, vacations, grading, and planning are all done at the family's convenience rather than an institution's.

How do you teach multiple children at once?

While one student works on math, another works on handwriting. Children are taught to work independently and save questions until the parent is free to attend to them. Some subjects are easily taught to the whole group, even when they are at different levels – science and history, for instance. Preschoolers love listening in, and clamor to “do school” when they see older siblings working.

What if I don't have the patience? We are adults; we practice and model patience with our kids. For Christian parents, children and family are the path to sanctity. No one always has enough patience. Parents often find that they are learning this important social skill along with their children, and that they have about same level of patience with school work that they typically have with children, or house or yard work. Love teaches patience.

Doesn't it take a lot of time? What about planning and time management? It does take time. Far less than the 40-hour school week, hour or two of nightly homework, travel time to and from school, and extra-curricular activities and sports that students and parents of institutional schools already spend.

The first year is usually the most time-intensive as the parent develops instruction and organizational plans and routines. It might be necessary for everyone to drop unnecessary outside activities until the routine is easy and comfortable. Like everything else, maybe housework and dinner should be a family affair so that everyone has free time, and early bedtimes or rising times contribute to parents' mental health. A tidy house and family dinner can be the rule, not the exception, although visitors may be so astounded by the number of books one owns that they never notice the dust on the piano.

I confess I was freaked out my first year because my son breezed through an entire day's work in an hour or less. I rang up my friend with a Master's in Education and asked her if I should give him busy work, and she was horrified I would even suggest it.

For the youngest pre K- 1st grade students, a science fair board with miniature calendar math resources works miracles in about ten minutes a day!

How do you make kids do their school work? The same way you "make" them take a bath or feed the

dog. One who creates an interesting home school curriculum full of living books and resources has absolutely no difficulty motivating students to work. Isn't part of the education mandate to make learners rather than consumers?

I remember the moment stumbling through syllables and reading mechanics suddenly clicked into actual reading. I felt like a BOSS that I had taught a human being to read, and I had never seen him so proud and excited to continue.

For students, you might buy a student planner for each child and write his assignments in for the week. We used student planners for years until I discovered that a daily list written on a regular spiral notebook with check boxes works better. Go figure! Presumably my kids appreciate ticking off the boxes and the sense of accomplishment it lends to their days.

When the work is dull, you might keep assignments short or subjects blocked. A child is created with the desire to learn and improve himself for his good. Homeschooling emphasizes and nurtures this bent while teaching the child to accept and practice discipline as a way of life.

How do you homeschool with young children? Homeschool while holding the baby on the lap. Take advantage of nap times. Give young children their own school box (an empty diaper wipe box?) and fill it with things they are only allowed to play with during school time. When the toddler needs attention, attend to the toddler. That's what family is about. Older children (fourth or fifth grade or so) work independently most of the time. If there is a serious problem, cancel school for the day (or the month!) and revise the week's schoolwork schedule.

How do you know WHAT to teach? Research or buy grade-level scope and sequences online. We used

BIG Workbooks as a guide each year until about the third grade. *The Well Trained Mind* is a popular resource.

Can both parents work and still homeschool?

Parents forced into the workplace find free education and “daycare” in the public school, it is true. But many working homeschool parents alternate work schedules and share teaching responsibilities. Some have work-at-home arrangements, find flexible part-time employment, or run their own businesses. With organization and serious commitment, both parents can work, although two full-time jobs make it difficult. Usually for one parent, though, the job and the “stuff” can wait; children can’t. It is definitely a sacrifice, but worth every second.

Don’t you ever just get too tired to homeschool?

Of course. Sometimes it is the parent, sometimes the student, but when one truly needs a break, one should simply take a break. February and March are consistently the times when everyone in education, whether public, private, or homeschool, is sick of school.

How do I know which curriculum is best for my family?

There is a saying in the homeschool community, “You won’t ruin them in one year.” Much of home education is an experiment the first year or two. Curriculum manuals abound and can be helpful, but word of mouth is often the very best way to gauge the tone and feel of a course or curriculum. First curriculum choices are often made based on what parents remember from their own education and the strengths and weaknesses they discern in their students. If a curriculum is not working, sell it on eBay or Amazon.com and try another.

What do I do when my student doesn’t “get it”? If a student is not ready for a concept, for whatever reason, he is simply not ready. First, research

learning styles and different ways of presenting the concept online, then re-present the material. If he is still not “getting it,” move on to something else and come back to it later. Often frustration arises when one attempts to force an issue or loses her temper. Remember that home education allows great flexibility to go at the student’s pace. It is sometimes the parent who rushes the child in an effort to accelerate him and appear an exceptional teacher and parent.

How do you cover everything?

Homeschooling covers an unbelievable amount of work in very little time, but ultimately one can never cover everything there is to learn or that is important. Education is about inspiring children to a lifetime of learning and teaching them to think independently. One covers what is essential, and anticipates a lifetime of opportunities to learn more.

Don’t they get bored staying home all the time?

Children need time for extravagant outdoor exploration. Some parents deliberately remove media simply to create “boredom” and force the creativity that automatically ensues.

Sonja Corbitt is the Bible Study Evangelista. She’s a Catholic Scripture teacher with a story teller’s gift – a Southern Belle with a warrior’s heart and a poet’s pen. The author of Unleashed, Fearless, and Ignite (summer 2017), her study series air weekly on The Bible Study Evangelista Show. Sonja produces these and other resources with you in mind - bites of spinach that taste like cake - to help you create a space in your busy heart and schedule for God to love and lift you all the way up into His great lap, where all you’ve been given is loved and lifted too. Catch her newest audio study series on the Magnificat, Line By Line. What’s an “evangelista”? Find out at biblestudyevangelista.com

[i] <http://www.nheri.org/>

AcademicAchievementAndDemographicTraitsOfHomeschoolStudentsRay2010.pdf

[ii] <https://www.hslda.org/research/>

[iii] <https://nheri.org/>



Many Catholics are Choosing Homeschooling.

Should You?

by Theresa Thomas

Homeschooling, defined as “parent-led, home-based education” is the fastest growing form of education, now bordering on the mainstream in the United States. [i] According to National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) , in 2010 more than 2.04 million students were homeschooled in the United States, and homeschooling has grown by seven percent in the last three years[ii]. 2010 statistics specifically pertaining to Catholic homeschooling are not available but if one figures that Catholics make up 23.9 percent of population[iii] it is easy to extrapolate, at least anecdotally, that Catholics make up a significant number of growing homeschoolers. In fact, *Catholic Homeschooling*, an informational academic internet site states, “At present, the number of students receiving a Catholic home education is estimated to be between 80,000 and 100,000...this estimate is derived from the number of total homeschoolers in the country and the number of students enrolled in the Catholic home study programs.”[iv] Further, the website claims that the number of all homeschooled students almost matches the number of students in Catholic schools in the U.S.

Why? Why are Catholic parents choosing to homeschool? In gathering stories for *Stories for the Homeschool Heart*[v], a book I co-authored with Patti Maguire Armstrong, we found a number of reasons why Catholic parents choose to homeschool. Some parents cite their local parochial schools being too expensive or not satisfactory enough to justify the cost. The parents claim that the schools in their area lack solid catechesis and have become “too secular” or too indistinctive from public schools. Others, unable to afford Catholic school, say they worry for their child’s safety in a public school, while still others opt for homeschooling because of the academic benefits of one-on-one learning, evidence of higher test scores of homeschooled students over public schooled students and parental control over curriculum. While appreciating the role of professional teachers and the difficulties they encounter in today’s school system, still other parents simply do not believe in putting a five year old in an institutional setting and feel that the peer influence at that age as well as time away from the nuclear family is almost always negative. Certainly, safety in the schools, ability to teach the Faith at home and instill moral values, and believing they can provide a superior academic education to that being offered locally are compelling reasons that parents decide to homeschool.

But during the collection of stories, while talking to scores of Catholic homeschool parents, Patti and I found time and time again that there was something more that was driving parents to begin to educate their children at home. Our anecdotal evidence suggests that large numbers of Catholic homeschool parents choose to homeschool quite simply because they feel God is calling them to do so. They report that they crave a rich sacramental, familial life and determine this can best be integrated with academics through home education.

The late Father John Hardon once said, “Home schooling in the United States is the necessary concomitant of a culture in which the Church is being opposed on every level of her existence and, as a consequence, given the widespread secularization in our country, home schooling is not only valuable or useful but it is absolutely necessary for the survival of the Catholic church in our country.”[vi] These are strong words for sure, but many homeschoolers feel the same way. While homeschooling may not be for everyone, and certainly God may call different families to different modes of education (possibly based on the ultimate mission of each individual soul) homeschooling can be a viable education option. Further, it is easy to see how Catholic homeschooling, with its directed focus and parents dedicated to intensive religious instruction and character formation, can contribute to the renewal of the Church in these tumultuous societal times.

How do homeschoolers homeschool?

Asking “how do homeschoolers homeschool?” is like asking “how do families eat dinner” or “how do families teach values?” Each family is different and develops its own style of homeschooling. Some families purchase an entire curriculum from a provider such as Seton Home Study[vii] , an accredited school and curriculum provider, or work with one of a myriad of other Catholic homeschool curriculum providers such as Mother of Divine

Grace[viii], Angelicum [ix], Kolbe Academy[x] , Our Lady of the Rosary[xi] , Catholic Heritage Curricula[xii] or others. They may set up a classroom in an extra bedroom, room over the garage or in the basement. Or they may do school over a kitchen or dining room table. Some families take school “on the road” as opportunities arise. Families may begin and end school in a similar way to traditional school, beginning each day formally with the Pledge of Allegiance and particular prayers such as the rosary or Mass. Some select family ‘uniforms’ to help children focus on the work at hand.

Other families homeschool in a more relaxed way. They may vary the room in which they school. Children may start school even before they eat breakfast, while still in their pajamas. Parents may design their own curriculum around each child’s particular needs and abilities. They may use textbooks, original works, and/or interactive internet material such as Ignatius Press’s Faith and Family religion series online[xiii] Teaching Textbooks[xiv] for math or Institute for Excellence in Writing[xv] for language arts. Some buy new curriculum every year. Others pass down books from child to child. Still others trade with other homeschool families. Finally, some parents “unschool”, which can be defined as “as interest driven, child-led, natural, organic, eclectic, or self-directed learning”[xvi] .

Despite the mode of home education chosen, all Catholic parents with whom we spoke report a deep love for their children and a fundamental driving concern for their child’s eternal soul. They report an understanding of their role as “primary and principal educators”, and take seriously and literally that “Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring.” (Pope Paul VI)[xvii] . Since homeschooling is legal in all 50 states, although regulated more or less in some areas, Catholic homeschooling parents report feeling compelled to teach their own.

How do homeschoolers find support?

Catholic homeschool groups exist in every state of the United States.[xviii] With the rapid growth of homeschooling over the last ten years, most decently populated areas have some homeschool groups available. Homeschooling parents are an innovative bunch. If they can't find resources they often make them. Sometimes, homeschoolers band together and barter services. If a member of the group includes a mom who was an engineer before she had children and another mom has extensive knowledge of the French language, they may trade services with each other. Sometimes they hire an outside expert to help them with particularly tricky subjects such as Latin or calculus.

Homeschoolers also take advantage of resources in the community. They form clubs, organize field trips, plan lessons around local museum exhibits, visit art galleries and historical places. They travel together to see ballets or science demonstrations. Some homeschooled high school students, like their traditionally schooled counterparts, take classes at the community college, hold part-time jobs, volunteer and help in the family business or start their own. They are often quite active in their local parishes, being dependable altar servers, and participating in choirs. They may dance in ballet studios, take gymnastics classes at the YMCA, or participate in homeschool sports teams or music ensembles. Most homeschooling parents have no difficulty finding support not only in the local Catholic group but also in these sub-groups. Finally, with the ease of internet access, Catholic homeschooling Yahoo groups and message boards have popped up everywhere. Parents need only access to the computer to find the information and support they need.

Should you homeschool?

There are many factors that should be taken into consideration when determining whether you should homeschool. Among them include asking yourself the following questions

–Am I willing to spend a significant time in planning, implementing and evaluating curriculum for my child? Can I truly put other activities aside for this primary purpose? Every day? For 180 days of the year? Homeschooling cannot be relegated to a 'hobby'. It must actively be pursued every week day from August or September until May or June, every year.

–Do I have access to the resources I need? Can I provide a well rounded curriculum for my child that will meet his/her unique educational needs? Excellent curriculum providers abound, but you the parent must research to find the right fit and grade level for your child. You must be willing to adjust and change as your child's needs change. You must be willing to research options for him, particularly as he gets older, has greater educational needs and is looking at taking the SAT, going to college, etc.

–Do I have a basic understanding of my Catholic faith or at least a willingness to learn with my child? Many parents who embark on Catholic homeschooling do not know their faith as well as they would like, but find excellent materials and pursue knowledge together with their child, often taking advantage of resources at their parish and in their diocese.

–Do I have the support of my spouse? Some husbands take an active role in homeschooling, teaching a class in their area of expertise, often math or science. Other fathers' primary role is one of principal and athletic or music director. In other families yet, fathers provide moral support for the wife and children, but are unable to teach or manage. A situation in which a spouse actively opposes homeschooling, however, is a red flag that successful homeschooling may not be possible. Spouses should be in agreement as much as possible as to the mode of their child's education in order for any choice to be successful.

-Do I know and understand the laws of my state pertaining to homeschooling? The Homeschool Legal Defense Association offers a summary of homeschool laws for each state.[xix] For the most up-to-date information, consult your state's Department of Education web page.

-Will I have the support of my pastor? Does my diocese offer resources or guidelines for Catholic homeschooling in my area? Many diocesan web pages offer guidelines for homeschoolers in their jurisdiction.

-Do I realize this is not just an option for education but a lifestyle choice? Many homeschooling families share that homeschooling is a 24 hour a day, seven day a week endeavor, where real learning is interwoven into everyday life. If this does not appeal to you, homeschooling may not be the right 'fit' for your family.

If you answer 'no' to some of the questions above but still have a strong desire to homeschool, know that you are not precluded from being a successful Catholic homeschooler. It does mean that additional challenges will be yours so make sure to address them upfront before proceeding with your plans.

Many Catholic families make the choice to homeschool for one year, often making it kindergarten or they begin homeschooling when a particular school situation is not working out. Then, they simply decide year to year how they will proceed. Some families end up educating at home until high school, where they send their child to a Catholic high school. Others homeschool kindergarten through 12th grade. Still others only

homeschool for a year or two, and then find another option opens up which fits their family's needs. The point is, Catholic homeschooling can be a viable option—either for a year or an entire school career—for Catholic parents who believe that educating for academics and eternity works best in the family and that there is truly 'no place like home'.

Theresa Thomas is a Catholic mother of nine who began the homeschooling adventure in 1995. She homeschools generally until high school after which the children attend a wonderful Catholic high school. Her youngest is 11. Theresa and her husband David live with their youngest, still-at-home children in rural Indiana. She is a co-author of two books including Big Hearted: Inspiring Stories from Everyday Families (Scepter), and has been a family columnist at Today's Catholic for 11 years.

- [i] <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/9320014765.html>
- [ii] <http://www.nheri.org/HomeschoolPopulationReport2010.pdf>
- [iii] <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>
- [iv] <http://www.homeschoolingcatholic.com/>
- [v] <http://www.amazon.com/Stories-Homeschool-Heart-Maguire-Armstrong/dp/0984486410>
<http://storiesforthehomeschoolheart.wordpress.com/about-2/>
- [vi] <http://www.ewtn.com/library/HOMESCHL/HARHOMSC.HTM>
- [vii] <http://www.setonhome.org/>
- [viii] <http://www.motherofdivinegrace.org/>
- [ix] <http://angelicum.net/>
- [x] <http://www.kolbe.org/>
- [xi] <http://www.olrs.com/>
- [xii] <http://www.chcweb.com/catalog/index.html>
- [xiii] <http://insightscoop.typepad.com/2004/2010/06/faith-and-life-series-now-online.html>
- [xiv] <https://www.teachingtextbooks.com/Default.asp>
- [xv] <http://www.excellenceinwriting.com/>
- [xvi] <http://www.holtgws.com/whatisunschoolin.html>
- [xvii] http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html
- [xviii] <http://www.catholichomeschool.org/findgroup.php>
- [xix] <http://www.hslda.org/laws/default.asp>

some choice over activities in their lives, the importance of collaborative learning, use of hands-on learning, and a well-ordered and prepared environment.

Unit Studies

Unit studies approach a given topic from the perspective of several different disciplines. Literature, history, art, music, math, and science can all be taught in this way, with various amounts of each depending on the subject and the age of the students. They tend to include hands-on activities. Unit studies can be useful for teaching several ages together because each child can approach the topic at their personal academic level.

Unschooling

Deeply influenced by the works of American educator John Holt, unschooling is child-led learning and learning from life. It stems from the belief that real learning only takes place when a child has a

personal desire to study a subject or learn a skill. Most unschooling parents work very hard to create an educationally rich environment that sparks investigations into a variety of topics. Strewing, or making books and materials readily available to encourage learning, is a popular aspect of this method. Unschooling does not rule out the use of traditional classes or textbooks provided it is what the child wants.

Eclectic and/or Relaxed

As the name suggests, these homeschoolers are flexible and pick and choose what method works best for their individual children. Some trial and error is involved with this method, but many veteran homeschoolers end up in this category by default simply because they have tried different approaches over the years and have discovered that what works with one child does not necessarily work with all.

Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur is a homeschooling mother of three and editor of TodaysCatholicHomeschooling.com

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The "Fundamental" Parental Right



by Antony Kolenc

In 2014, the United States Supreme Court refused to hear the final appeal of Uwe Romeike and his family, the homeschoolers who fled Germany in 2008 to avoid financial penalties, potential jail time, and the loss of their children to foster care—all due to their decision to educate their children at home. The German government does not believe parents possess a “fundamental right” that gives them the authority to educate their own children as they see fit.

Facing German oppression solely because of their homeschooling, the Romeike Family made the exodus to the shores of the United States (U.S.) seeking asylum. Instead, they found an American immigration system that did not want them. Denied asylum in the immigration courts, the Romeike’s took their case to federal court, only to find a stone wall of opposition under President Obama’s Department of Justice (DOJ).

Homeschool advocates decried Obama’s refusal to help the family. But even more startling was the position the DOJ took in the case. Its legal briefs indicated that the Obama Administration did not believe a parent’s decision to homeschool is so “fundamental” that it should be given special protection. Some homeschoolers saw this as more evidence that the Administration sought to erode the rights of U.S. parents. Then, in an unexpected reversal—after DOJ had won its battle in the courts—the

Department of Homeland Security “deferred” the Romeike’s deportation, allowing them to stay “indefinitely” in the U.S.

Thankfully, the right to homeschool in America is backed in the courts by a strong “fundamental” right with a distinguished and accepted legal pedigree.

The Parental Right and “Natural Law”

What is the source of your parental rights? You conceived your children and gave them life, chose to carry them to their birth, nurtured them as infants, sacrificed for their growing needs, and lavished them with unconditional love. So it would seem that, as a matter of Natural Law, parents have a cherished and sacred right to raise their children as they see fit.

Natural Law views certain rights as so sacred that no government has the ability to infringe them. In the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson referred to these as “the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God,” and he announced, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These are three natural rights we accept because of their connection to the American Revolution. Though not listed in the *Declaration*, the right of parents to raise and educate their children—the “Parental Right”—flows from the same wellspring.

Indeed, the Parental Right has been one of the most accepted natural rights throughout human history. It is woven into the fabric of Sacred Scripture, and has been so revered that it has gone virtually unchallenged for millennia. The rights of a father and mother have historically been enshrined in the laws that form the basis of Western society. For that reason, homeschool advocates argue that the Parental Right is contained within the Ninth Amendment, which recognizes that “the people” possess “other” natural rights that are not specifically enumerated in the U.S. Constitution.

The Supreme Court Speaks

Unlike in Germany, the highest court in the United States has spoken authoritatively on this topic in favor of the Parental Right. As early as 1923, in *Meyer v. Nebraska*, the Supreme Court said that Americans had a “fundamental” right to “marry, establish a home and bring up children[, and] ... give [their] children education suitable to their station in life....”¹ Two years later, the Supreme Court confirmed this view.² Over the next 80 years, the Court from time to time mentioned this “fundamental” parental liberty interest.³

In the year 2000 a divided Supreme Court called the Parental Right “the oldest of the fundamental liberty interests recognized by this Court,” and confirmed there is a “constitutional dimension to the right of parents to direct the upbringing of their children.”⁴ Thus, U.S. homeschoolers have a strong basis to believe that parents have a fundamental right to educate their children.

The Role of Government

Homeschoolers in the United States should feel secure in their rights as parents. But they must also recognize that the Parental Right does not exist in a vacuum.

American courts have recognized the government’s power to protect children as “*parens patriae*”—a Latin phrase meaning “parent of the country.” The Supreme Court has affirmed the “power of the state” as *parens patriae* to place “reasonable regulations” on a child’s education.⁵ It has also explained that the State “has a wide range of power for limiting parental freedom and authority in things affecting the child’s welfare, [including] to some extent, matters of conscience and religious conviction.”⁶

Due to this trade-off between the State and parents, courts often feel they must balance the interests of both sides when an issue arises. To fully grasp the Parental Right, then, we must understand how judges think about the issue.

Strict Scrutiny

We live in a constitutional democracy where the Majority votes for its leaders and holds them accountable at the ballot box when they act against the will of the people. Courts do not want to strike down laws passed by the Majority unless they have good reason to do so. For that reason, judges often look at a law and merely ask whether it is “rational.” If the government has a rational reason for passing a law or taking an action, then the court is likely to uphold it.

But courts are less cooperative when the State interferes with a fundamental right. For instance, because the Supreme Court considers the right to Free Speech to be fundamental, it “strictly scrutinizes” laws that censor speech. The only way a law can survive this “Strict Scrutiny” is if the government has a “compelling” interest in regulating that right. Think of it this way: if the State’s “rational” reason must be at least 50% strong, then its “compelling” reason must be at least 95% strong.

The good news for homeschoolers is that most courts view the Parental Right as “fundamental.” Thus, the

power of Strict Scrutiny should serve as a strong future protection against any potential attempts by the government to destroy the right to homeschool in America.

The Guaranteed Right to Homeschool

Homeschooling is legal everywhere in the United States. Indeed, U.S. homeschoolers may enjoy the world's greatest freedom to educate their children. Should that right come under future attack, homeschooling advocates believe the right to rear and educate their children will be protected by the courts at the highest level—Strict Scrutiny. There is good reason for this belief.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly called the Parental Right “fundamental,” even though it has never technically ruled that Strict Scrutiny must be used whenever that right is impacted. In one of the most recent cases involving this issue, every Justice on the Supreme Court acknowledged the importance of the Parental Right. And Justice Clarence Thomas argued that courts should use Strict Scrutiny *every time* the government interferes with that right.⁷

The Romeike Family, unfortunately, did not have a German court system that protected their fundamental rights as parents. But in America, in light of our precedent on this issue, lower courts assume that parental rights deserve special treatment. That is exactly what a California court did in 2008 when it used Strict Scrutiny to examine that State's homeschooling law.⁸ And should the right to homeschool come under fire in the future, U.S. courts will closely examine State homeschooling laws under a heightened level of scrutiny.

We, as American homeschoolers, can thank God that our “fundamental” legal right to homeschool is secure and thriving. And the Romeike Family is no doubt grateful for their “indefinite” reprieve from deportation. But we must continue to pray and work so that families around the world can educate their children in peace in their own native lands.

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**A version of this article was originally published as a legal column in Practical Homeschooling Magazine in April 2014.*

1. *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 399-403 (1923). The case involved a post-World War I appeal from a teacher being criminally prosecuted for teaching German to a student in a Lutheran school, in violation of a Nebraska “English-only” law. A unanimous Court ruled against Nebraska, finding no “reasonable relation” to any competent state interest.

2. *See Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 535 (1925). Oregon had passed a statute requiring children to be educated in public school—a law that would have shut down all primary private schools in the state. A unanimous Court struck down the law, declaring, “The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.”

3. *See Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 166 (1944). In *Prince*, the Court upheld the conviction of a Jehovah's Witness whose minor daughter distributed religious pamphlets on the street in violation of child labor laws. In *Prince*, the Court said, “[T]he custody, care and nurture of the child reside first in the parents, whose primary function and freedom include preparation for obligations the state can neither supply nor hinder.” Thirty years later, the Court reiterated this idea in *Stanley v. Illinois*, 405 U.S. 645, 651-52 (1972) (“The rights to conceive and to raise one's children have been deemed ‘essential,’ ‘basic civil rights of man,’ and ‘[r]ights far more precious . . . than property rights.’”).

4. *Troxel v. Granville*, 530 U.S. 57, 65 (2000) (plurality opinion). In that case, a Washington court had granted visitation rights to the grandparents of two young girls, despite objections by their custodial mother. The Court overturned the order, ruling that it “violated her due process right to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of her daughters.”

5. *Pierce*, 268 U.S. at 536.

6. *Prince*, 321 U.S. at 166-69.

7. *See Troxel*, 530 U.S. at 57. Justice Clarence Thomas was the only justice arguing for strict scrutiny.

8. *See Jonathan L. v. Super. Ct. of Los Angeles County*, 81 Cal. Rptr. 3d 571, 592 (Cal. Ct. App. 2008).



8 Ways Homeschooling is Good for Your Health and Your Life

by Theresa Thomas

We know homeschooling is good for your children - their morals, their academics, their physical and emotional development, but are you aware of the unique benefits of homeschooling to YOUR health and welfare? No? Well, then read on, mama! Here are eight ways homeschooling your children makes you healthier and happier. Enjoy.

1. Homeschooling moms can eat healthier.

Homeschool moms are not packing school lunches, trying to figure out what nutritious snack will stay fresh for four hours in a lunch box with just an ice pack, and then scrounging at lunch time for herself, eating whatever is there because she doesn't want to take the time to fix food for just one person. She can't zip off to the fast food store easily either at

noon, unless she wants to put coats and shoes on all her little people and worry about the post-eating mess in the van.

Homeschool moms often open up their fridges and warm up healthy leftovers from the night before, or spend a few minutes chopping up fresh vegetables for quick, vitamin-laden salads for everyone. She can boil a couple eggs or warm up frozen creamed spinach if she wants. If moms plan ahead, they can even pre-make a whole week full of lunches and put them in the freezer for easy defrosting and eating, whether lunch is at 11 a.m. or 1:00 p.m. Homeschool moms generally are very conscientious about what goes into their children's bodies. When they go out of their way to make a nutritious and delicious meal for their children, they are more likely to eat healthy foods themselves. *Bon appetit!*

2. Homeschooling moms can get the sleep they need

Homeschooling moms can get all the sleep they need. Homeschooling moms can take mid-day naps, or sleep later, or get to bed earlier than their non-homeschooling counterparts. They don't have to stay up until midnight encouraging a child with an early morning project due. They don't have to drag sleepy children out of bed to get them fed and ready for a 7:00 a.m. bus. They can go with the flow and work with their child's and their individual sleep needs.

Studies show sleep is more necessary than originally thought. While many homeschool moms DO get up early to get a head start on their day, they don't HAVE TO. They are not outside-the-family-activity driven. They control their family's time and commitments and are free to rest with the littles when they need or want. Homeschool moms have more control over their families' schedules than do moms of children in brick and mortar schools. They can more easily adjust sleep schedules for their children and themselves than other moms.

3. Homeschooling makes mom smarter.

No matter how prepared you are for homeschooling, there is always something you don't know that your child must learn or wants to learn. This is what homeschooling moms say. Maybe it's Latin she is learning alongside her kids. Perhaps it's the Krebs Cycle or other biological or chemical concept. Regardless, every homeschool mom attests that she is always learning something new on account of her children, and constantly must be on her toes. While this quick thinking can be challenging on some days, it is definitely a homeschooling mom's benefit over time.

I suspect future studies will show homeschool moms are less likely to get Alzheimers. If doing a crossword puzzle a day is supposed to help stave off the disease, surely teaching four hours a day and learning

something new each hour will catapult a homeschooling mom into huge brain protection and alertness well into old age.

4. Homeschooling keeps moms physically fit.

After all, they are constantly chasing students down to pull them back to their work. Just kidding. Seriously, homeschool moms report they often spend time doing physical activity with their children - biking on sunny days, hiking, exploring the neighborhood. This is often part of the actual school day as many homeschool moms embrace 'hands-on' learning - going to the park, finding geological specimens (ie: rocks), are integrated with the curriculum. What's more, to homeschool, moms must develop self-discipline. This often spills over into all areas of her life, where she finds time to be physically active with her children.

Many homeschooling group social activities revolve around physical fun - roller skating, soccer in the park, and other sports. Some homeschooling moms even sign up for Pilates or aerobic class with their teenaged daughters as part of their physical education. The flexibility of homeschooling allows for mom to be physically fit, if she chooses to integrate activity into the family's school day.

5. Homeschooling builds strong family relationships and strong relationships preserve health.

When families live and learn together day in and day out, with members spending most of the day with one another, they can't help but grow closer. Big children interact with little children. Parents have more time for in-depth conversation with their offspring. People who have satisfying relationships have been shown to be happier, have fewer health problems, and live longer. When homeschooling families learn together, they grow together and bond. These satisfying relationships can help them live healthier lives.

6. Homeschooling families are in more control and therefore may encounter less stress.

Sure, there is stress involved in finding curriculum, organizing a school day, and teaching a child from day to day and year to year, and dealing with state regulations all while running a home. But most of this stress is self-moderated by homeschooling parents. It is not (except for the state regulations) imposed by outside sources.

The power in a homeschooling family is with the family. The family decides the schedule, the subjects, what's best for the child. There is no worry about negative outside influences from teachers or administrators or peers. The parents *are* the teachers and administrators, and they can carefully watch over peer influence and interaction on a consistent, daily basis. The deadlines generally are those determined by the family, not by a school corporation, or five different teachers or a particular school.

Homeschooling can keep everyone calmer. Less stress = better health.

7. Homeschooling can make a marriage stronger. Stronger marriage = health benefits.

Homeschooling is like bringing a magnifying glass into a marriage. If there are problems in the marriage before embarking on homeschooling, they will loom bigger after one begins. If there is already strength and happiness in a marriage before homeschooling, that will grow too afterwards. The key is to build on a strong base and increase blessings exponentially, thus contributing to overall well being and health. Homeschooling can make a marriage stronger because a couple must discuss many issues and topics before and during homeschooling. Navigating these topics well can lead to better marriages and thus better health.

Homeschooling parents must interact more than non-homeschooling parents to discuss in depth their general and specific plans for educating their children (Should we use boxed curriculum? Will we homeschool one year or 12? What subjects are important? How will we integrate

athletics into our children's lives? Logistically in our home how will this work? Etc. etc.) Homeschooling parents will face unique challenges (Perhaps the in-laws will object vehemently for example and that must be addressed by the couple, or maybe the couple must discuss the layout of the house for the accumulation of books, or there might be daily problems with one particular subject...).

Homeschooling parents must work together. They must communicate. Choosing to homeschool is choosing to delve deeper into a marriage, where a couple's relationship can be strengthened and blossom in ways otherwise not capable.

8. Homeschool moms find their own passions as they seek to develop their children's

Homeschooling moms often find interests of their own while igniting the passions of their children. When a child is immersed in writing poetry or short stories, mother might find she wants to create them right with her child. She might decide to submit her work in a contest as she encourages her child to submit his. As a homeschooling mother teaches her daughter the basics of sewing, she might be inspired to create something elaborate of her own, or upcycle some used clothing she has in a closet.

In short, homeschooling makes mothers think outside the box, and her child may not be the only one who benefits from mom teaching - mom often finds her own passions while teaching her children. She is a life-long learner and while others her age may be suffering career burnout, a homeschool mom often develops a deeper passion for life!

Theresa Thomas is a Catholic mother of nine who began the homeschooling adventure in 1995. She homeschools generally until high school after which the children attend a wonderful Catholic high school. Her youngest is 11. Theresa and her husband David live with their youngest, still-at-home children in rural Indiana. She is a co-author of two books including Big Hearted: Inspiring Stories from Everyday Families (Scepter), and has been a family columnist at Today's Catholic for 11 years.



Are We Homeschooling for Heaven or Harvard?



by Karen Edmisten

My relaxed methods of homeschooling prompt a question: Are we being academically challenging and rigorous enough?

That gets us to the core questions about why we homeschool in the first place: for academic excellence? For spiritual reasons alone? Do we homeschool to get our children to Heaven or to Harvard?

Personally, I've never really asked myself the "Heaven or Harvard" question. In our state, we have to report/declare our reasons for homeschooling by claiming an exemption for either academic reasons or religious reasons. We claim the religious exemption because we do firmly believe the Church's teaching that we are the primary educators of our children, i.e., that we have the right and responsibility to educate them as we see fit, or to contract out their education to schools if we so choose, etc. But, the academic exemption has always been right in front of us, too, and we could legitimately have chosen that option as well.

When we wanted to pull our eldest daughter out of school it wasn't because we were afraid that she was being spiritually tainted. She had a sweet, kind Kindergarten teacher (who later quit working outside

the home and began homeschooling her own children) and she had made friends with some very sweet and lovely children. But I couldn't bear some of the other stuff: I couldn't bear that she wasn't allowed to read (in school, I mean) the books that grabbed her. I couldn't bear that her love of learning was being dulled with handwriting practice and pre-reading worksheets. It made me mad, actually. It made me realize that I knew my daughter better than anyone else did, and that I could provide stimulating days and a vibrant education for her at home.

Certainly our goal was to raise our children, spiritually speaking, as we saw fit: saturated in our faith, living it every day. We wanted to provide a particular kind of lifestyle that allowed for exploring the liturgical year rather than the school year, for going to Mass when it worked for us, not just on Sundays, for a holy half-hour in the middle of a "school day" and for digging into a saint's life story if that's what we felt like doing.

But such a lifestyle and accommodations for our faith don't negate or ignore the desire for academic excellence. Atticus and I have always been dedicated to providing a strong and stimulating education for our girls.

On the other hand, we may not define academic excellence in exactly the same way that the world

does. Allow me to elaborate. Of *course* we want to be the best teachers we can be and we hope to provide our children with the best possible education. But that doesn't mean we're interested in churning out cookie cutter versions of human beings. Not everyone wants to attend a particular university or even a particular kind of university. Not everyone wants to pursue a particular type of profession, either. For us, academic excellence — the kind that takes into account the very specific needs, gifts, passions, interests, strengths and weaknesses of each child — will produce everything: plumbers, engineers, nurses, doctors, landscapers, secretaries, stay-at-home moms, stay-at-home dads, computer programmers, salesmen, philosophers, respiratory therapists, Spanish teachers, and on and on. An academically excellent homeschool considers the fact: the world needs all kinds of people and all kinds of jobs.

When it comes to raising and educating human beings with souls, paying close attention in a loving home to our individual children and what they need is every bit as important as an isolated, rigidly defined, supposedly objective standard of academic excellence.

I have never found and have never believed that there is one method, one cookie cutter ideal, one fixed rule, or one predictable outcome to homeschooling.

There is just this one thing in our homeschool: we need to figure out what this child needs at this moment, this week, this month, this year. Homeschooling, for us, is about finding what works, and then doing it.

Excellence, then, while it *is* about tailoring the academics to our particular children and their needs, isn't about proving to the world that we can raise the smartest, most stereotypically or predictably "successful" kids possible. As a matter of fact, homeschooling isn't about *us* at all.

Should we repeat it? *Homeschooling isn't about us at all.*

Sometimes we homeschooling parents forget that. There's so much pressure — from the world, from family or friends, from interested observers and critics — to prove that we haven't definitively messed up our kids. We feel compelled to confirm that we made the right choice, the best choice. And then we forget that *it isn't about us or about how we look.*

It's about our kids. It's about cooperating with God in this endeavor. It's about raising the people He entrusted to our care. It's about helping them to become the people *He* wants them to be. Sometimes our kids will fit every preconceived notion the world has of success and sometimes they will look as far from it as is humanly possible. And everything on that spectrum is conceivably perfectly okay, as long as we keep on asking ourselves the question, "What does this child need next?"

That's why, for us, it's not "Heaven or Harvard." It's Heaven and Harvard and not-Harvard and everything in between. It's about letting a Kindergartener read *Little House* books all day if that's how she best learns. It's about letting a high schooler write a novel the entire month of November if that's where her passion is. And it's about having her do some math, too, because that's a practical part of life that we have to address. It's about faith and books and being excited about learning for the rest of our lives.

It's about individual human beings, it's not about me, and it's about a life lived authentically. And that's going to look different for everyone.

Karen Edmisten is the author of five books including You Can Share the Faith, Deathbed Conversions, and After Miscarriage. She contributed to A Little Way of Homeschooling, several other books, writes a column for Catholic Digest, and is a writing coach at BraveWriter.com. A former atheist, Karen was baptized at the age of 30, received into the Catholic Church at 35, and happily saw her husband enter the Church five years later. They homeschooled two daughters through high school and still have one teen at home. Find Karen online at karenedmisten.com.

Worried About Your Child's Social Life?



by Jennifer Fitz

Recently my daughter attended a party that could have come right off the set of one of those “Just Say No” public service campaigns. A group of girls were pressuring her into doing something she didn’t want to do. The activity wasn’t grossly immoral, but it was contrary to her faith, and contrary to her dignity as a young woman. Her friends at the party thought she was just being shy, or prudish — you know, “that homeschooler.” They kept trying to persuade her to join in. She politely declined and found something else to do.

She told me about the incident afterwards. It was one of the best things a mom could hope to hear. At an age when other kids are desperate to fit in with the crowd, my daughter had a clearly defined sense of who she was and how she wanted to be treated, and she wasn’t going to compromise herself for the sake of being popular. She also told me, “Other than that, it was a really fun party. I wish they’d host one every month.”

And if they did? I’d probably let her go.

I know the moms who were hosting this party, and they had worked hard to put together an event that was both fun and well-chaperoned, with a pile of activities centering on sports, games, and crafts. I

also knew in advance that these moms didn’t share our perspective on certain questions of the faith. Given that my daughter is well-catechized and knows to look elsewhere for advice on faith and morals, we agreed this event was fine. Not a problem, despite the little incidents that might crop up.

Social life is like this. There are no perfect friends.

An essential social skill is *discernment*. Given that all of my friends are going to fall short of the glory of God, does this particular friendship help me live more the way God wants me to? Am I relating to people in a way that meets my need for connectedness without compromising my need for holiness? And what is my role in this friendship? Even among children, there is a time and place for being the moral leader within our imperfect communities.

There is also a time and a place for withdrawing — for avoiding bad company and its pernicious influence on us.

Does School Socialize Me?

I recently overheard a mom fretting about the decision to homeschool. She wasn’t happy with the influences at her local school, but worried, “I think they need to be socialized.” By *socialized*, she didn’t mean, “It’s important to me that my children learn the values of

our wider culture, and the best way to do that is to spend hours every day with people who reject the Christian faith, promote immorality, and mock anyone who doesn't toe the line." I don't know any parents who are looking for that. What she meant was, "I want my kids to be able to make friends and get along with people. I want them to have relationships that answer their need for human connectedness — their genuine spiritual and biological need to live in community."

I'm with her 100%, and I think most parents share that goal. Where does school fit in with that? Well, there are people at school. Lots of them. It's a place you can make friends. That's a good thing. But let me be blunt: If you are dependent on your school (or your workplace) for providing you with friends, you do not have mature social skills.

How Are Your Social Skills, Mom?

Why is my daughter so resistant to peer pressure? Because she knows how to make friends. She knows how to introduce herself to new people, strike up a conversation, and find something pleasant to do together. She also knows how to stay in touch with a friend she might not see but a few times a year.

Part of this is raw talent, but a lot of it is skill. She is used to trying new things and meeting new people. She is accustomed to meeting a wide variety of people, of all ages and backgrounds. She often finds herself in situations where she simply has to get along with the one or two people in front of her, no matter how weird or different they might be. And she knows that usually she'll find a friendly person, if she makes the effort.

The payoffs are huge. When someone tries to manipulate her into going along with the crowd? She

has every confidence that there's a different, better crowd somewhere else. And because she has so many different types of friends from so many different places, she can distinguish between these folks over here who know everything about violin, and those over there who are a better authority on what the Bible says.

When I hear a parent or teacher worrying about socialization, that's a red flag for me: I suspect these adults really just don't know how to make friends.

Community Means Living Together

Is your local school a community? You bet it is. And given that there are so many people thrust together in one place, if your child attends school but can't seem to make friends there, that's a cause for concern. While it could be the child who needs some mentoring and practice with social skills, as my daughter can attest, it could be that the community is toxic. We should be able to find friends wherever we go, sure. That's a mark of good social skills. But we live in a fallen world, and bad communities — big and small — do crop up from time to time.

How do homeschoolers, hermits, and other under-institutionalized-types find friends? By living with other people. We find other people at home, and we find them out in the wider world. We do things with those people. We spend time with those people. We invite them to share parts of their lives with us. That's socialization.

Jennifer Fitz is a homeschool mom, mother of four, and freelance writer. She is the author of Classroom Management for Catechists and contributor to numerous Catholic books, magazines, and online publications. She blogs for the Catholic Conspiracy at JenniferFitz.com.

10 Reasons to Attend a Homeschool Conference



by Nicole Ernest

1. Explore Homeschooling

You do not need to be homeschooling to attend a homeschool conference. Have you been considering homeschooling? Wondering what it is about? Not sure if you can do it or if it would work for your family? A Homeschool Conference is the perfect opportunity to get some questions answered and explore the world of homeschooling.

2. Used Book Sale

I laughed when I first read somewhere to bring a rolling suitcase to a homeschool conference, but then I went to one, and I went to the used book sale. JACKPOT! There are so many awesome deals and unfortunately they do not have shopping carts, so yes, bring a rolling suitcase to help you carry all of your awesome treasures that you will find.

Also, a quick tip that I learned is to make a budget list of all of the top books and curriculum items that you are looking for and the cheapest price you are able to find them with the publisher or on-line. Keep that handy with you while you are shopping and you will easily know if you are getting a good deal or not.

3. Inspiring Speakers

My husband and I were able to attend the Minnesota Catholic Home Education Conference last year and were able to hear Dr. Meg Meeker speak. She has always been one of my favorite authors and it was fantastic to hear some best tips on parenting and living life to the fullest. Check the nearby Homeschool Conference schedule to see what gems may be in your area this summer.

4. Curriculum Booths

I do not know about you, but getting into the world of homeschooling I was completely overwhelmed by the amount of different curriculums out there. They all seemed so wonderful and all seemed like we could incorporate them into our family well. It is so great to be able to go to the different curriculum booths at a Homeschool Conference and not only physically page through the books but also speak to someone who can answer all of your personal questions.

If you are planning on trying to go to a lot of speakers and also the Used Book Sales there is not always a lot of time to go to the Curriculum Booths. I made a list of the booths that I made sure I wanted to go to: Seton, Kolbe Academy, Catholic Heritage Curriculum, Mother of

Divine Grace and a few others to make sure that I prioritized these booths first.

5. Talk to the Vendor Representatives

Take time not only to page through all of the different books but to really talk to the Vendor Representatives at the Curriculum Booths. That is what they are there for. Ask them the tough questions about how things work, about what you do if you are having problems or concerns, how grading works, how you can teach multiple grades the same subjects, etc.

When we were at the Seton booth we were able to sit down and talk to Ginny Seuffert, who is a veteran homeschool mother and grandmother of over 20 plus years. Talking to her and asking her a lot of practical questions was truly what helped us decide that Seton was right for our family.

6. Visit and Support Other Organizations

There are so many fantastic organizations that take time to come to Homeschool Conferences and you do not want to miss out on their great products and services. HSLDA (Home School Legal Defense Association) is usually at most conferences and typically is not only giving away a free membership by drawing but also sometimes offering discounts if you sign up at the conference.

7. Sign up if you are Ready

Most curriculum vendors have great deals going on at a conference if you are ready to sign up! For example Seton will offer a \$30 discount per child if you sign up at the conference and also waive the First Time Enrollment Fee of \$25. That can be a significant savings depending on how many children you have.

8. Meet New People

Depending on which homeschool conference you attend there could be hundreds to thousands of

people there. It was so wonderful to meet homeschool students who gave wonderful testaments about their experiences and parents advice about how they have made homeschooling work. It is a fantastic place to network and meet new friends.

9. Inspire Conversation with your Spouse

When my husband and I went to our first homeschool conference we were pretty sure that homeschooling was for us, but we still had some pretty big questions. By attending a conference together and by going to individual talks that spoke to us each personally about what our own experiences with homeschooling might be like we learned so much. It is a great opportunity to come together with your spouse and decide what is best for your family. My husband and I were able to go out on a date after attending the conference and talk to each other about all of our hopes, dreams and fears about homeschooling and really get on the same page. I have definitely learned that having the support of your spouse is one of the most important things to make homeschooling a success.

10. Have Fun

A homeschool conference is really a lot of fun. If you have felt burn out after a long year of homeschooling or just not really feeling too motivated to move forward and get ready for the next year, attending a homeschool conference might just be what you are needing. It is really inspiring to see such a wonderful community come together to support a fantastic way of education. You might be able to be inspired by speakers, get some new ideas or even just enjoy a day or two away!

Nicole Ernest is loving living out her vocations as a Catholic wife and mother. Nicole resides in Nebraska with her husband and their lovable, energy filled boys. Nicole shares about living the liturgical year, homeschooling and marriage/ family life at her blog Children of the Church
<http://childrenofthechurch.blogspot.com>

The home is not the one tame place
in the world of adventure.
It is the one wild place
in the world of rules and set tasks.

G.K. Chesterton

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—Randy Hain, co-founder of Integrated Catholic Life.

Scepter

Teach Your Child to Be Grateful

by Carol Gordon Ekster

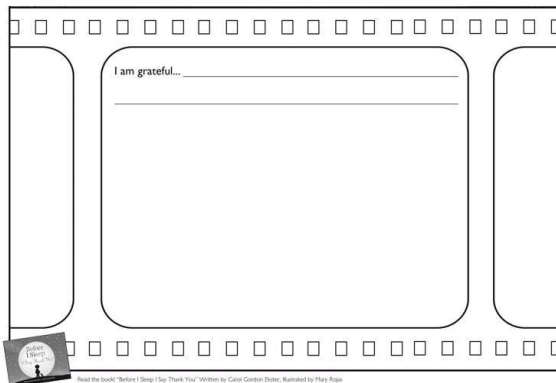
Being grateful is easy to do and has amazing benefits. As homeschooling parents you can help your children bring this powerful tool into their lives. Research indicates that gratitude can heal, energize, and change lives.

It's almost impossible to be grateful and unhappy in the same instant. Gratitude is a route to finding peace and happiness. There is so much to thank God for in this amazing world, even when things are tough. We just have to be open to recognizing the many gifts we are given throughout our day. Once you help your children to start a gratitude habit you will be amazed at how much sweeter your family's days will become. You will all help each other to notice the positive things that happen in your life more and more.

Here are some specific things you can do to help your children cultivate a spirit of gratitude:

1. Discuss with your children the many things for which they can be grateful. You could start a gratitude habit at the beginning or end of each of your school sessions. You should participate as well, modeling gratitude. It could be that you feel gratitude for what you have, for kindnesses others have shown you, for feeling well or just having a day without too many troubles.
2. You can also complete one of the sheets shown below once a week. Older children can write more, while younger children can just illustrate their feelings. Save it as a kind of gratitude diary that you can review at the end of the school year. And when there are difficult times for your children, when it feels hard to be grateful, you can use the gratitude diary to discuss that being grateful even in tough situations is beneficial. If

Name: _____

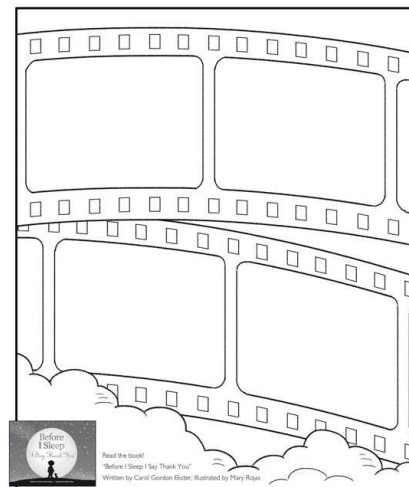


I am grateful...

Read the book! "Before I Sleep I Say Thank You" Written by Carol Gordon Ekster. Illustrated by Mary Ryan

Name: _____

What 4 things are YOU grateful for?



Read the book! "Before I Sleep I Say Thank You" Written by Carol Gordon Ekster. Illustrated by Mary Ryan

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Saying thank you to the other people in our lives more often makes the world a more joyful place.

your children are feeling angry, or jealous, or hurt by others, guide them to press a pause button and think of something good in their lives. Is it the beautiful weather? Do they like an activity they've been doing? Did a friend or family member say something that made them smile? It will most certainly lift their spirits.

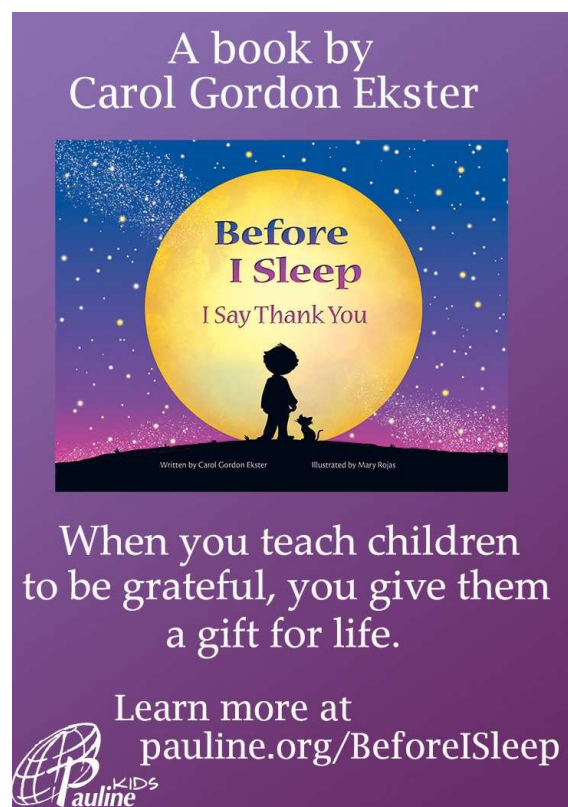
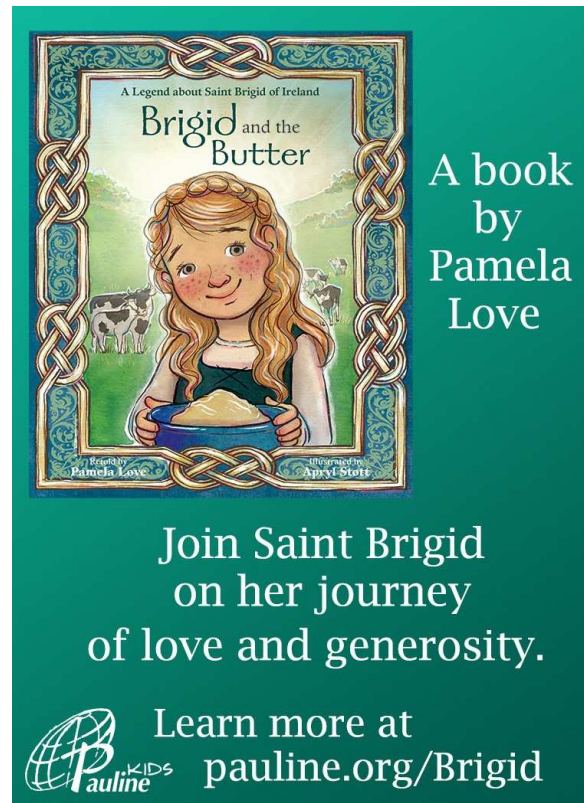
3. Spread the message of gratitude in your own life. Saying thank you to the other people in our lives more often makes the world a more joyful place. Your children will imitate your behavior and reap the benefits as well.

4. Encourage your children to make gratitude a part of your nightly routine... Before sleep, take a minute or two to reflect on the day asking, "Which of God's blessings and gifts did you receive today?" Try to think of five specific things.

5. Remind children to be grateful for forgiveness and second chances. As part of your nightly prayers, ask each child if there is one thing they wish they had done differently during the day. Tell them to let God know they are sorry, and ask for God's help to do better in the future.

Try any or all of the ideas above or come up with your own. I think you'll agree that there are many good reasons to make gratitude a part of every day. To teach a child gratitude is to give them a gift for life.

Carol Gordon Ekster is the author of Before I Sleep: I Say Thank You, (Pauline Books and Media, 2015)



8 Ways to Add Some Fun to Your Homeschool

by Patricia Purcell

It was the last period of the day before Christmas break. My seventh grade classmates and I filed wearily into the science lab, prepared to endure a final boring lecture from our teacher, Mr. K., before we were set free to enjoy the holidays.

We let out a collective groan as he emerged from the supply closet, pushing a sheet-covered cart that appeared to be loaded down with lab supplies. He expected us to do actual work? Now?

Ignoring our grumblings with irritating calm, he instructed us to open our books and read about the layers of the Earth, while he set up for the lab. Humming a Christmas carol under his breath, he proceeded to pull out pans and utensils, fully aware that most of us were watching him surreptitiously.

At last he looked up with a serious face and began his lecture. “The center of the Earth is a core of solid rock.” His hands rummaged under the sheet and brought out a tub of chocolate ice cream, which he spread into the bottom of a sheet pan. We sat up taller in our seats. “The next layer is...” He brought out a jar of fudge sauce. The class was grinning now.

By the time his ‘lecture’ was done, he had assembled a gigantic ice cream sundae and turned our lesson into an unexpected party. Mr. K. was a serious teacher, but that day he showed us that it is okay to have fun with learning sometimes.

It’s a lesson that I’ve tried to keep in mind as a homeschooling mom. It is so easy, especially as the kids get older, to look at the volume of work that must be completed and forget that a great education involves

more than just chasing grades. It should serve to instill a love of learning in the student.

I’ve realized that in order to do this, I need to take a page from Mr. K.’s planner and build some fun right into my school year. There are many ways to do this.

Plan Ahead to Build in Fun

Fortunately adding some fun to your school year doesn’t have to be time consuming or expensive. Subjects like History, Science, and Literature lend themselves to further exploration beyond the textbook. Some ideas include:

- History Day – Dress up as historical characters that the kids are learning about. Encourage everyone to stay in character for the day, emulating the speech patterns and social customs of the time as much as possible. (You’ll enjoy the polite speech that this should encourage.) Prepare a meal from the time period together. Older children might write a report or give a speech about the character or time period.
- Culture Day – Same as above, but with a geographical slant. Research the traditional costume and food of an area, and replicate it at home. Children could give a report about the history, terrain, and chief exports of the region. If your students happen to be studying the language that is spoken in that country, it’s a good time to practice as a family.
- Literary Tea Party – Invite some friends to join you for tea time dressed as their favorite book character. Encourage kids to recite lines from literature and have others guess the work that it’s from. You can even decide ahead of time to have a book discussion or debate. It could even be the start of a book club for your children.



- Be a Mad Scientist – Science is an area that begs to be delved into, but many of us find that sometimes we don't have time or the supplies on hand for experiments. Set aside a day just for science. Ensure that you have all the necessary supplies ready beforehand, and allow yourselves the time to be awed by the wonders of science.

Easy Ways to Add Some Fun to Your School Year

Even if you don't have time to dedicate a whole day to a subject, there are still plenty of ways to build fun into your school year.

- Change of Venue – If you and your children are becoming weary of doing lessons in the same old place, shake things up a little. For little ones, building a fort in the living room out of sheets and cushions to serve as a temporary classroom can make even math facts seem more exciting. If you have older children, load up the backpacks and head to the library for the day. The hushed atmosphere and endless shelves of books might inspire them to study harder.
- Take a Walk – Allow everyone to get a breath of fresh air and get the wiggles out. Take a walk in your neighborhood, and really look around with purpose. How old are the houses? Who would have lived here one hundred years ago? Or, head to a park for a nature walk. Bring along some binoculars and identification guides for birds, bugs, and foliage. Encourage kids to record their

observations in a nature journal.

- Special Projects – If possible, set aside an out of the way space in your home for long term projects such as models, sculptures, crafts... anything that your children are interested in trying. You never know when a hidden talent will be uncovered.
- Field Trips – Look around your community for unique learning opportunities. Many museums and parks offer classes and admission at bargain rates for students.

Instill a Love of Learning

Take the time during your busy school year to show your children that learning is about more than grades on a report card. Make time to go beyond the lesson plans as often as possible. Encourage kids to discuss and research topics that interest them.

Help them find ways to further their knowledge. Demonstrate that you too still value learning new things. Most of all, as Mr. K. taught me so long ago, show your kids that learning can be fun!

Patricia Purcell is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. She now lives in New York state with her very patient and handsome husband and their three active, homeschooled children. After teaching and shuttling kids to activities, she spends her time writing, reading, attempting to garden, and cooking. Not content with turning only her own children into bookworms, she manages book clubs in hopes of turning their friends into booklovers too.

How 15 Minutes a Day Can Change Your Child's Life

by Maureen Wittmann

I've taught literature for local homeschool co-ops for more than a decade now. During this time I've witnessed, up close, an extraordinary number of families who value read-aloud time in their homes. Recently, when my students read the *Sherlock Holmes* books, one 17-year-old boy asked if it was okay that his mom was reading the books aloud to the family instead of him reading silently to himself.

"Yes!" I told him, "Not only is it okay, it is encouraged." I then asked him if he, as the oldest child in his family, helped with the reading. I was thrilled to hear he regularly helps his parents by reading aloud to the younger children.

Research shows that homeschoolers score far above their public school peers on standardized tests. Analysts believe there are many reasons for this phenomenon. I believe one reason is that homeschool parents and children are reading together more than the average American family. It's a lesson for all parents that is easily imitated, no matter where our children get their academics.

Raising a Reader

Research has also shown that reading aloud is the single most important factor in raising a reader. Not whether you have a Ph.D. or a high school diploma. It's whether or not you're reading aloud to your children. It's caught, not taught.

I'm not talking about just about how to read, but raising a child who wants to read. Filling your child with a love for the written word and the desire to open a book.

Children need to find joy in their lessons. Phonics is hard for some children. When children see the purpose of their phonics lessons is to be able to read their own books, they become more engaged in learning.

Some children learn to read simply by sitting in the lap of their parent and looking at the words as they are read. I have a couple of children like that. I sat down to teach them how to read and they already knew.

However, it was a different story for my dyslexic child. He did not begin to take off in reading until he was 10 years old. Today, as a 26-year-old man, he loves to read even though it takes him significantly longer to read than the average person.

I believe his love for the written word goes back to the days when he couldn't read himself because of his dyslexia. I read everything aloud to him. Everything. We cuddled on the couch and worked on school lessons together. When you're a little child, it is comforting to be able to cuddle with your mom and have her full attention.

If reading is pleasurable, children will read without a fight. After all, it is human nature to be drawn to what is pleasurable.

Writing and Grammar

Writing and grammar lessons will be easier with a solid foundation of read aloud time. If you're reading good literature, then you will more likely write good literature.

My dyslexic son is an excellent writer. I remember asking him once, when he was 14, "Christian, how did you get to be such a good writer?" He answered,

“Because you give me books like *Lord of the Rings* and *Narnia*.” He knew.

Speech and writing are basically copycat activities. We imitate what we see and hear. It goes in through our ears and eyes and comes out our mouths as well as our keyboards.

My second child had severe speech impediments. It was a hereditary problem and at 5 years old she was difficult to understand. When Mary first saw a speech therapist, I was told many children with speech problems have them for no other reason than they don’t have a significant amount of verbal communication with adults in the home.

The therapist also shared that speech problems were on the rise and studies showed children with two working parents were twice as likely to develop speech problems than those with a stay-at-home mother. More recent studies show speech problems continuing to rise today due to the increased number of children spending time in front of screens instead of interacting with others.

Vocabulary and Comprehension

When my young daughter tested off the charts for vocabulary, the specialist told me, “You may struggle to understand Mary’s speech, but boy can she understand you!” She asked if I read aloud to Mary on a daily basis, knowing full well my answer would

be yes. The specialist told me that she never saw children with good vocabulary who weren’t read to by their parents.

A year later, Mary tested in the 99th percentile for reading comprehension. Again, the specialist was excited about the results. She told me it was because of our daily lessons where I read to Mary and had her retell the story. This exercise took fifteen minutes a day. In kindergarten, we read from the children’s Bible. In first grade, it was saints’ stories. Fifteen minutes a day made all the difference in the world.

An important thing for us to consider is that listening comprehension comes before reading comprehension. Children understand the verbal before they understand the written. In Jim Trelease’s book, *The Read Aloud Handbook*, he uses this example – the word “enormous.” If a child has never heard the word enormous, he’ll never say the word. If he’s never heard it or said it, imagine his displeasure when he attempts to read it. Imagine the frustration of encountering it for the first time on the written page.

During read aloud time, if a child hasn’t heard a word before, he’ll often figure out its meaning through the context of the story. If the story reads, “The giant was so enormous that he towered over the houses in the village,” it is easy to figure out the meaning of “enormous.”



If he can't figure out the meaning of a word as you read, make sure he is comfortable in stopping you and asking for a definition. Keep a dictionary close to you for such instances.

Expanding Attention Spans

Reading aloud also helps children and their ability to concentrate for long periods of time. Our current society conditions children to have short attention spans: 1-minute YouTube videos; TV commercials; Facebook memes; Twitter's 140-character limit; and Snapchat. Sitting down with Mom or Dad to read from the time when children are little will help grow their attention span. It will help them read for long periods of time on their own when they need to. It is, wonderfully, unforced learning.

When to Begin and End

You can never start reading aloud too early with children. I suggest beginning at the same time you begin talking to your child. All you need is a library card and the willingness to do it.

Conversely, children are never too old to be read to. Most parents stop reading aloud once children learn to read on their own. Please, don't be one of those parents. The research shows that children who are read to through the adolescence years do significantly better in vocabulary and comprehension.

Again, listening comprehension comes before reading comprehension. For example, a child who soaks up *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* read aloud, may only be able to read simple sentences such as "the cat in the hat" to herself. If you stop reading aloud as soon as a child begins to read herself, you'll both miss out on many great stories.

The Importance of Fathers

It makes a big difference if Dad is reading and not just Mom. Studies show that boys with fathers who read to them score significantly higher on standardized tests. Second are boys whose fathers read recreationally. Boys need to know that reading is not an activity only for girls, and that can happen if Mom is the only one reading.

Dads, make sure your sons see you reading books, magazines, and newspapers. Make sure they hear you talking about what you're reading. Emotions are contagious – if they see you're excited about reading then they'll be more likely to get excited about reading themselves. Make sure you're making time to read aloud to your children. Make it a habit.

Dads are busy, but all I'm suggesting is fifteen minutes a day. You can make an incredible difference in your child's life with only few extra minutes.

Conclusion

In my opinion, reading aloud is more important than worksheets, homework, flash cards, book reports, and the rest. Those things have their place, but for those methods to work at their best potential you need to first build a solid foundation with good books.

This article originally appeared on CatholicMom.com and is used with permission.

Maureen Wittmann and her husband are parents to seven children, who have always been homeschooled. She is the author of For the Love of Literature (Ecce Homo Press) as well as coeditor and contributing author to The Catholic Homeschool Companion (Sophia Institute Press) and A Catholic Homeschool Treasury (out of print). Her articles have appeared in Our Sunday Visitor, Homeschooling Today, Heart and Mind, Catholic Home Educator, New Covenant, Latin Mass, Catholic Faith, Catholic Digest, and more.



Resist the Urge to Compare Your Child

by T.M. Gaouette

One of the main reasons why you as a parent may choose to homeschool is because your child is struggling in a regular school. Maybe the pace in a classroom is too fast or too slow and the school is unable to accommodate your child. Or maybe your child doesn't understand what's going on and needs more one-on-one assistance that, again, the school cannot provide. Therefore, you decide that homeschooling will allow the opportunity to work with your child individually and at a pace that meets his or her needs.

So, you start the process and in setting up your child or children in the homeschool environment, you get together with other homeschool parents for social events or within co-ops. Whatever the scenario, you converse with other parents and learn about their day-to-day activities, curriculums, extra-curricula activities, and how their children cope with it all. And then you freak out.

You discover that your child struggles in math so much more than your new homeschool friend's child, and they're the same age and in the same grade. You learn that your child isn't able to keep up with extra-curricular activities in addition to regular classes, like another family's children, or that your child can't draw a self-portrait or write cursive well. In fact, your child or all your children are just not on the same academic level in some areas of their homeschool education when you compare them with others.

So, guess what? Don't compare them.

You see, the only rules you must adhere to when homeschooling are those set by your state. If you're following the law, the rest of your homeschooling requirements are set by you and your child. And this is good, because, as you know, every child is different.

Homeschooling is hard enough without trying to compare your child with others. And if you're

Stop focusing on what your child can't do or where he can't keep up. Focus on what he can do.

comparing your child with others, then aren't you doing a disservice to your child? And most importantly, aren't you defeating the whole purpose of homeschooling altogether?

Your child is a beautiful and unique individual and his learning process is equally distinctive, as are his academic strengths, interests, and talents. Rather than compare your child with others, focus on what works for your child. Find out what your child needs that will make his math experience easier. Learn what your child's gift is so that you can find ways to incorporate that into his academics. Take one day at a time as you learn about your child and even as you learn more about yourself as a teacher.

Most importantly, stop focusing on what your child can't do or where he can't keep up. Focus on what he

can do. Discover and utilize his strengths and use that knowledge to help strengthen the areas of his learning that he is finding the most challenging.

Homeschooling is a gift to both you and your child. Don't get caught up in comparing your child with others or even his siblings. It'll only cause unnecessary worry to you and your child.

T.M. Gaouette is a wife, homeschool mom, blogger, and fiction novelist. She was born in Africa, brought up in London, and is now living in New England where she raises goats with her husband and four children. Devoted to Him, Gaouette is dedicated to glorifying God through her fiction for teens and young adults. She is the author of The Destiny of Sunshine Ranch and the first and second book in her Faith & Kung Fu Series, Freeing Tanner Rose, and Saving Faith. For more on T.M. Gaouette and her work, visit her at tmgaouette.com



"The beauty of home education is that it gives a family more time together—time to solidify relationships, to communicate values, and to focus on each child's individual needs in a consistent and unhurried atmosphere."

Kimberly Hahn & Mary Hasson

Baby on the Move?



How to Keep Your Homeschool Thriving

by Kyndra Steinmann

In many ways, this homeschooling thing is best described as “constantly re-inventing the wheel!” We know that “the wheel”—education—is what we need, but the way we get it done is constantly changing, due in part to changing conditions and circumstances.

Right now we are in a season of homeschooling with a very loud and busy eight-month-old. She yells in the middle of math lessons, eats every crayon she can get her hands on, and LOVES to pull up on the edges of the desks to grab at books and papers!

Some of the children find her more distracting than others, but even the most dedicated student has trouble on days when the baby is cranky for some reason. (This week, it’s her getting two teeth and having a cold at the same time that has her particularly bothered—and therefore particularly bothersome!)

So back I go, into planning mode, to figure out how to adjust things in order to keep school moving and the baby happy and contented. Here are some of the best ideas I’ve implemented:

- **Start school with some children before others.** This year I have an emerging reader, so his lessons take precedence over having the other children start school “on time.” I’ve tweaked the schedule to allow him to come into the school room at 7:30 and do reading and

phonics with me, while the big children do their kitchen and laundry chores and the preschooler and eight-month-old play downstairs under the big kids’ supervision.

- **Have special toys just for school time.** We use cubby units for classroom storage, and one of them has puzzles and toys that are age-appropriate for a newly mobile child. All the toys need to be quiet, but there is a lot that can be done with small stuffed animals and soft plastic things that won’t make a loud noise if banged together. The baby’s current favorite occupations are taking all the puzzles apart (which the preschooler then puts back together—good practice for him!) and chewing on the large wooden stringing beads.

- **Incorporate some Montessori-style baskets for infants and toddlers.** There are some great resources out there for “play” that coincide with developmental stages. I’ve pinned a bunch of things to my “Tot School” board (<https://www.pinterest.com/kyndrast/tot-school/>) on Pinterest, and I intend to start presenting my little one with simple “lessons” like taking things out of containers and putting them back in. She’s the right age to find that fascinating anyway, and I’m sure the preschooler will be happy to “teach” her!

- **“Babywear.”** I only started babywearing when the three-year-old was an infant, but it has been such a lifesaver. I like a carrier that goes on my back, where the baby can see everything but can’t reach anything. About half the time she falls asleep

I always try to remember that soon the baby will be a toddler who talks and wants to do school herself, and then I'll have to redesign our day all over again. This time with a little one is fleeting—and will soon be past—and I want to enjoy it as much as I can before it's gone!

while I teach, and that short nap makes lunch time go much more smoothly!

- **Have another sibling babysit.** I remember this practice working for my mom, but so far it's not been a good choice for us. The children are close in age, so only the older two are really able to watch her in another room. Both of them don't do very well with stopping school before they are finished with their work—or, rather, getting back to it if they do—so I prefer to have them work while I manage the baby.

- **Have the baby practice sitting still.** She's at the point where church is also becoming difficult, so I'm starting some "sitting still" practice with her. I hold her on my lap and say, "Sit still," then watch the clock. Little squirms are fine, but when she starts trying to get off of my lap, I repeat, "Sit still" and then start the time over. At this point, I'm trying for two or three minutes of relative stillness with no shrieking (to which I respond, "Too loud!"). When we've achieved success over those two or three minutes, I say, "Good girl! You sat still!" and let her down. It's a slow process, but eventually—by summer if I'm very consistent—she will understand what "sit still" means and be able to sit still for five minutes or more.

- **Have children take an assignment to another room and return when it is complete.** Both of the big kids have desks in their rooms, so they do some of their work in there and come into the school room for math and other lessons that I need to teach them. The little boys don't find the baby as distracting, and their lessons are shorter and somewhat more interruptible, so they remain with me in the school room.

- **Everyone gets a chance to learn patience!** On the days when the baby is cranky and refuses to nap during school, everyone just has to learn to take their turns with my attention. It's not a bad lesson for them—or me!—and somehow the work always does get done eventually.

I always try to remember that soon the baby will be a toddler who talks and wants to do school herself, and then I'll have to redesign our day all over again. This time with a little one is fleeting—and will soon be past—and I want to enjoy it as much as I can before it's gone!

This post originally appeared on the Home Educators Association of Virginia website and is used with permission.

Kyndra Steinmann blogs at kyndrasteinmann.com about living in a houseful of young children, special needs, disciplining hearts, and abundant grace! As a homeschool graduate, she has an especial burden to encourage mothers to know and enjoy their children.



How to Keep Homeschooling When Life is Crazy Busy

by Patricia Purcell

One of the many great benefits of homeschooling is that it allows families the freedom to take advantage of some wonderful extracurricular activities. The variety of available sports, lessons and clubs are so tempting that many families, like mine, must work hard to choose them with great discrimination in order to keep schoolwork as the top priority.

Even when limiting the number of activities, it can sometimes seem overwhelming to try to fit it all in. Usually, that's a red flag to start pulling back on the activities and just focus on academics.

There are times when the disruption will be only temporary, such as when students are doing extra rehearsals for a play, or practicing more for a tournament. In such times, it can make sense to momentarily change the school routine and fit in the learning when and where you can.

For several years, my older two children were involved in a wonderful homeschool acting troupe. With careful planning, we were able to fit in the regular weekly rehearsals. Twice a year would be the performances.

These involved traveling to scattered locations across upstate New York, as well as extra rehearsals during the school week. In their downtime, my kids were so exhausted that regular lessons were hopeless. That was when I would adapt our routine to allow for some alternative learning.

Here are some ways that I did that.

1. Use Your Time Wisely

At the time that our family was involved in drama, my youngest was too young to participate. Since even the weekly drama class was 20 minutes from our house (and more in traffic), instead of going home the two of us would make the most of our time by multitasking. During the three and half hours that the class took, we would try to take care of all of our weekly errands, thereby giving ourselves more home-time during the rest of the week. Before setting out, I prepared by loading the car with:

- A cooler with cold packs, to store cold items from our grocery trip
- Library books to be returned
- Special shopping lists, for birthdays, clothing, etc.
- A bike or scooter for my son to ride at the park if the weather was good
- A snack
- If it was actually performance time, I would also pack lunches.

2. Create a Car Box

Then we would find a park or a library, or sometimes just sit in the car and use the time for learning. I created a car box for him, filled with items that were not part of his regular curriculum, but that were hands-on and engaging. I included such things as:

- Workbooks
- Pencils, crayons, scissors, glue, etc.
- Books (both easy readers and read alouds)
- Puzzles
- Children's magazines
- Each week I tried to slip in something new to interest him. He benefited from the time alone with me, especially as I was free from the usual distractions of teaching multiple kids.

3. Listen to Audio Books

Sometimes we would have to travel several hours to the play venue. Rather than wasting that time, we used it to listen to quality audio books. When possible, I would look for a book that involved the history of the region or the time period of the play that the kids were doing.

4. Find Local Attractions

Often our travels placed us in areas that were historically interesting or offered an attraction that was worth checking out. I would check books and DVDs about the area out of the library for the kids to review, and we would try to plan a visit to a local attraction such as a museum or historic site.

Once, we even toured a private school which was, as you can imagine, a unique experience for homeschooled kids.

5. Use Technology

We found that bringing along a laptop or tablet was helpful. Even 10 minutes of practicing spelling words or math facts is better than nothing!

6. Focus on One Subject at a Time

Even during the busiest weeks, I learned to squeeze in the subjects that my kids needed the most practice

in (for us it was usually math) so that when we got back to our regular routine, there was not a lot of tedious review to do.

7. Give Oral Quizzes

Not only did this help to fill up the time on a long drive, but the kids didn't even complain after I pointed out the fact that by taking their spelling tests out loud, they didn't have to write them out too.

8. Assign Some Research

With all of the interesting history and extra learning that the kids were doing, it often seemed to be a perfect opportunity to assign a little research. If they were fascinated by a particular event or person that they had learned about, I would challenge them to come up with more facts about the subject. Sometimes rather than a written report, we would just schedule a family discussion over dinner.

9. Resume Your Routine ASAP

As enjoyable as time away from the normal routine might be, it's best to get back to the normal schedule as soon as possible. Think about how hard it can be to resume schooling after a long summer break and you'll know why I say this. Kids need to know that things are back to normal and school vacation is over.

So, the next time extra activities threaten to wreak havoc with your homeschooling routine, relax and realize you can manage it.

Make sure your children learn something during their time away from schoolwork, even if it's not a part of your planned curriculum. You might be surprised at what new interests begin as a result!

Patricia Purcell is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. She now lives in New York state with her very patient and handsome husband and their three active, homeschooled children. After teaching and shuttling kids to activities, she spends her time writing, reading, attempting to garden, and cooking. Not content with turning only her own children into bookworms, she manages book clubs in hopes of turning their friends into booklovers too.

F.A.Q.'s about

Catholic Unschooling

by Leonie Westenberg

What do you think are the positives of unschooling?

I guess I see some of the positives of unschooling to be rather nebulous, things like joy and an interest in learning; strong family ties; a sense of identity. These are things that can't always be measured but are with our kids for life – so, there is still that difference, for example, in my older sons, long term unschooling graduates.

In other words, you may not see the fruits of unschooling right now, this very minute, but instead catch glimpses of the fruits but over time. Just like the way our children grow. They seem to be little forever and then, one summer, we notice that they have shot up, their jeans are too short, their shirts too small, and we think, with wonder “How they have grown!” It is the same with unschooling. We worry today about that *lazy* son. about not enough reading and then, one day, we find a Shakespeare novel under a pillow (“For night time reading, Mum”) and a clean kitchen, cleaned by a son, upon your return from work. Maturity and growth.

Sometimes you don't see quantifiable things – knowing history or art, for example – but you see, instead, their passions, how much the kids know about their passions – or simply, in the case of one of my sons who has no *one* passion, just a general happiness, a brightness and an interest in life.

But I see value in a classical education. How can I mesh this ideal with unschooling?

Can you let go of your agenda (the classical education) and see where God will take you and your children in learning? I think that is the first step to successful

unschooling – no hidden agenda, trusting in a rich home and community experience, in your own influence, in living the Faith, in learning through life. For joy in life and learning, joy in adoring Our Lord, joy in family relationships has to come first, before we even talk about classical education or the tools for learning. We are more open to the goals of the education of “the free man” (to quote Plato and Aristotle) when we are in a healthy environment.

One can also strew a classical education rather than require a classical education via books, movies, excursions and outings, music, art, discussion; living, eating, breathing the classics; learning Latin or Greek yourself; learning our prayers in Latin; learning the Latin in Mass in the Extraordinary Form; and endless family discussions and debate and reference to logic. In other words, using the materials and resources of a classical education within your daily life and home.

One can also educate oneself classically – and then share this with the kids...as you share who you are.

A case in point here. Liturgy is my passion. I don't teach the kids about liturgy but because I read about it, I blog about it, I talk about it, the kids end up knowing about liturgy. Recently, we had two priests over for a cup of tea. And, as often happens here, of late, we began discussing liturgy. The kids were strong in expressing viewpoints and discussing concepts and ideas – and one son said that this year, liturgy had become something of an interest for him too. Education via osmosis.

But I want my children to learn perseverance and self-discipline and commitment.

In family life, especially within my larger than standard

family, it is impossible not to learn self discipline and perseverance. We have to discipline ourselves to share, to take our turn, to pitch in and help with chores, to do something we don't want but which others want, to persevere through annoyance or irritability and through the normal duties and strains and giving and taking that comes with the pleasures of family life.

Unschooling is not wrapping a child in a cocoon...it is opening the world to a child, sometimes warts and all...be it in family discussions on budgeting...or in volunteer work in our parishes or in the homeschool community, working with and rubbing shoulders with a myriad of people.

I have also found that one can pick just a single subject in which to learn perseverance...and that academic discipline can be learned by consistently studying one subject formally, rather than "doing school" ... and we can leave the other subjects to life and stewing. Sometimes this single subject discipline has been Latin in our house, sometimes Kumon maths or English, sometimes Religion.

But my son's strength is maths; he is not interested in society and environment .

It helps me not to think of my kids in terms of education (one son is into history, one doesn't like writing,) but in terms of virtues (patience, prudence, fortitude, and so on) and in terms of character traits (friendly, quiet) and who they are right now as people. This kind of thought changes my mindset, away from school, and onto the idea of Charlotte Mason that children are born persons. Thinking of children as persons means we think of who they are and what they need; we encourage and acknowledge their input; we don't see them as blank slates on which to write.

Even at work, I see this in my students. I do not mold them; I work with them and guide and instruct and sometimes discipline. I get to know them as people, first.

So, how do we start unschooling?

My suggestion is to start unschooling by taking a vacation, a holiday – in your home, your suburb, your hometown. Act like you would on vacation – make yummy breakfasts, go for walks, play games, watch movies, cook, build Lego, go to museums and libraries, etc.

Don't think in terms of education, just in terms of living and spending time – and keep a journal of what you do each day. I recently purchased a lovely 365 journal and I am writing brief notes of what we do, things we talk about and think about. It's hard not to see learning after awhile.

The other thing we do is just celebrate the liturgical year together – you would be surprised how much fun, how much learning occurs just naturally through celebrating the liturgical year. For example, this week we talked about St Martin de Porres and Peru and looked for Peruvian dessert recipes. We prayed the *De Profundis* for All Hallows Eve and had an All Hallows Eve party. We went to Mass and learned about the history of All Saints and made Soul Cakes. We prayed for the dead on All Souls Day (and read about horse racing for our Melbourne Cup lunch!) and we talked about St Charles Borromeo, his influence on Blessed John XXIII and about Milan and made Milanese pizza. Who needs school ? And doing activities like this is a good way to fill in that gap that sometimes seems to happen if you stop school and wonder what to do next, what are our passions, what do we do as unschoolers?

But I panic without school!

I used to read unschooling books or websites or blogs every day. No kidding, this is what I used to do: read a little bit of unschooling wisdom every day, to help me keep on track when, perhaps, the rest of the world thought I was crazy or lazy. I would pray, workout, and read about unschooling each morning.

Can you see how unschooling flows from life, is life, is learning?

So is unschooling like unit studies or thematic units?

Well, in a rabbit trail kind of way. Not a full blown you must complete x and y integrated units method but more like...hey, this looks interesting, let's go...The latter describes our unschooling rabbit trails.

For example, it was Harry Potter week and I suggested we do some Harry Potter reading and movies and related activities from a unit study that I found free online. Last year, we were going on a beach holiday to Wollongong so I used some ideas from a homeschool science blog regarding a shell project and we did that together. Last year, or the year before, we did the growing tomatoes thing from the Canadian Space project and the Journey North as a family. Earlier this year, we were into the 1980s because we like 1980s music and movies and we went several times to a back to the 1980s exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum. So, I downloaded some teacher resources from the website and we chose some activities to do .

Then we had our whole *Legally Blonde*/romantic comedy genre study going...and now are into C.S Lewis: *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* ; *Mere Christianity*; *Screwtape Letters* and unit study ideas from a study guide integrating subjects in a Choose Your Own Adventure fashion.

Can you see how unschooling flows from life, is life, is learning?

So, unschooling is...

Different for everyone. We have always been very influenced by natural learning, unschooling, delight directed learning, John Holt. And I have found that each of my sons have grown more into self discipline and into academics and continue this interest and inner motivation at university and work.

Therefore, for us, unschooling has lead to more rigorous academics, to learning how to follow a path, to perseverance.

Of course, our family home and family culture has a role – strewing, chores, family life, valuing self discipline and academics, our values and Catholicism. But these are hard to separate from unschooling. And that really sums up unschooling...it is who we are...and it makes us into open books for our children... avid learners at all ages.

Leonie is the mother of seven sons, all unschooling graduates. Her sons have studied or are studying diverse areas at University after unschooling, including law, philosophy, history, economics. Leonie is a lecturer in theology at Notre Dame University, Australia and is passionate about education. She is the author of several textbooks and journal articles and speaks at conferences about education and theology. Leonie continues to help other mothers in finding their own unschooling process and rhythm, 'for the children's sake'. She blogs at <https://livingwithoutschool.wordpress.com> and is a contributor to The Little Way of Homeschooling edited by Suzie Andres.

The Hybrid Option: Best of Both Worlds

by Erika Ahern

I grew up in rural New Hampshire in the 1980's and '90's, before homeschooling was widely accepted. My parents made the courageous decision to homeschool my brothers and me in the elementary years, a decision that meant we pursued our education largely in isolation from other families. There was simply no homeschool community within driving distance. As a result, while I excelled in high school activities and academics, it was not until college that I found true friends – a community of young men and women who were seeking the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.

God works all things to His purpose and now I am blessed with five of my own children. My husband and I embarked on the homeschooling journey, but our path looks different from the years I spent reading alone on a New England mountainside.

Today, not only is there a sometimes overwhelming abundance of homeschool resources (how to choose?) but also on the rise is the idea of “hybrid” schooling. The hybrid communities seek to provide the “best of both worlds,” with students attending traditional classrooms two or three days per week and spending the alternate days at home with their siblings and parents.

Available hybrid options are many – they may be secular or religious, classical or traditional, offering either *a la carte* classes or an entire curriculum and extracurriculars. Most aim to serve families who desire to homeschool with the support of a community. These communities offer

an alternative to traditional or public schools and often provide a moral and educational philosophy that is an extension of the family's own beliefs.

My own family has been blessed by one hybrid option in particular, Regina Caeli Academy, which operates in ten cities across the United States. Regina Caeli Academy's mission is lofty: to assist homeschooling families educate their children not only for success in this life but even more for heaven. Our motto, “Training the Mind to Form the Soul,” speaks to the need to develop individuals who can think clearly and critically *for the sake* of our salvation.

Our comprehensive, two-day-a-week program provides academic support in all subject areas and positive support for the whole family. The parents remain primary educators of their children, while our program provides tutoring, testing, curriculum, and structure to help everyone stay on track. To help ensure fidelity to the Church, every adult who works at the center—whether tutoring classes or caring for our nursery babies—takes an Oath of Fidelity to the Magesterium.

We use Mother of Divine Grace, a classical curriculum following the natural stages of learning in a child and based on Dorothy Sayers' essay, “The Lost Tools of Learning.” In the elementary school years, we focus on developing the skills of memorization, observation, and a joy in learning. In the middle school years, the dialectical stage, students develop reasoned arguments, logic, and organized thought in all subject areas. The later high school years focus on the skills of rhetoric, in which students learn to express themselves with elegance and

persuasiveness. By the time our students graduate, they are ready to meet the challenge of any college environment with both confidence and ability. Most of all, they are in love with the truth and beauty of their Faith while still retaining the joy of learning.

Classical education flourishes in the hybrid model. The classical method – especially as developed by Laura Berquist – emphasizes the spoken word, oral composition, and conversation as fundamental skills. Without the spoken word, students will never truly master the written word; without conversations with other persons, a child will not develop the capacity for prayer and adoration that is our final end in heaven. A hybrid program, such as Regina Caeli Academy, gives children plenty of time for Socratic discussion in the classroom as well as more fodder for conversations with their parents and siblings in the home.

Another benefit is the pooling of educational resources: at Regina Caeli, for example, my children can learn anatomy and physiology from a registered nurse while studying Latin with a classics major. The parents pool their resources to provide top-quality tutoring (hiring tutors from the outside when necessary), regular field trips, extra-curricular activities, and even a study abroad option in the high school. This collaboration, grounded in a devotion to the Catholic Church, provides support.

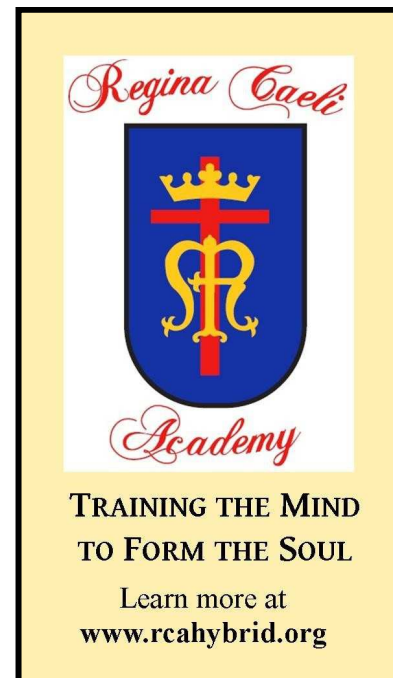
Thus, the hybrid model of homeschooling empowers parents as the primary educators of their children while giving them much-needed support. Community learning requires a certain submission of our own will and timeline – something that is often difficult for the independent homeschooling mom – but the benefits far outweigh the challenges. Learning in community automatically provides an accountability to our commitment to educate our children. We stay on target in terms of lesson plans, but are also challenged to be more faithful Christians.

Children enrolled at Regina Caeli also grow up in the knowledge that they are not alone as Catholics in our culture. While my own parents were truly the only Catholic homeschoolers for miles, my children inhabit an atmosphere in which *many* families are committed to Catholic formation. I am grateful to the other women at our tutoring center, who hold my children accountable to Christian charity, diligence, prudence, and the other virtues necessary to sainthood.

A question I'm often asked is why we don't simply convert Regina Caeli centers into five-day traditional schools. The primary reason is that our families are homeschoolers first: nothing can replace the relationship of a child with his parent. The hybrid option respects that reality and protects those precious, fleeting years when a child is at home. The days at home are quieter, providing space for children to read in silence, practice contemplation, learn the skills needed to run a household, and bond with their siblings. These days, for me as a homeschooling mom, have become more flexible because my children come home from Regina Caeli already tutored in new concepts and ready to practice them with me.

The great gift of homeschooling does not mean the loss of community. Through hybrid options, such as Regina Caeli Academy, parents can receive the support they need to truly raise their children with the best of educations and the most beautiful of Christian formation

Erika Ahern is the Director of Education for Regina Caeli Academy. She and her husband live in Connecticut with their five children.





The Socialization Myth

by T.M. Gaoette

Be honest! When you told your friends and family about your desire to homeschool, some of them, if not all, threw back the clichéd response, “But, what about socialization?” How are your children ever going to learn how to be social if they’re homeschooled?

This is such a common question that most homeschool parents what to throw back their head and scream in response. Why? Because this age-old argument has been refuted time and time again. Yes, it has been proven that homeschool children are socialized just fine, and in some cases, they are better socialized than their peers attending regular schools. There have been many studies on the subject. Just look it up!

What is socialization anyway? Well, basically it’s when people get together. And apparently, there’s a right way for this to happen and a wrong way. So, when a parent explains that he or she homeschools their children and the non-homeschooling parent

drops their jaw in shock and asks, “But what about socialization?” they’re basically saying, “How the heck are your children going to learn how act when they get together with other children because homeschool children stay at home all day long and never get out in to the real world, which is regular school. And so how will they ever learn how to talk to, play with, and act when they get together with peers of their own age?”

So what forms of socialization do children acquire in regular school? Let’s remind ourselves of what constitutes as socialization at a regular school. Your child basically hangs out with children his or her own age for the day. During class, there is minimal interaction, unless the class calls for it, and only then is the interaction coordinated by the teacher. During recess, again, the child is around peers his own age and their interaction is monitored.

How does socialization in a homeschool environment differ from that in a regular school environment? Well, besides hanging out with siblings of different ages, homeschoolers usually meet with friends of

different ages who have similar interests. Homeschooled children also do more errands with their parents so they are in stores, banks, and other locations more than children who attend regular schools. This means that homeschooled children are around many different adults who they will likely converse with. In fact, the homeschooled child is exposed to more real life experiences because they spend more time with their parents who are living in the real world.

Ultimately, one of the biggest issues children and teachers face in a regular school environment is the lack of respect that children have, not only for their peers, but also for adults. Well, in a homeschool setup, children are around their parents more, so they are taught how to speak and treat other children and adults. It's my personal opinion that children taught in a homeschool environment are not only smarter, but kinder, and better socially. Of course, I'm biased on this matter, but we as homeschooling parents are witness to this every day.

The reality is that, while both regular schooled and homeschooled children are given opportunities to socialize, the question is, what kind of socialization is really preferred by the parent and even society itself? Do you want children socialized by peers and teachers that may not share your personal values? Or would you want them to be around children with like-minded parents, the parents, your own family, and yourself?

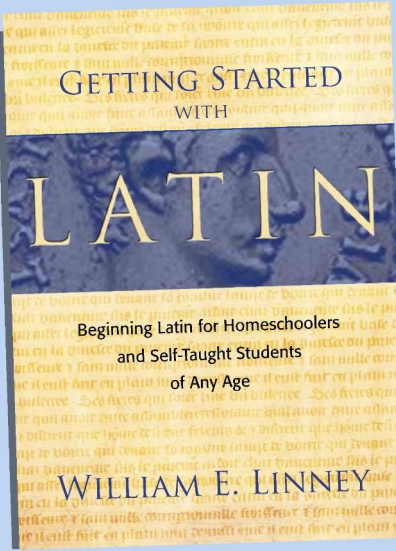
When it comes to Catholic homeschoolers, this idea becomes even more significant. For any Catholic home, Jesus should be placed at the center of everything. And this is paramount when it comes to socialization. Are your children going to get that godly guidance at a public school, or even at a private Catholic school? Only you can know this and make decisions accordingly.

For me? The only problem I have when it comes to socializing my children is finding the time to get together with all their friends.

T.M. Gaouette is a wife, homeschool mom, blogger, and fiction novelist. She was born in Africa, brought up in London, and is now living in New England where she raises goats with her husband and four children. Devoted to Him, Gaouette is dedicated to glorifying God through her fiction for teens and young adults. She is the author of The Destiny of Sunshine Ranch and the first and second book in her Faith & Kung Fu Series, Freeing Tanner Rose, and Saving Faith. For more on T.M. Gaouette and her work, visit her at tmgauette.com

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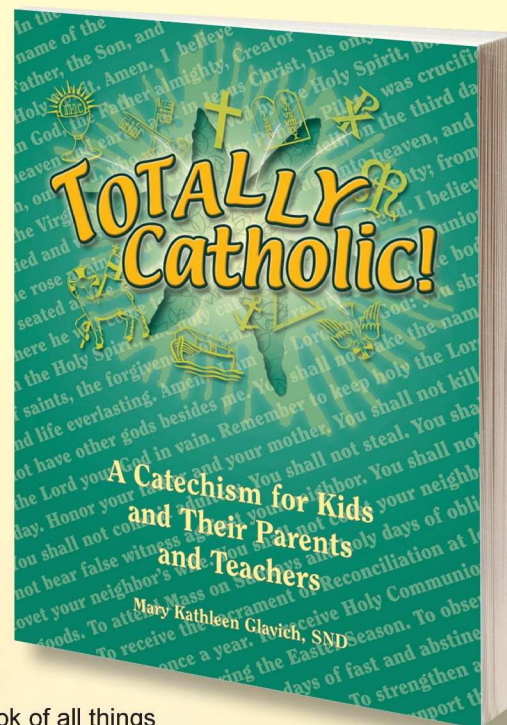


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Sr. Kathleen Glavich, a Sister of Notre Dame, taught for thirteen years before becoming general editor for the *Christ Our Life* religion series (Loyola Press), a position she held for fifteen years. She has had more than fifty books published, including two Catholic Press Association award-winners. Most recently, Sr. Kathleen has served as a member of the parish staff at St. Dominic Parish in Cleveland, Ohio.



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How to Homeschool When You Are Mentally Wiped Out



by Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur

Mental and physical exhaustion can happen to any homeschool parent. Whether it results from trying to juggle too many family obligations, adjusting to life with a new baby or adopted child, caring for a sick child or coping with one's own illness, helping aging parents or grandparents, trying to balance work and homeschooling, dealing with unemployment, buying and moving into a new home, or any of a myriad of life's stressful situations, chances are at some point in your homeschool career, the very thought of homeschooling will be one thought too many.

Yet, if you have been called by God to homeschool your children, that responsibility remains. What can you do in those situations when you have very little to give? How can you continue to educate your children when you can barely function yourself?

1) Consider an Out-of-the-Box Curriculum

Sure, when you are at the top of your game, you can pick and choose curricula or maybe even design your own. When you are exhausted, you might want to consider an out-of-the-box curriculum. The pressure to plan will be off of you. Your children can continue to get a quality education; you can care for yourself a little bit more.

If you are on a tight budget, reasonably priced educational workbooks are often available at local bookstores for elementary-aged students. These can provide some structure and continued practice in the midst of a difficult time.

In the same vein, on-line education may be an option. While I would hesitate to have a young child spend hours in front of a computer screen, high school students may be able to take many of their classes via the internet.

2) Outsource

It can be hard to accept help. I know that I much prefer to be on the giving end of the equation, but there are times in life when we need to be willing to both accept and ask for help.

Make a list of everyone who could possibly help you in your homeschool. Do you belong to a homeschool group? Is there a co-op available where your children could take classes once or twice a week? Would another homeschool family be willing to supervise your children doing their lessons for a limited time?

Are other relatives and friends available to help? Do they have a particular skill that they would be willing to share with your children? Maybe a teenager or local college student could be hired as a mother's helper to read to little ones or help with math.

3) Prioritize

In times of mental stress, not everything can be accomplished. Trying to stretch yourself thin will only result in frustration for both you and your children.

It can be great to tackle six or seven different academic subjects, but there are times when that just isn't practical or possible and you need to choose what is most important for you to focus on. Language arts and math are the core of knowledge. If someone can read, write, and understand basic math, he or she has the tools to learn anything else.

If you need to get down to bare-bones homeschooling, do it and don't feel guilty about it. Your children will continue to learn from the world around them. Nurture your relationship with them as much as possible and allow formal academics to take a backseat for a little while.

4) Utilize Child-Led Learning

Whenever I start to get discouraged about what we are or are not accomplishing in our homeschool, I start reading about unschooling, also known as child-led learning. *The Little Way of Homeschooling* is one of the best books I've read on this subject. It profiles several Catholic homeschoolers who fall on various spots on the unschooling spectrum.

Unschooling does not mean not educating one's

child. Instead, it operates on the principle that children will be more invested in their education if they choose what they want to learn about.

In a time of mental exhaustion, this can be used as a supplement to #3 above or as a method all on its own. Take frequent trips to the library and check out books on topics that interest your children. Have lots of art supplies available to encourage creativity. Spend time outside observing nature. Watch "how-to" videos on the internet. Play card or board games. Cook together. Have children keep a journal or make a movie. Teens might be able to find a volunteer opportunity in a field that they are interested in.

The possibilities are endless. Education does not always have to look like what the world considers school. Our children are always learning.

Mental and physical exhaustion will happen to all of us at some point, but with God's grace, both you and your family will get through this season. Remember that homeschooling is a marathon, not a sprint and try to keep the long view. Reduce the homeschooling stress as much as possible, focus on your relationship with your children, and trust in Our Heavenly Father to see you through.

Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur is a homeschooling mother of three and editor of TodaysCatholicHomeschooling.com

Mental and physical exhaustion will happen to all of us at some point, but with God's grace, both you and your family will get through this season.

Homeschool Hospitality



by Sonja Corbitt

Few things say “welcome” to me like a winding back-country road leading to a porch swing and wicker chairs covered in plump cushions that look out over acres of clover and ambling flocks.

Anyone sitting on such a porch knows the open front door behind her promises lacey curtains that blow into rooms, as she watches the scent of daffodils billowing into the sheets on the line—sheets that will soon cradle exhausted bodies flopping in feather beds with fluffy comforters.

Hospitality is mostly understood as a way of entertaining, and is even a whole industry. As Catholics, though, we understand hospitality as sharing all that has been given to me with those I have been given: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

Entertaining Angels

I would argue that we homeschooling parents are routinely presented with a unique opportunity to practice biblical hospitality. Every school day we welcome and offer the light and hope of Jesus by hosting secret gurus in our homeschools.

Like Abraham and Sarah, or Manoah and his wife, who thought they were offering hospitality to a simple stranger, upon their arrival at the kitchen table

or study area each morning we might believe our miniature guests are mere children, cute little responsibilities that we must teach and mold and nurture.

“Train a young man according to his way, even when he is old, will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). I assumed this meant I must discipline them in the proper paths. How, then, are *they* so incisive, so penetrating, if they are not angelic spies planted by God? Who’s the teacher, and who’s the student here, anyway?

When my oldest was two he determined he would dress himself and consistently wore mismatched socks, even though I paired them carefully and laid them out for him. The difficulty I had in stifling the overwhelming urge to make him change revealed a silly perfectionism, and began a series of confrontations with incidents in which he behaved according to his personality and temperament, but I was strongly tempted to force him to conform to my, or other people’s, expectations.

From my son I learned that dark emotions provoked by others’ personality expressions are often signals that there is a lesson present for me through them, and that a lack of respect for the divine timeline of others’ unique development, spiritual or otherwise, simply exacerbates everyone’s anxiety and stymies our potential.

He taught me that differences are resources rather than deficits. I once corrected a picture he had drawn by asking why he had colored the people yellow. He reported in sensible tones that it was the way he felt about morning. Duh.

At eleven, it only took a couple of sarcastic remarks escaping from his mouth to recognize my own tone, and I learned to my chagrin that I am a smart aleck who often answers questions with sarcasm.

I can always tell when my priorities have become muddled and my offspring need individual time with me, because their behavior degenerates into mob mentality and something is usually broken.

But I have also learned that dandelion fluff makes my hair look prettier and watermelons make the best bombs. We should not wear watches or talk softly. We should learn to speak Sioux, eat more broccoli trees and less pie, and sing Shakespeare.

I have learned God writes operas from the music of rivers, whispers “I Love You” through the wind, and sends us poetry in the Psalms. Since “all things are possible with God” I also know He could bake thirty minutes brownies in two minutes, and that pennies thrown in wishing wells are prayers He might grant.

Did you know one’s perspective is broader from the limbs of trees, and broader still from one’s knees? How else might picking wildflowers, growing lettuce, and gathering eggs all be lessons in treasure hunting?

Pain will pass, but laughter is eternal, godly; I have it directly from sages, and I, on miraculous rare occasions, get a glimpse of a poignant love and intimate gratitude that God experiences when “brothers live in unity” and care for one another with real love (Ps. 133:1).

While God loves me tenderly and deliberately through them, He is teaching me to really SEE. In my most desperate times when I feel no one really sees me, my three year old has been known to hold my face in his miniature, grubby hands and tell me, “You’re my pleasure.”

Promise Carriers

As homeschooling parents, we tend to wear the teacher hat and always occupy the teacher role in relation to our children. But God has special lessons, challenges, and blessings for *us* through them that are amplified and individualized for us through the hospitality of homeschooling. We welcome those lessons by welcoming Him in our children.

“In the spiritual life of childhood the things children say or do are never puerile or childish” (Josemaria Escriva, *Spiritual Childhood*). The things my children say and do frequently heal the blind.

Children carry an inherent message, a promise, one that I must allow the room to emerge. It is not my message. I don’t plant seeds of my legacy in them. We hold one another’s hands along the path to sanctity for a while, but they carry their Father’s legacy, just like the first Child of Promise.

The Child Jesus teaches me about the inherent gift of children, full of promise, full of anticipation, were they never to do another thing but “be,” because what they are is love. Children simply love. Their smallness, like His, conceals the largess and presence of this love to us and to the world through them.

Sure, we are responsible to teach them their Reading, Writing, and ‘Rithmetic, but they beckon us with giggles to listen for secret wisdom, to accept divine hugs through little arms, and welcome messy, glorious virtue kisses pressed upon our weary cheeks. How significant that Jesus appeared to the earth as a little, laughing, noisy, Child of Promise.

It is, therefore, my job to provide an environment of hospitality where their weaknesses are minimized and their gifts and talents can come forward and be acknowledged and strengthened and released to a waiting world. The necessity of this extreme hospitality might worry me if it weren't for how desperately I love them and want to welcome them, these promise carriers.

Instead it comforts me to know He chose me to receive the love they are, and in receiving them as guests and not possessions, I will reveal to them that they have something priceless to offer, something beautiful, something of the image of God: their love.

The Least Are the Greatest

I learn from these little people how to offer hospitality to Jesus in my heart, how to fully welcome Him in all the discomfort and sometimes difficulty of personality, temperament, mood, and humor, and that is the greatest love and lesson of all.

But they also teach me how to be His child, to allow Him to minimize *my* weaknesses and use *my* strengths, and thus prepare to welcome His promise for *me*: Love.

“Before God, who is eternal, you are much more a child than, before you, the tiniest toddler. And besides being a child, you are a child of God. – Don't forget it” (Josemaria Escriva, *Spiritual Childhood*).

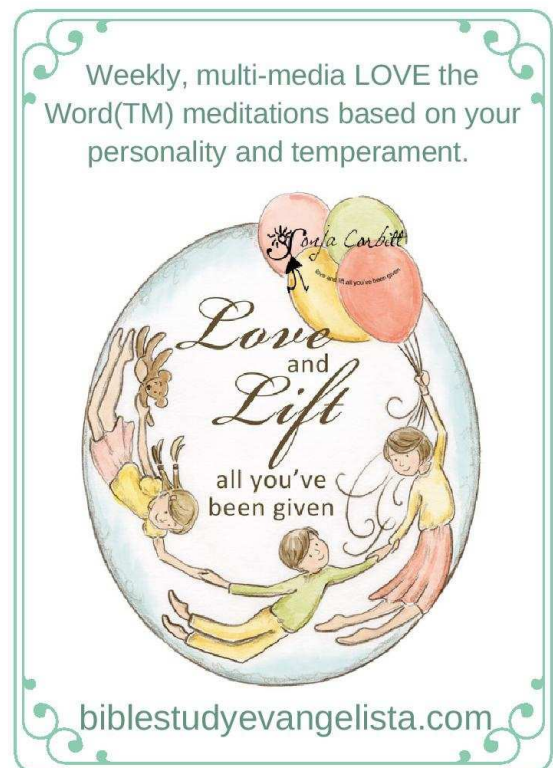
At times my priorities are so askew I forget there is any such thing as intrinsic value, and that through God, I can glimpse it, but homeschooling my children teaches me that the mystery of love isn't something that is gradually diminishing in a modern world; it simply grows with my simplicity.

*And truly, I reiterate, nothing's small!
No lily-muffled hum of a summer-bee,
But finds some coupling with the spinning stars,
No pebble at your foot, but proves a sphere.*

*No finch but implies a cherubim;
And glancing on my own thin, veined wrist,
In such a little tremor of blood
The whole strong clamour of a vehement soul
Doth utter itself distinct.
Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,
And daub their faces unaware.*

-Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*

Sonja Corbitt is a Catholic scripture teacher with a story teller's gift – a warrior's heart, and a poet's pen. Her LOVE the Word (TM) initiative and other Bible study media create space for busy Christians to hear and experience God as they love and lift all He has given them (John 17). What's an “evangelista”? Find out at biblestudyevangelista.com.





by Kyndra Steinmann

The questions pop up frequently in Facebook groups and real-life discussions with other homeschoolers. “I’m looking for a co-op. Do you know of one? What’s it like?”

The answer is: it depends on what kind of co-op you are asking about. Here’s a brief rundown on some of the basic types of co-ops out there.

Hybrid or Part-Time Homeschool Model

This type of co-op may be taught by parents but is often taught by a group of hired teachers. A number of classes will be offered in their entirety, in various subjects or for particular grade levels. Often the classes will meet either two or three days a week, and the students will have “homework” to complete on the “off” days. Usually these co-ops mainly provide classes for middle and high school students but some of them will also offer classes for elementary students as well. They tend to offer mostly science and math classes, but may also offer foreign languages, fine arts, or other classes as well.

The hybrid co-op is great for middle and high school students who need instruction in a particular subject that parents themselves feel weak on. It is also a great choice for years when homeschooling needs to

be moved somewhat off of mom’s plate due to family circumstances (the birth of a new baby, for instance) or for a child who needs to learn how to listen to and learn from non-parent teachers. It can also be a great choice for the accelerated student who isn’t ready for dual enrollment yet but needs some extra challenge.

Very little parental involvement is required beyond making sure students do their work, and it can be a good way to focus on a student’s level of responsibility before enrollment in a community college class or other educational opportunity.

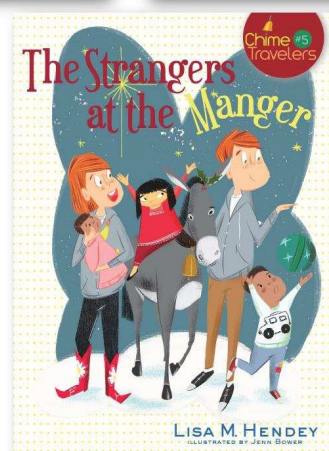
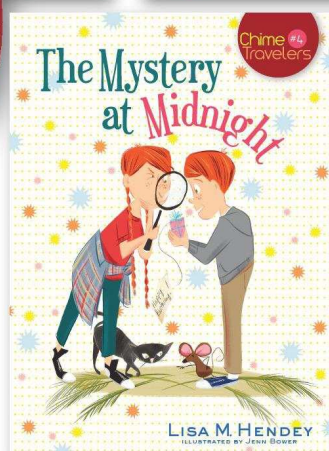
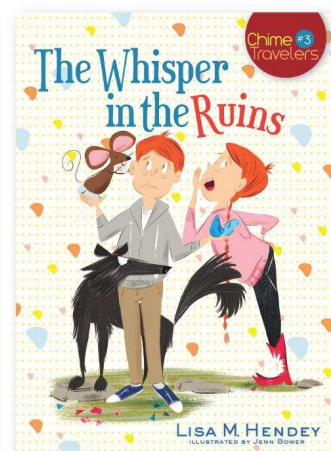
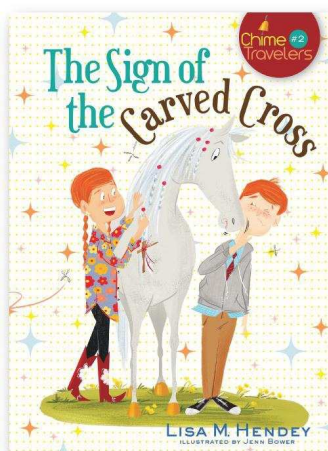
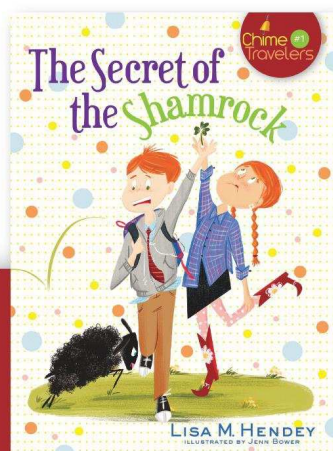
Typically these co-ops don’t do well with students with severe learning or behavioral difficulties. Teachers are generally very good at their subject, but they may not have much sense of how to work with a highly energetic or easily distracted student.

Group Activities and Homeschool Field Trips Co-Op

This kind of co-op is wonderful for the early years of homeschooling! It gives the students a chance to do things with other children, forces Mom to leave the house for something besides grocery shopping, and is often more economical than visiting a museum or historic site as a single family. Activities can range from a monthly nature walk or art museum visit to a

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weekly meet-up at a local playground or park for some group activities and games followed by free play.

Generally this type of co-op is organized by a group of moms working together, and most activities will be free or very low cost. The membership is frequently quite diverse, and people will tend to float in and out of the co-op as family circumstances dictate. Often these groups will run year-round.

The diversity and informality of the group means that children with learning or behavioral difficulties can often be included in ways that support their efforts to learn social skills. Because these groups don't usually have a strong vision or plan beyond some kind of group learning and socialization, they can be much more emotion-driven than a more academically focused group. Care of the relationships within the group will be important, and it is a good idea to ask from the outset what methods of conflict resolution the group uses for conflicts between children and between parents!

Homeschool Moms Teach Once a Week

Historically, I think, this has been the most common kind of co-op. Once a week, families gather for a day or a morning of various classes taught by moms (and sometimes dads) as the group sees a need for a particular subject or a mom has a desire to share her passion for something.

These co-ops are often able to be very accommodating to children with learning difficulties or social issues. Often the class participation is determined by ability rather than age or grade level and students are able to take the classes that suit them best rather than those that they "should be" taking according to their age.

Clear communication is a must in this type of co-op as the requirements and expectations for the students will vary depending on who is teaching and participants will need to both respect others' standards and be able to discuss issues that arise in

love and gentleness. A co-op of this type that involves as many people as possible in the planning and running of the enterprise will probably do a good job of communicating with parents and helping them to work together.

The Centralized Model (Classical Conversations, Catholic Schoolhouse)

This fourth model is relatively new. It might be called the "franchise" model of homeschool co-ops. In it a group of parents decide to use a particular curriculum together with other co-ops around the country. This usually means that there are plenty of resources available as the projects developed by teachers in Texas are available as inspiration at least for teachers in Virginia. Many times the "central office" will provide regular (even week by week) support for co-ops in the form of blog posts, downloads and other materials.

Because these co-ops are all over the country they would be a great choice for a family that moves frequently or is thinking of moving since the new co-op would still be the same curriculum-wise.

Depending on how the central office runs things the local co-op may not have much flexibility in what is offered or in what order things are taught.

As you can see there are co-op organizations out there for almost any need! The important thing is to plug in and do your part in whatever kind of co-op you choose! Of course if what you are looking for doesn't exist in your area you can always start something.

This article originally appeared on the website of Home Educators Association of Virginia heav.org and is used with permission.

Kyndra Steinmann blogs at kyndrasteinmann.com about living in a houseful of young children, special needs, disciplining hearts, and abundant grace! As a homeschool graduate, she has an especial burden to encourage mothers to know and enjoy their children.

Keepers of Learning:

Notebooking for a Charlotte Mason Education



by Celeste Cruz

One of the great beauties of a Charlotte Mason education lies in the sacramentality of her philosophy.

It is books *and things*,
ideas *made tangible in words on the page*,
beauty *in the form of craft and cloth*,
our minds and our souls *and our bodies too*.

It is God *and his Creation*.

It is the Holy Ghost working in our children *through their flawed, human parents*.

We see this hinted at in her approach to each subject. Some disciplines seem inherently bodily, but that physicality is always balanced by the intellectual ideas that inform them. Physical education, for example, is informed by heroic tales and oriented toward service and charity. It is thus not only bodily but mental also. The same applies to handicrafts – in Charlotte Mason's vision, they develop virtuous character, not just serviceable skills. At the same time, the subjects that seem intellectual in nature are balanced by physical practices. History, for example, we learn primarily through living books. But

students take their mind-to-mind meetings with the authors and re-present them with their bodies, both in speech (narration) and on the page (mapping or timelines). No matter the subject, education is of the spirit, body and soul.

This rich combination does not originate with Charlotte Mason, and we can even find a misguided and hollow representation of it in our current school system, in which curriculum designers round out book-based subjects with "hands-on" projects that are mostly just busywork, hoping to document learning for the auditor and cater to a kinesthetic learning style. The Mason vision is quite different: mental and physical engagement, suited to the nature of the topic studied, worked wholly by the student, in which he incarnates the glories he has seen and learned. We are creatures with a soul and body made in the image of a Creator God, so for us, knowledge comes through re-creation, and that re-creation often needs to happen outside of our minds. This is the principle upon which narration is founded ("we narrate and *then* we know"). But this principle also extends to other learning tools she recommends, which acknowledge our needs as persons and fulfill them in rich, varied ways.

In *The Living Page*, Laurie Bestvater refers to these ways, these "forms of vitality," with the term *keeping* – as in *keeping* a commonplace, *keeping* track of seasonal sights, notebook-*keeping*, and so on. Her word choice describes the process Charlotte Mason had in mind so aptly:

:: These notebooks were not meant to be disposable – they are literally meant to be *kept*. As such, we are expecting students to do their best work, as always: slow, careful, attentive.

:: They involve a physicality. Keeping isn't at its heart a mental practice. Certainly it is idea-oriented and involves the mental habits of attention and discrimination as we observe, think, and cull. But ultimately keeping does not dwell in the land of ideas. It catches up the intangible and *keeps* it tangibly on the page.

:: They aim at ongoing, lifelong habits. We *keep* at them, we *keep* them in our lives. Individual notebooks come and go, but new ones take their place. The process itself is never finished so long as we are students (and we are all students!).

:: The student owns his work. He is the *keeper* of her learning. The teacher has an important role to play, but she doesn't guide her students through systematic keeping that arrives at the same result for each student, like a cut-and-paste craft or a timeline that tells precisely where to place entries on the page so that it all fits neatly. Such activities are ultimately hands-on without being hearts-on and minds-on.

For these reasons and more, the term captures the essence of this beautiful posture and practice. Used alongside narration (which shares many of those same qualities), notebooks can be a powerful learning tool when used in the Charlotte Mason style.

What might that look like, on a practical level?

Although Miss Mason's schools seemed to focus on a few notebooks in particular (the Book of Centuries, the commonplace book, and the nature journal), students might keep many different kinds of paper records over the years: poetry copybooks, gallery sketches, timelines, foreign language notebooks, character tables, century charts, herbariums, maps, science journals, and more. Most of them begin with a blank page where the student is directed in format and process but not in content. So for a commonplace book, the student might be given a blank lined page, instructed to write in his best cursive hand, and asked to include one new entry weekly and date the entry at the top – but the content would be left to the student. All forms work similarly: the format and process might be proscribed to support the learning journey of the student, but *what* is kept is his own.

As such, these should be a "source of delight to a child" (Volume 1). Miss Mason says of the Calendar of Firsts, "think of the zest and interest, the object, which such a process will give to daily walks and little excursions." The emphasis isn't on the notebook itself but the capacity for wonder, observation, and care that it inspires in the student – and that applies to all keeping, not just the work of young ones looking for new nature discoveries. The reader keeping a commonplace is attuned to new ideas and how they connect with what he has kept before, his "intellectual history" faithfully recorded in his notebook (Volume 5). The nature journaler feels "pride and joy" both in the product and process of his efforts (Volume 3). These notebooks not only hold what we have seen – they make us "see and then see more" (Mary Hardcastle, *The Parents' Review*). This is truly the goal of any learning tool in a Charlotte Mason education.

To be honest, although I was completely convinced of the beauty of these "paper graces" (as Bestvater calls them) for my children and immediately wove them through our homeschool, I personally resisted

the call of the page for many years. I love to write and read, and I love the *idea* of journaling. But the process itself seemed inefficient for a mother with a house full of busy children and not nearly enough hours in the day. Couldn't I just tape a photo of a wildflower into my nature notebook instead of sketching with time I don't have? Wouldn't it be easier to print out a Civil War map rather than laboriously outlining states and adding cities? If I cut-and-pasted my favorite quotes into a "Commonplace Book" on Evernote, wouldn't the result be the same as writing them out line by line? In all those cases, the final product would be much more accurate and detailed than anything I could produce by hand – and think of all the time saved, time I'm spending rocking babies, making meals, and folding laundry.

Perhaps some of you can relate?

I've come to find, though, that my definitions were incomplete and my values misplaced. Certainly Miss Mason claimed her methods *were* efficient, but she saw efficiency as a means to an end. The end is caring and living. My goal is not to be an efficient mother – my goal is to be a faithful, intentional mother. Not to be an efficient reader, but a thoughtful reader. Not to understand history as efficiently as possible, but to consider and connect to the events and figures of the past. Love is not always efficient; it is often slow, always mindful, and requires sustained, engaged, consistent attention. And if ordering the affections is what we're aiming at, then keeping is indeed efficient – as a method to cultivate love.

So I picked up a pen and trusted Miss Mason on the blank page for myself. I began keeping a couple different notebooks, committing to weekly entries. A few years later, with notebooks carefully filled and more keeping begun, I am fully convinced of the benefits – not just for my children, but also for myself.

May I share a few suggestions with you for getting started in these lifelong practices, whether weaving them into your student's week or cultivating them yourself?

:: Commit. Developing a new habit sometimes looks rather awkward and strict. Because the truth is that habits require intention and diligence. Most of us need a clear goal, at least at first, and we need to be held accountable in some way. For example, adding the tasks to your checklist makes sure you have a consistent reminder. You might come together weekly or during term exams to share notebooks as a family for accountability. Perhaps building it into your home environment would work better for you: leave a book and your commonplace on the bedside table, set your Calendar of Firsts open by the backyard window ready for daily entries, stack your poetry journals next to the tea set to pull out each afternoon. We are most likely to form habits when we have a measurable goal in mind and have set ourselves up to meet it.

:: Carve out time. "Non-essential" practices like these, however committed the keeper is, quickly get left behind, especially when our schedules are already packed tight. But as Mary Hardcastle writes in the *Parents' Review*, "All important things get done when they are recognized as important." Show that you recognize this habit as important by giving it a place in your day/week/term. Some mothers read or have their students read with their commonplace or Book of Centuries open alongside. Some sit down with their stack of notebooks on leisurely Sunday afternoons. Some families nature journal in the field one morning a week; some journal at home right afterward. Take a close look at your days and find *when* will work for you.

:: Choose carefully. Launching into every kind of keeping all at once risks burnout, and some students are simply not ready for certain kinds of keeping, because of age, development, or a lack of necessary

skills. As Miss Mason might say, it isn't about how much we *keep* but how much we *care*. We can't force an interest, but we can make these practices more likely to be interesting – by presenting them delicately and enthusiastically, by requiring only what the student is capable of, by using materials the student loves, by scaffolding with modeling and practice, and so on. Consider the kinds of notebooks to introduce and how they will work best for the particular keeper. These are practices to grow into and we should feel no rush.

:: Feed on inspiration. These practices are, at their heart, *invitations* to wonder, engage, remember, and connect. They aren't simply *obligations*, though the wise teacher knows that our affections are not always ordered as they should be and sometimes we must push through to the joy. But the notebooks work best when we are *inspired* – and not only *required* – to keep them. That inspiration might come from a variety of places: the work of great thinkers and writers, the principles we hold dear, the good fruits

we have already seen in our own work, the community of other keepers. Wherever we find our inspiration, these "captain ideas" motivate and infuse our practices with meaning.

I hope in Charlotte Mason's notebooking practices you find joyous days, heightened attention, and engaged learning across disciplines – for yourself and for your students.

Originally published at Charlotte Mason Living. Image copyright Celeste Cruz.

Celeste Cruz lives in Northern California with her husband and their eight children, ten and under. Once upon a time she was training to be an English professor; now she can usually be found with a baby strapped to her back and littles underfoot as she home educates using the Charlotte Mason method. She runs a local Charlotte Mason group, including a monthly study for mothers, a weekly nature study club, and other cooperative learning events. She also coordinates conferences for Charlotte Mason West, moderates at the AmblesideOnline Forums, and blogs at Joyous Lessons. Read more at joyouslessons.blogspot.com.

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A Day in the Life of a Homeschooling Mom

by T.M. Gaouette

A day in my homeschooling life usually begins with children of different ages climbing all over my bed. These children are mine and they wake me from a short night's sleep that followed a night of writing so that we can begin another day of being together.

I do feel blessed that I get to wake up knowing that I will be spending the day with my children. And I am often reminded of the days I had to rush to get ready for work, rush my two children at the time into their clothes and through a half eaten breakfast, drop them off with a rushed kiss, and cry on the way to work. Then later in the day, when the evening was setting in, the rushing would commence again, from picking them up, to making dinner, doing homework, and kissing them before bed. And the next morning it would be the same. Now?

Now, as a stay-at-home, homeschool mom, the only aspect of my former life that remains consistent is that my day is scheduled. It has to be. It's the only way that I can maintain my sanity and my children can stay focused. I try to be organized especially when it comes to school work. If not, everything and everyone will fall apart pretty quickly, including myself. So, after waking, dressing, doing morning prayers and chores and breakfast, we begin school at 9:30 a.m.

I have four children. Two are in school. My two little ones understand that when their older siblings are in school, they play quietly. We start with the school prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Then it's math and language arts. And depending on the day, that may be followed by geography, history, science, and finally, religion. Usually, the kids break for a snack, but only after math is done. That's the subject that takes the longest in my house.

As you can see, I'm a delayed gratification type of person. It's what my children need to get them going, keep them on schedule, and have something to look forward to later on in the day. School is usually finished by lunch. At least, the worksheet part of school is done. Any day trips, library visits, art activities, experiments, gym time, and/or martial arts are scheduled later in the day, after lunch. This is the fun part of the school day, and includes social activities and play-dates. We have many homeschool friends who attend our church, plus a few families in the neighborhood.

Lunch is at 1:30 p.m. followed by praying the Rosary. Then if nothing is scheduled, the children play. Snack at 4:00 p.m. and dinner at 6:00 p.m. It seems rigid, but for my children, this consistency creates order, which is very necessary in my homeschooling environment. I know what I'm doing and they know what to expect. Of course, not every day is the same. And this is the beauty of homeschooling. I can be flexible.

A day in my homeschooling life is not the same as that of my homeschooling friends. And I doubt that it's going to be the same as a day in another homeschooling mom's life. In fact, I can guarantee it is very different. And that's because their children are different from mine, as are their academic needs, learning requirements and abilities, schedules, and interests. And that's the beauty of homeschooling. The day is in your hands.

T.M. Gaouette is a wife, homeschool mom, blogger, and fiction novelist. She was born in Africa, brought up in London, and is now living in New England where she raises goats with her husband and four children. Devoted to Him, Gaouette is dedicated to glorifying God through her fiction for teens and young adults. She is the author of The Destiny of Sunshine Ranch and the first and second book in her Faith & Kung Fu Series, Freeing Tanner Rose, and Saving Faith. For more on T.M. Gaouette and her work, visit her at tmgaouette.com



How to Homeschool When Not at Home

by Nicole Ernest

We recently went on a trip away from home for 10 days and realized that even though we were away from home that our homeschooling did not need to stop. Here are a few tips from what I learned to make homeschooling successful while away from home.

1. Plan ahead:

When at home I have bins of craft supplies, a printer to print any printables, etc. Yet, while away I do not have access to these things so I HAD to plan ahead. I looked at what curriculum activities we would maybe do for the week, what feast days were coming up, what art projects we would do, what read-alongs we would want to read, and I put together a little bag of supplies that I needed. I brought glue sticks, crayons, colored paper, ribbon, scissors and a few more items. The other part of planning ahead was making sure to not bring more than we needed. Some of our more hands-on curricula I decided to leave at home to make it easier for us all. Everything needed to fit in one small bin for the entire trip.

2. Keep the Schedule:

We have learned that our children succeed with a schedule. Since we have loosely started homeschooling two years ago it has simply become a part of our daily life and our children have come to expect it each day. I knew that if I did not bring homeschool activities that when we usually do book

work (during our youngest son's afternoon nap time) that our older children would be confused and more easily bored. We continued most days to do our book work and activities during nap time each day and it worked great.

3. Add Fun Field Trips:

One of the best parts of going to a new place is the opportunity to explore new sites and fun places to visit. We did a few fun field trips while we were away to the local zoo, and other great activities. It is also a great way to learn about the local history and geography. Make sure to check out what is around where you are traveling to and plan for when they are open during your stay.

4. Pray:

Traveling and being away from home with little ones can be stressful, but with God anything is possible. Take the time to start and end each day with prayer and ask God to bless you and your family with a love of exploring His beautiful world and creations while also enjoying precious time together. Take time to visit fun churches, chapels and shrines in the area that you are visiting as well.

Nicole Ernest is loving living out her vocations as a Catholic wife and mother. Nicole resides in Nebraska with her husband and their lovable, energy filled boys. Nicole shares about living the liturgical year, homeschooling and marriage/family life at her blog Children of the Church <http://childrenofthechurch.blogspot.com>

How to Teach Children to LOVE the Word



by Sonja Corbitt

With all my heart, my first priority in parenting and homeschooling my kids has always been to instill in them a zealous, obedient, living love for Jesus that would sustain them throughout their lives.

Without sacrificing reading, writing, and arithmetic, I took Jesus at His word: “Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you” (Matt 10:10).

I knew the key to my “parenting priority number one” would be teaching them to love the word of God. As St. Jerome said, “Ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” So how do you teach a love for the scriptures?

The Mother of Listening

As in all things, Our Blessed Mother is the best example. Pope Francis called Mary the “mother of listening,” because she didn’t just hear the word, she received it in a way that came alive in her.

She, in turn, offers the Word to us. So I created a “new” Bible study initiative modeled on her Annunciation called LOVE the Word™.

Lectio without the Latin, the LOVE acronym is a nifty way to teach children how to imitate Our Blessed Mother’s personal “listening” practice. We tell them they will learn how to LOVE the Word like Mary, from Mary; we watch and listen to her as her children.

In his address, Pope Francis follows Mary through her personal practice of attentive listening, outlining how practically and beautifully she illustrates the traditional steps of *lectio divina*. She LOVES the Word of God so that it comes alive within her and is born into the world, and she guides us with a sure hand in how to do the same.

Listen

First, Mary *listens* to the word of God.

“What gave rise to Mary’s act of going to visit her relative Elizabeth? A *word of God’s* angel. *Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son.* (Lk 1:36).

“Mary knew how to listen to God. But be careful: it was not merely ‘hearing’ a superficial word, but it was ‘listening,’ that consists of attention, acceptance and availability to God.

“It was not in the distracted way with which we sometimes face the Lord or others: we hear their words, but we do not really listen. Mary is attentive to God. She listens to God” (Pope Francis, *Address at St. Peter’s Square* May 31, 2013).

Whether at Mass, reading the daily lectionary readings, listening to Catholic radio, or praying “the Bible on a string” that is the rosary, the first step is teaching children to open their hearts in “attention, acceptance, and availability to God”- *listening* as Mary did: *Come Holy Spirit*.

Next, no matter what age children are, they love to be read to. I am a middle-aged homeschooling mother, and *I* love to be read to. Once they are available and attentive, we ask them to pretend the Blessed Mother is reading the word of God to them as *we* read it to them, so they can accept it for themselves from her.

In this way, they learn to look to Our Blessed Mother for the Word she gives the world, and to *receive* the word of God they hear, accepting “it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work” in them (1 Thess 2:13), just as it was in her.

But Mary teaches us that listening is more than simply hearing the word in a cerebral way that does not penetrate or move her. She gives it life by obeying, or *observing*, its meaning.

Observe

Pope Francis continues, “Mary also listens to the events, that is, she interprets the events of her life, she is attentive to reality itself and does not stop on the surface but goes to the depths to grasp its meaning...

“This is also true in our life: listening to God who speaks to us, and listening also to daily reality, paying attention to people, to events, because the Lord is at the door of our life and knocks in many ways, he puts signs on our path; he gives us the

ability to see them. Mary is the mother of listening, of attentive listening to God and of equally attentive listening to the events of life.”

Mary listens to and observes the word of God. She ponders its meaning and connections to her circumstances in His presence, and rises to obey it. Mary’s simple, daily routine is ripe with observance, pregnant with life and meaning.

Verbalize

When our mother of listening receives a whisper of a word from God in her morning prayer she hugs the secret close. And it is incarnated.

On her way to obey what she has heard and interpreted, Mary *verbalizes* what she has heard and prays back to God her best understanding of His word to her. The word of God that Mary has listened to and observed erupts from her in *The Magnificat*.

After reading the scriptures to your children as though you are Mary and guiding them in thinking through it, ask them, “What do you think this scripture means? What do you think Mary wants you to do now?”

Will Mary not answer, “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2:5)? Perhaps you might lead them in a prayer, or assist them in a journal entry, or help them draw a picture depicting what is in their hearts.

Entrust

“May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). As Mary entrusts her heart to God in LOVE, He entrusts His Word to her, and she gives birth to that Word in the world, entrusting Him to me and you.

At the wedding in Cana, too, Mary brings the Word of God to bear on the practical events and problems of her day and evening. She observes the difficulty of a young married couple at whose wedding feast the wine runs out; she thinks about it.

She knows the Word intimately; to Him she verbalizes the problem; she entrusts it fully to Him: “they have no more wine” (Jn 2:3). Mary listens; she observes; she verbalizes; she entrusts. And another miracle occurs.

LOVE the Word™

Mary is always offering the Word – her Word – to us. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, “Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely: For this reason, the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord’s Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God’s Word and Christ’s Body.” (CCC 102–104)

How do I teach my children to love the Word? I feed them from the “one table.” Every day with attention, acceptance, and availability, I offer them their “daily bread” with Mary our mother.

Are you making the Gospel reading from the daily lectionary or some other Bible resource available to your children every morning? Do you read it to them, or together with them, it and hear it with hearts that search for ways to obey Him, or are you pushing through it to check it off a list, if it happens at all?

Where will the word your children – Mary’s children – hear from you this morning connect with their circumstances, relationships, habits, and desires

today? Can you help them discern and obey that word when you observe together its perspective on the life you share, especially in your homeschool?

LOVE: Listen, Observe, Verbalize, and Entrust. Like Mary, as I lead my children to the scriptures on a daily basis, I can use this convenient acronym to help them discern His miraculous activity and will, and *listen*, there, to His voice. I help them *observe* their relationships and circumstances and how they connect to the word they receive.

I ask them questions that lead them to *verbalize* back to God, through Mary, their thoughts and fears and feelings and understanding of all of it, what response they think He desires from them, and what they believe He wants them to do. And I direct them with Mary to fully *entrust* all that concerns them to Him.

“The word of God is living and powerful...” (Heb 4:12). When I teach my children to LOVE the scriptures the way Mary, “mother of listening,” models for us, the scriptures come alive in their reality. I show them that the power of God’s word rests on and speaks to their relationships and circumstances every single day, and as it begins to root and thrive in them, they experience Mary’s “Magnificat” – the thrill of offering the living word to their own world.

Sonja Corbitt is the Bible Study Evangelista. Find her current study series and weekly LOVE the Word™ meditations based on personality and temperament at biblestudyevangelista.com.

LOVE: Listen, Observe, Verbalize, and Entrust. Like Mary, as I lead my children to the scriptures on a daily basis, I can use this convenient acronym to help them discern His miraculous activity and will, and listen, there, to His voice.

How to Homeschool Your Preschooler

by Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur

A new homeschooler recently asked me, “How do you homeschool a preschooler?” Time was, keeping a child home for his or her preschool years was a perfectly normal thing to do. Children went to school when they were five (or even six!) and somehow still managed to learn to read and write and maintain friendships. Today, if you tell someone your child is not going to preschool, you are likely to get some very strange looks.

Keeping your child home for preschool, even if you plan to send that child to traditional school for kindergarten, makes one a radical, out of step with the rest of the world. For those who plan to homeschool all the way through, preschool is the first step, the testing ground for all that will come later. Either way, it seems like an awful lot rests on the success of that first year or two. Please allow me to put your fears to rest.

I, too, was once a nervous homeschooler of a preschool child – actually two preschool children. I kept a notebook of what we did each day, assigning each activity to a subject area, just to reassure myself that yes, we were covering a great deal of learning in the midst of going about our daily lives. I also wanted to



have that record, just in case that someone ever asked “What has your child done for preschool?” I assure you, no one ever asked.

If you have decided to take the plunge and teach your child at home for preschool, here are some basic tips to get you started:

1) You can do this! You have been educating your child since birth.

Parents are a child's first teachers. Think back to all the things that your child has learned in the past three or four years. You have been right there with your child, helping and encouraging him to reach every milestone. Homeschooling your preschooler is merely a continuation of the process. You can do it! You have been educating your child all along.

2) Play, play, and more play

At this age, exploration and play are the main tools by which children get to know the world. Respond to your child's questions and follow where they lead. Play with your child, and allow plenty of time for independent play. An imagination can only be formed in childhood. Allow it to blossom.

3) Integrate learning into everyday life.

The world is a wonderful classroom. Math is learned by counting objects around you, measuring ingredients for a

How do I
begin to
teach
my child
about our



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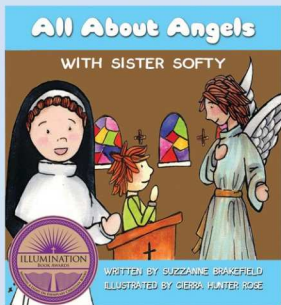
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recipe, talking about what time it is, or finding today's date on the calendar. Scientific exploration takes place in the great outdoors observing different plants and animals. During the winter, a kitchen or bathtub can be the site for experimentation. What types of items float? How are things put together? What happens when you cook different ingredients?

Letter magnets on the refrigerator are great for learning the alphabet and spelling simple words. Point out words on signs. Have your child practice writing her name on greeting cards. If you are taking a trip, plot out your route with your child in a road atlas. Look up places where relatives live on a map or globe. Just as you remember best those things that have some practical use in your life, so will your child.

4) Read to your child

Reading to your child is one of the most important things you can do for your child's education. Set aside some time every day to curl up with your child and read. As your child begins to recognize some words, he can help you read.

5) Nurture your child's creativity

Little children love to create and should be encouraged to do so. Crayons, markers, paints, clay, blocks, paper towel tubes, and just about anything else you can think of are all tools of the trade. This is no time to be critiquing your child's artistic development. It is all about the process at this stage. Give them the raw materials and then get out of the way!

Music is another important component of education. Expose your child to a variety of recorded music. Dance with him to help him feel the rhythm. Sing silly songs as your child gets dressed or takes a bath. Use pans and kitchen utensils as musical instruments. Let your child know that music is part of life!

6) The library is your best friend

The library is an amazing resource. Where else can you go and discover whole new worlds for free? Take your children often so that they can help pick out their books. The library also has media resources such as DVDs and computer software that you may want to incorporate into your child's education. Most libraries also offer storytimes and other activities for preschool children. Take advantage of them!

7) Find one or two social outlets for your child

The biggest argument people will give you for not homeschooling is socialization. "How will your children learn to get along with others?" Just being in a family teaches children how to cooperate and negotiate with others. However, it is important for your child to have some peer interaction. Taking your child to the park, signing up for your library's storytime, or attending a playgroup are all ways of making sure your child knows how to play well with others.

8) Enjoy your homeschooling journey

Homeschooling your preschooler is a wonderful opportunity to bond with your child and help him or her grow. While there will obviously be moments of frustration (just like parenting in general), it is amazing to watch your child's eyes light up when she finally figures something out that she has been working on. It's great to be there when your child recognizes his first written word, learns how to write his name, or can add $2 + 2$! Whether you decide to send your child to kindergarten or continue to homeschool, you will have gotten your child off to a wonderful start and created memories that will last forever.

*Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur is a homeschooling mother of three and editor of
TodaysCatholicHomeschooling.com*

Learning to Read is Like Learning to Speak



By Kyndra Steinmann

Lately the toddler tornado has been experiencing a language explosion! Every day or two she has a new couple of words, and she is constantly trying to string them into phrases and getting frustrated when her attempts at communication are met with confusion. Sometimes she really is pretty clear—“moore chockat” was pretty understandable as “more chocolate,” but at other times we are only able to grasp that she wants something, or is trying to tell us about something. Language acquisition—like learning to read—is hard. The learning child has to learn to distinguish a mash of sounds as individual words, and then learn which words to string together in what order, if they want to make themselves understood. No wonder she needs a nap by mid-morning!

The other day, I was working with the preschooler on some beginning reading skills (Do these two words start with the same sound? Which pictures rhyme? etc.) and he was really struggling with the concept. He was rapidly becoming frustrated with himself, as he has a strong desire to learn to read, and he sees the older children doing it so easily. I was watching him work at it and trying to give hints without giving

answers, and it occurred to me that what he was doing was every bit as difficult as the toddler learning to talk!

In some ways, he is just taking the next step in communication—breaking the language down into its sounds and then building the sounds back into new words—but his brain doesn’t do those steps automatically yet, and there are a lot of steps to keep track of even in something as “simple” as deciding whether or not two words start with the same sound.

Think about it for a minute. If you’ve taught reading, then you have probably had the experience of a child sounding out “c...a...t” and saying “rat”!

How on earth can they do that? They know the correct sounds. They said the correct sounds. So where did “rat” come from?

It came from the fact that the early reader doesn’t yet have automatically in their minds the sounds of the letters. They sound out correctly, but by the time they reach the last sound, they are somewhat unsure of what they said for the first letter, so they insert a word that has something to do with the story in hopes that it will be correct. In the same way that the

toddler tells me, “Rocking!”—her word for nursing—whenever she has a problem that she has no word for, the early reader tries some word that is related to the story or sentence in some way in his mind. Imagine how frustrating it is for him to be told his guess isn’t the right answer.

Learning to read is one of the places in which homeschooling parents experience the most fear. A child who can’t read will be extremely disadvantaged in his life. True! We have a responsibility to teach our children to read, and it is very easy for our fears for their success to turn the “learning to read” process and reading itself into a struggle and trial to our children. It is so important at the beginning of the learning journey that the lessons be gentle and that we make it clear that we know that they are doing something difficult. We need to make it clear that *teacher* and *student* are a team, and that we will continue to work with the student until he does learn to read, however long that takes.

A few things that help with this difficult task:

- Provide a language-rich environment that stimulates children to desire to learn to read. When young children are read to, and see people around them reading and referring to books, they will want to learn.
- Read poetry—even silly rhymes like Dr. Seuss or Ogden Nash. The rhythm and rhyme of poetry begin to train the brain to think of words as something made up of parts.
- Read books aloud that the child can’t yet read independently, and have him narrate the story back. Write down what he narrates and have him read it back to you (even if this means that you

read it and he repeats it). This is how children learn that words are strung together to convey ideas—and, incidentally, it makes learning to write on their own easier, as they will have already learned how to compose and order their thoughts.

- Play games that depend on language and/or spelling. Junior Scrabble is popular around here, as are just spelling things on the refrigerator with magnets to see what it says.
- Include opportunities for literacy in their games as appropriate. The six year old and the preschooler have a game called “snack stand” in which they “cook” in the toy kitchen and attempt to sell us what they cook—Peace and Quiet Salad with the lettuce cooked so it wouldn’t crunch, for example. I have added a little blackboard to their play space, and they get someone to write a menu for them, or they ask us how to spell “Chocolate Cake with Sarbines (Sardines).” Seeing their own ideas written down prompts them to think about how other words are made.

Finally, relax! Unless your child has a learning difficulty he will learn to read if the two of you keep working at it. It may take some time, and you may have to get creative, but he will learn! Be patient, let him know that you know he will learn—and together, you will learn!

This article originally appeared on the website of Home Educators Association of Virginia heav.org and is used with permission.

Kyndra Steinmann blogs at kyndrasteinmann.com about living in a houseful of young children, special needs, disciplining hearts, and abundant grace! As a homeschool graduate, she has an especial burden to encourage mothers to know and enjoy their children.

Finding Math in Literature

by Maureen Wittmann

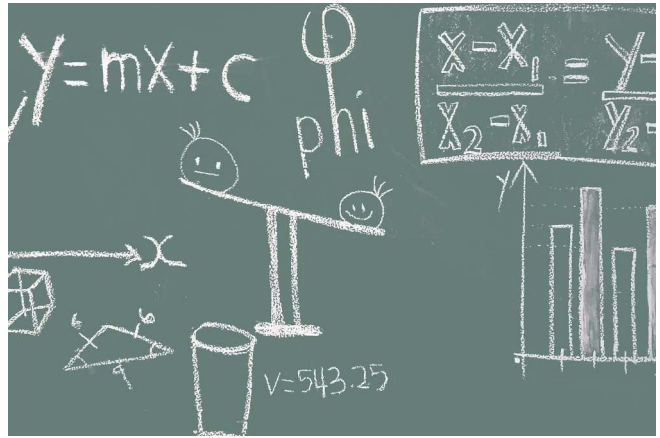
I majored in applied mathematics in college, yet it wasn't until I became a homeschooling mother that I discovered math in literature. I'd like to help you to also discover how you can introduce living books into your homeschool and take a break from the drill, drill, drill.

Have you ever said to your children, "I hated math in school" or "Math was my worst subject"? I'm challenging you, right here, right now, to never say those words again.

Emotions are contagious. If your personal fear of math is evident to your children, they'll likely take on the same fear. If you'd like your children to succeed in their math studies, then make the conscious decision to find the beauty in math yourself. Yes, it's true: there is beauty to be found in mathematics.

Just as God is orderly, mathematics is orderly. There is beauty to be found in its orderliness. You can find it in nature, in music, and in art. Reading how the great proofs came to be or how mathematical discoveries were made can be very interesting. Reading biographies of the great mathematicians, again, can be quite interesting. Take it from me, mathematicians tend to be quirky, colorful people. It can be fun to discover the meaning of such things as: harmonograph, Fibonacci sequence, golden ratio, Möbius strip, and Weaire–Phelan structure.

Think of it as *Math Appreciation*. We study art and music appreciation. We share Monet with our children before embarking on art lessons in watercolors. We listen to Beethoven with our children before setting them down to piano lessons. There is no reason why we can't do the same with math.

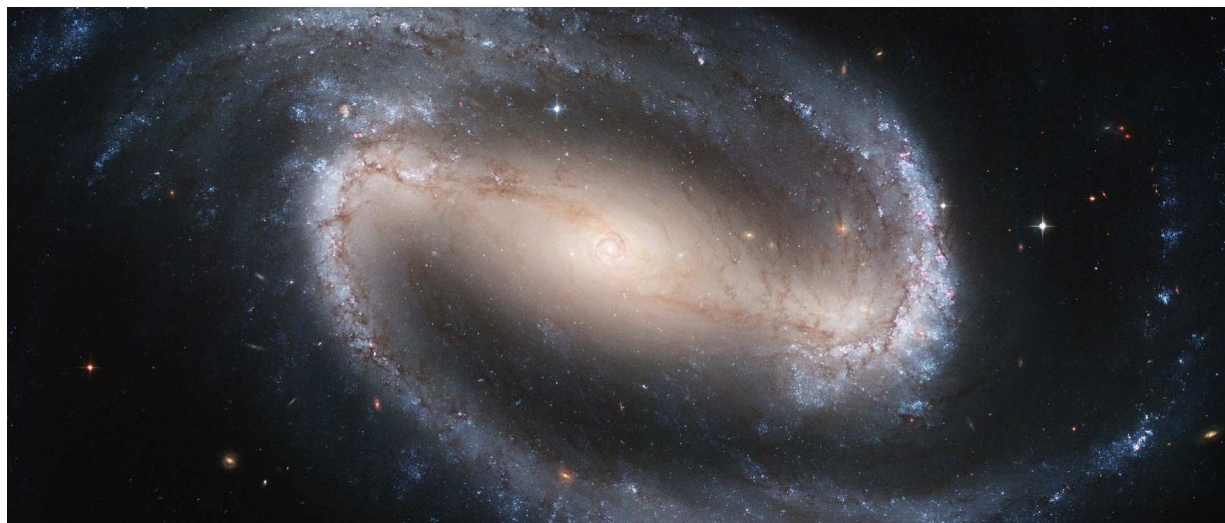


There is a lot of terrific, fun math literature out there to help you enter the world of *Math Appreciation*. A free book list can be found at: <http://homeschoolconnectionsonline.blogspot.com/2014/11/a-reading-list-math-and-living.html>. I also wrote a book called *For the Love of Literature* that includes a lot of great math titles. You should be able to find the book in your library or through inter-library loan. In fact, the library is a great resource in finding living math literature. Go to the children's section and then find the 500's in the Dewey Decimal System and start pulling books off the shelf.

I encourage you to read books to your children such as *Sir Cumference and the Round Table*, *The Man Who Counted*, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, and so on. Also take some time to work number puzzles and do fun things like create codes. Perhaps, together, you and your children will come to appreciate math through living literature, and therefore be more successful in math studies.

This post originally appeared on CatholicMom.com and is used with permission.

*Maureen Wittmann and her husband are parents to seven children, who have always been homeschooled. She is the author of *For the Love of Literature* (Ecce Homo Press) as well as coeditor and contributing author to *The Catholic Homeschool Companion* (Sophia Institute Press) and *A Catholic Homeschool Treasury* (out of print). Her articles have appeared in *Our Sunday Visitor*, *Homeschooling Today*, *Heart and Mind*, *Catholic Home Educator*, *New Covenant*, *Latin Mass*, *Catholic Faith*, *Catholic Digest*, and more.*



What is a Good Catholic Science Curriculum?

by Stacy A. Trasancos

I get this question a lot. “Can you recommend a good Catholic science curriculum?” Here is my answer.

Use a good secular science textbook. Pearson/Prentice Hall and Holt textbooks are my favorite. Teach the scientific fundamentals well. Do not let your child become an adult who never experienced the awe and wonder of science, who never stretched his or her mind to learn the details of biology, chemistry, and physics, and who never saw the beauty in the mathematics of nature. That is a tragedy. It happens far too much in secular institutions because without any belief in God the Creator, kids do not see science as the study of God’s handiwork. Science does not come to life. They do not think it matters unless they want to become scientists, and then, sundered from faith, they ultimately have no explanation for why they even care about science.

Separately, teach kids about our faith. Do not include theology or religion in the science class, just as you would not include algebra in grammar class. It confuses

the basics. Kids need a firm and distinct grounding in both science and religion.

Then, as they mature, teach kids how to sort through scientific conclusions (and everything else) “in the light of faith.” Doctrine is a guide, a light. “Dogmas are lights along the path of faith; they illuminate it and make it secure. Conversely, if our life is upright, our intellect and heart will be open to welcome the light shed by the dogmas of faith.” (CCC 89)

No scientific evidence can possibly contradict defined dogmas. God created everything. Humans are body and soul. There is a beginning in time called Creation. Most of the challenging questions belong to areas where various theological opinions can be held and explored. How do we understand humanity? How do we interpret Genesis and evolution? What happens at the atomic realm, and how does it relate to our macroscopic experience? How big is the universe, and why should we care? What is the difference in animate and inanimate matter? How does the mind affect the body and vice versa? These questions are debated because

***No scientific evidence can possibly contradict
defined dogmas.
God created everything. Humans are body and soul.
There is a beginning in time called Creation.***

they have no clear answers, at least at this moment in history.

People need a process for sorting through modern difficulties in faith, without losing themselves to popular culture's sway. This is why I wrote *Particles of Faith: A Catholic Guide to Navigating Science* (Ave Maria Press, 2016). The book does not tell you what to think, but *how* to think systematically with an unwavering confidence in Christ and His Church. The book is for any Catholic who wants help understanding and sorting out scientific issues of our time. (Sorry for the book plug, but seriously, that is why I wrote the book—to explain the process.)

As it relates to science, however: *Teach the science*. A young adult cannot very well navigate science in the light of faith if he or she does not know the basics. If we believe that God created everything before we ever get to science, then we are free to roll

up our sleeves and see what textbooks have to say. Natural science only studies the physical and biological realm, and we already know there is much more to reality beyond its grasp.

Dr. Stacy A. Trasancos is a wife and homeschooling mother of seven. She holds a PhD in Chemistry from Penn State University and a MA in Dogmatic Theology (Summa Cum Laude) from Holy Apostles College & Seminary. She worked as a chemist for DuPont before leaving that career to raise children. In addition to teaching for Kolbe Academy, she teaches Chemistry and "Reading Science in the Light of Faith" at Holy Apostles Seminary and "Catholic Theology of Science" at Seton Hall University. She is the author of Science Was Born of Christianity: The Teaching of Fr. Stanley L. Jaki and Particles of Faith: A Catholic Guide to Navigating Science (Ave Maria Press).

If you are interested in enrolling your child for an online science course at Kolbe Academy with Dr. Trasancos, please visit: <http://www.kolbe.org/about-us/about/our-instructors/science/#strasancos>

Take a Moment for Maps



by Pamela Love

One of the advantages of homeschooling is the ability to cover subjects too often skipped over in schools due to lack of time. Geography is one such topic, and based on my experience as a substitute teacher, students are drawn to it far more than many people realize. It can be used to enrich other coursework, or personalized to the child.

Here are some ways to encourage this natural interest, none of which needs more than a few minutes, unless the child expresses an interest to go further. (Of course, occasional review is important to retain information.) A current globe is useful, as all flat maps somewhat distort the size and/or location of landmasses. Help your child to learn the following, guiding them as needed.

Personal Geography

1. Where are we? (Help student point out community, state/province, country, continent.)
2. Where were we? (Places previously lived/visited; family origins. I once worked with a group of eight students from seven different countries. They were fascinated by the classroom's globe. I helped each one find the country in which he or she had been born. After that, they wanted me to show them countries through which they'd traveled on their way to the United States.)

3. Where do you go? (On a local map; point out church, stores, parks, etc.)

4. Where do other family members live, worship, work, and/or serve, if not in this community?

5. Where do things in our house come from? (Look for "Made in" labels. In my house, there are products originating in the United States, Mexico, Canada, Malaysia, China, Holland, Japan, South Korea, South Africa, and many more.)

History

While maps are obviously important to studying history, here is another activity to help bring it alive. For centuries, sailors used the North Star to steer by. People escaping slavery before the Civil War often used it as a guide to reach freedom in the North. It's part of the Little Dipper. Have your child research how to find it, and try locating it one night. (Depending on where you live, this may require driving to an area some distance from street lights. Unfortunately, the North Star isn't very bright.)

Science

Spring, summer, autumn, and winter aren't just times. They're also places. Have students show you where the Earth is located in its orbit during these seasons. They may be surprised that it's actually closest to the sun during January!

Also, try this: at dawn one day, take your child outside. When they locate the sun, they know where east is. Directly opposite is west. If possible, have them note west's location by a landmark. At sunset, go outside again. Ask: Is that where the sun is setting?

Religion

Not only can students trace the movements of important people in the Bible, they can also locate where saints or other important people in Christian history lived.

Bonus Activity

Map races: If you have more than one child at about the same ability level, supply each child with a map

or globe. Whoever points to a given location first, wins. Even one child can do a map race, however; simply race against the clock.

Pamela Love worked as a teacher and in marketing before becoming an author. Brigid and the Butter: A Legend about Saint Brigid of Ireland, published by Pauline Books and Media, is her latest picture book. Down East Books published her other picture books: A Loon Alone, A Cub Explores, A Moose's Morning, and Lighthouse Seeds. Scholastic Children's Press published her easy reader, Two Feet Up, Two Feet Down. Her stories, poems, and plays have appeared in such magazines as Cricket, Highlights for Children, and Plays: The Drama Magazine for Young People, among others.

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Writing Improves Writing



by Melissa Miller

Writing Improves Writing. Does that seem repetitious? Maybe, but it's true! Handwriting, or what teachers often refer to as a transcription skill, is critical on its own. But what you may not now is that improving handwriting skills has been demonstrated to improve a child's compositional skills, including compositional fluency. According to many studies, early handwriting instruction not only improves a student's legibility but also has a highly positive effect on the quality and length of that student's composition as they advance through grades in school.

If a kindergarten or first grade student struggles to recall letters or remember how to form a letter, that student is using up valuable "brain energy," which cannot be applied to developing thoughts or ideas on paper.

For a struggling writer, being discouraged by difficulty with handwriting can set the stage to avoid writing at all since the student can begin to feel he or she is "not a good writer."

Handwriting needs to become an "automatic skill," which can be used effectively to coach the student into becoming a skillful writer. The fundamental

skills of handwriting provide the underpinnings needed to encourage the development of more and more complex compositional skills. It is estimated that 70% of an elementary student's day is composed of performing some type of fine motor skill, with handwriting comprising a large chunk of this time. Therefore, it is important to provide additional and appropriate instruction as early as possible to students that are experiencing difficulty with basic handwriting skills.

Recently there has been much discussion about the potential demise of handwriting instruction in schools, with proponents of both sides of the argument focusing on theoretical, practical, budgetary, or other factors. The increased introduction of technology into schools, including everything from smart boards to tablet and laptop computers, tends to focus thought on teaching keyboarding rather than writing by hand on paper.

Keyboarding can be an option for some. However, it is important to take into account that *keyboarding does not have the same positive correlation with development of compositional fluency that writing by hand does.* For this reason, along with other significant factors such as fostering the brain development that occurs

More than any other factor, the evidence points to explicit handwriting instruction as the critical factor for improving handwriting performance.

through practicing handwriting at an early age, educators and policy makers should take care to retain handwriting instruction into curricula for early education. Extra focus should also be applied to students who are struggling with handwriting skills.

Handwriting is a complex skill that requires the integration of many different components. Developing good handwriting relies on sound foundations in sensory processing and postural skills.

That said, ***more than any other factor, the evidence points to explicit handwriting instruction as the critical factor for improving handwriting performance.***

Five activities of the handwriting instruction process have been proven to improve handwriting skills:

Observe the instructor form each letter using the proper formation sequences

Trace letters

Copy letters

Write from memory

Learn to use letters in a meaningful context

Practice sessions should be frequent and short (10-15 minutes) and allow for inventive spelling. Tracing within each letter, as well as supplying directional arrow cues, have been shown to support the developing writer.

Most importantly, it is clear that early letter practice not only speeds the development of handwriting skills, but also promotes a child's reading and compositional abilities.

“Explicit supplemental instruction that helps young children write letters accurately and quickly can increase the probability that they will become skilled writers...such instruction was a better predictor of children’s success than student or family variables or even the teachers’ sense of efficacy or their approach to writing.”

Quote Taken from:

Steve Graham, Karen R. Harris, and Barbara Fink, Is Handwriting Causally Related to Learning to Write? Treatment of Handwriting Problems in Beginning Writers. (2000) Journal of Educational Psychology 92(4), 620-633.

Melissa Miller, OTR/L is a pediatric occupational therapist with over 25 years of experience. She specializes in handwriting and sensory integration therapy. She has practiced extensively in schools, including serving as the Clinical Coordinator for the Washington, DC Public School System. She also has comprehensive experience practicing in outpatient clinics, hospitals, and in developing home-based interventions. Early in her career, she worked in a hand therapy clinic, which provided her with valuable insights into hand biomechanics. Melissa invented the Handwriting Tree® program, a flexible, engaging teaching and remediation system. She co-founded and serves as President of Handwriting Tree, LLC.

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Visual Arts: *Visual Aids for Budding Scientists*

by John Hofland

Our high school chemistry teacher, Mrs. Harms, didn't merely teach chemistry. She WAS chemistry. As she danced under the periodic chart, she became sodium atoms who craved electrons from their friends, the generous chlorine atoms. The atoms we studied had likes and dislikes, personalities, and families. We almost imagined them as people. When Mrs. Harms taught, she became the atoms we were learning, and because she made the abstract visible, it became easy to learn Bohr's law, calculate moles, and memorize atomic valences.

As a result, I found chemistry exciting. So imagine my disappointment when my third-grade daughter found science difficult and boring. For her, learning science meant learning lists of abstract definitions, and little more.

One day as she studied, I heard her repeat over and over, "An atom is the smallest unit of an element," and "A molecule is a combination of two or more atoms." She was learning the right words, but the

concepts remained meaningless. Hearing her struggle, I remembered Mrs. Harms, and suggested we act out the concepts. I played the nucleus and she raced around me as the electron. Then she and I held tight together as protons and neutrons as my wife—an electron—raced around us.

Next, the three of us stood far apart and named ourselves as separate atoms: I was carbon, my wife was hydrogen, and our daughter was oxygen. Finally, we left our own spaces and joined together in a big group hug to become a molecule. With these simple exercises, the foggy abstractness of the science lesson became a concrete idea. What had made the difference? The obscure definitions now had an image that made them make sense.

Images are vital to understanding. That's why we often say, "Oh, now I SEE," when we suddenly understand a new concept. On the other hand, an idea without an image has little meaning.

Images also provide us with the tools we need to create solutions. In the mid-1800's, the German

scientist August Kekulé was baffled about the atomic structure of benzene. One day he sat in a chair and dozed off in front of his fireplace. During his nap, he had a dream about dancing atoms! Some atoms twined together twisted like snakes. Then one snake grabbed its own tail and started whirling before his eyes. He awoke with a start, realized that the benzene molecule could only be shaped as a circle, and worked long into the night to study the implications of his new theory.

If images can be so helpful to learning science, why not exploit this fact when we teach an art lesson? We commonly use art lessons to encourage creativity and to develop a sense of aesthetics. Why not also link art lessons to other subjects so that an art project can

become a springboard that encourages curiosity, or a motivational tool to learn more about the subject of the art lesson, or an image that becomes the “hook” to hang information on?

While traveling in Hungary a few years ago, we found large clay-and-wire insects decorating a garden wall. These were no ordinary insects. Oversized, bulging human eyes stared out at passersby. Their heads sprouted four curly antennae. Some were wingless, and some had several wings. What a good image for an art lesson, I thought! What fun it would be to draw these insects! But we could also link the art lesson to science. By comparing these fanciful insects to real insects, one can reinforce the characteristics that define the insect world.



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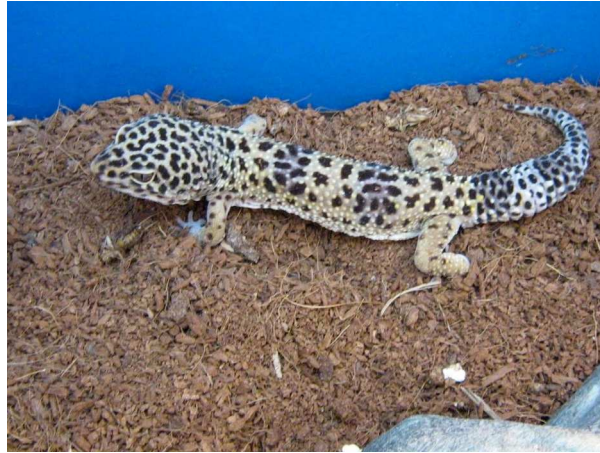
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A similar pairing could be made with painted metal art from Haiti. Haitians cut used 50-gallon steel drums into shapes like geckos, dragonflies, and other animals, and paint them with bright, imaginative colors. The finished artwork is inexpensive and makes a great refrigerator magnet - and they also make a good foundation for art projects. But why stop there? If you are drawing a gecko, why not also visit a pet store to begin a study of real geckos and lizards. In this way, the art project becomes a motivational spark to encourage curiosity about the creatures.

Sometimes an art lesson can serve to reinforce a concept. If we were studying the nine-banded armadillo, we would learn that an armadillo has a nose like a pig, a shell like a turtle, and bristly hairs that act as sensors. When frightened, it can jump like a rabbit, and to protect itself, it hides in a burrow. It has good-sized eyes, but it is practically blind; rather large ears, but it is quite deaf. To remember all those facts, try drawing the armadillo—you will have to give the creature a careful look, a look that will link facts and image unforgettably.

An art lesson can serve to reinforce a concept, but the reverse can also be true: a *concept* can serve to reinforce an *art* lesson. An interesting topic for an art lesson is the relationship between an object and its background. One way to help young artists learn about this tension is to begin by learning about butterflies. Butterflies are often camouflaged—their coloring resembles their environment. Once we learn about camouflage, we could use the information to solve an interesting art problem: we could draw and color a butterfly, and then play with the tension between object and background to camouflage the insect without completely hiding it.

Next time you are looking for visual *aids* for a science lesson, think about using a visual *art* lesson!

John Hofland is the owner of ArtAchieve (artachieve.com), a company whose online art lessons make it easy for anyone to teach art and link art to other subjects. Previously he was a university theatre professor and a middle school science teacher. He and his wife homeschooled their kids.

Images copyright John Hofland

Lingua Fecunda: Latin, the Fertile Language

by Jacob Bowe

Maybe you have heard a beautiful Latin hymn. You have probably used a Latin phrase at some point, like *per se* or *status quo*. In high school, you may have learned that our American Republic was based on the Roman *res publica* (literally, “the public thing.”) Most likely though you have heard someone say, or even whisper, that Latin is a “dead language.” This is technically true; there are no native speakers of Latin left. But if Latin is “dead,” it has given its life to enrich the soil from which Western Civilization grew. Your faith, your language, and your country all have deep roots in the Latin language.

Latin and the Catholic Church: The history of Latin and the history of the Church are inseparable. The Mass has been performed in Latin for more than 1,500 years. The *Vulgate Bible* (Latin translation) of St. Jerome, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, and the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas are all written in Latin. But aren’t translations sufficient, you ask? Imagine a non-native speaker of English had read some Shakespeare in translation. We would still want that student to read the Bard in English. Your children will grow in their faith as they work diligently to translate the hymns, prayers, and great works of the Church in their study of Latin.

Latin and the English language: English is typically thought to have the largest vocabulary of any language and more than 50% of those words

come, directly or indirectly, from Latin! Most of our technical and scientific vocabulary comes from Latin. Frequently in English, you will have “doublets,” where a native English word is paired with an adjective from Latin directly, like dog/canine (from the Latin for dog, *canis*) or sun/solar (from the Latin for sun, *sol*), or indirectly from French like word/verbal (ultimately from the Latin for word, *verbum*). Learning Latin will expand your child’s vocabulary and give them the tools to infer the meanings of new words.

Latin and American Civics: When they had cast off their King and it came time to create a new system of government, the Founders looked back to Rome and formed a republic modeled on the Roman *res publica*, “the public thing.” When Alexander Hamilton wrote the first *Federalist Paper* to defend the American Constitution, he chose the pseudonym “Publius,” after one of the founders of the Roman Republic, Publius Valerius. Our Senate is modeled on the Roman *Senatus*. Many of the founders were classically educated, and this education greatly informed the government they brought forth. Your student too can be educated with the same works that inspired our system of government.

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Homeschooling High School is Not as Scary as You Think



by Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur

I started officially homeschooling when my older two children were in second and first grade (I had homeschooled them for preschool). Even then, people would ask me, “You don’t plan to homeschool all the way through high school, do you?” At that time, I’d shrug my shoulders and give an honest reply. “I don’t know. We’re taking this year by year.”

That answer worked great until my oldest son was fast approaching ninth grade when I had to face the question head on. What were we going to do about high school, and more importantly, what did God want us to do? I did what I always do in these types of situations – I hit my knees in prayer and offered a 54-day novena for the wisdom to make the right decision.

In conjunction with my son, we decided to continue homeschooling for high school, but increased the number of classes he takes at a local acting school so that he would have more social interaction with other teens and independent time out of the house.

That same year, we decided to enroll our second son who was starting eighth grade in a new alternative school on a part-time basis. He attends two days a week and does the rest of his classes at home. This has been a great blessing for us. He gets additional academic challenges while still having the benefits of homeschooling.

I now have two years of homeschooling high school under my belt and am here to tell you that it is not as scary as it seems. Are you thinking about homeschooling high school? Here are some things to keep in mind.

1) Begin with Prayer

It is important to discern whether homeschooling is the right choice for you and your teen. Every teen is unique and even in the same family, each child may need a different high school experience, whether that be a private, public, homeschool, or some combination of the above.

2) Teens are Often Very Self-Directed

If the thought of teaching subjects you haven’t thought about in 20+ years (or ever) leaves you in a cold sweat, take a deep breath. Teens can learn a great deal on their own, whether that be through traditional textbooks, experiential learning, on-line courses or videos, or enrolling as a student at a local community college. If your teen wants to learn something, there are many opportunities for them to learn it. Think of yourself as more of an advisor, helping your child to find the resources they need and to hold them accountable for their learning.

3) Teens are Interesting

Yes, being a teenager is hard and so is being a parent of a teen. It is a time of growth and change. But, teenagers are also interesting to be around. You can have meaningful discussions and debates with

teenagers especially when your relationship is built on trust and respect. They will learn things you've never been exposed to and will often be very willing to share that knowledge. While homeschooling any age provides the opportunity to constantly learn new things, homeschooling teens takes that to a whole new level.

4) **High School Can be Tailored to the Student**

While one of the hallmarks of homeschooling at any level is that it can be adapted to the individual learner, high school provides a unique opportunity to customize an education. Most teens have some idea of what they are interested in and what career they might like to have. Coursework can be customized to fit those goals. *High School of Your Dreams* by Catholic Heritage Curricula can be a good starting point for developing a course plan. Teens may also be able to take advantage of sports and other extracurricular activities through your local high school. Check with your local school department.

5) **Keep Good Records**

One thing you will want to do as is keep good records of what your homeschooling teen has accomplished so that they have a transcript for college or employment opportunities. Whether you do formal classes or have a more relaxed style, you can create a transcript for your child. HSLDA has some information on their website at <https://www.hslda.org/highschool/academics.asp> while a search for transcript templates online will offer many options for either arranging subjects by year or general topic.

6) **It's Still a Year by Year Decision**

The local high school isn't going anywhere. If you and your teen decide that homeschooling isn't working, there are still other options. If you feel called to homeschool high school, don't let fear stop you from giving it a try. They just might be the best years of your homeschooling life.

Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur is a homeschooling mother of three and the editor of TodaysCatholicHomeschooling.com

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Searching for Catholic Fiction for Your Teen?

by Leslea Wahl

A group of authors writing primarily for Catholic and other Christian teens has launched the website CatholicTeenBooks.com. The website provides teen readers, parents, catechists, homeschool co-ops, youth ministers, teachers and others with direct links to exciting, well-crafted books that raise the heart and mind to God and reflect the fullness and beauty of the Catholic faith.

The site is organized by genre and includes a wide range of books in the following categories:

- contemporary
- historical
- mystery
- speculative
- saints
- dystopian.

Among those, you'll find suspense, romance, coming of age stories, and lives of the saints with age-appropriate themes including the power of intercessory prayer, the communion of saints, the Rosary, virtue, Theology of the Body, and respect for life at all ages and stages.

"A growing number of Catholic authors are producing high quality fiction, as well as riveting non-fiction or fictionalized versions of historical people and events," according to Stephanie Engelman, author of *A Single Bead*. "The goal of these authors is to teach as Christ taught - through stories. They take ordinary people, with ordinary lives and challenges, and write extraordinary stories meant to change hearts while teaching minds. While

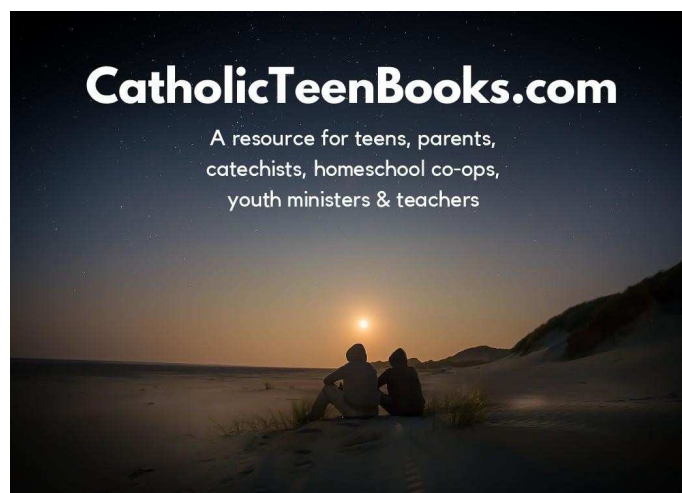
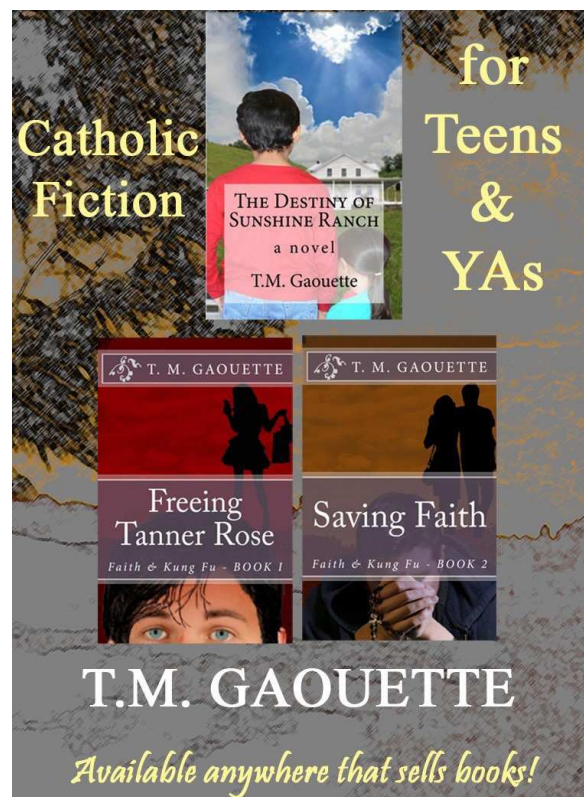


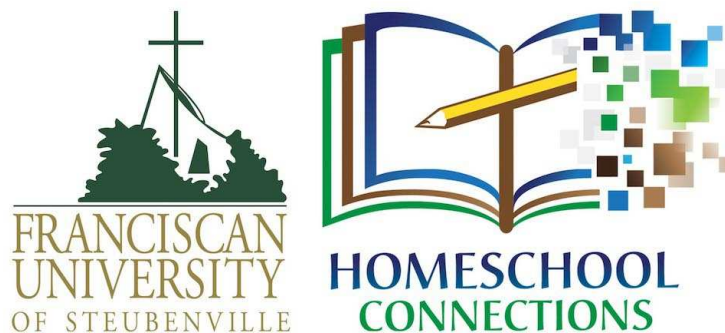
avoiding being preachy or didactic, these authors impart wisdom and support Catholic moral and social teaching.”

Many of the books included have been awarded the Catholic Writers Guild’s Seal of Approval. Several have also received awards from the Catholic Press Association as well as secular organizations. Some books are currently used in schools throughout the United States. All are available in both paperback and electronic format through Amazon.com and other retailers.

“An incredible amount of excitement surrounds this new website,” said Theresa Linden, author of the award-winning *Roland West, Loner*. “We hope to see it grow into something wonderful for God, helping young readers find books they will thoroughly enjoy and that support, rather than tear down their faith. And also, helping authors of Catholic teen fiction reach their audiences.”

Leslea Wahl is a Catholic author of two Young Adult novels, The Perfect Blindside and An Unexpected Role. One of the most exciting blessings of her writing journey has been to connect with a group of kindred spirits who share her passion for writing Catholic novels for teens and create this collaborative website.





Homeschool Students to Receive Franciscan University Tuition Discount

In an exciting move allowing homeschool students to earn college credit before ever stepping foot on campus, Franciscan University of Steubenville has partnered with HomeschoolConnections.com to provide a 10 percent post-secondary tuition discount on online undergraduate classes for select homeschool students.

According to Maureen Wittmann, co-founder of HomeschoolConnections.com, the agreement allows eligible families to experience substantial savings on college costs. "College has gotten so expensive," said Wittmann. "It's a big financial burden on many families, but dual enrollment with college credit can help lighten that burden."

The discount, which will be available starting August 2017, is open to junior and senior high school-level students whose families are members of HomeschoolConnections.com, a Catholic faith-based organization that provides online classes to homeschool students and teaching resources for their parents. Eligible students will be able to take up to two discounted Franciscan University classes per semester, including summer, for a maximum total of

12 undergraduate courses while still finishing their high school-level coursework.

"Our partnership with HomeschoolConnections.com creates an avenue for homeschooling families to start their children's college education with our passionately Catholic and academically excellent courses, building on the faith foundation they have established in their homes," said Franciscan University President Father Sean O. Sheridan, TOR. "With so many students coming to us from homeschools, we are happy to make a Franciscan University education more affordable and accessible to them. We see this outreach to homeschooling families as an important aspect of our service to the Church."

Franciscan will begin offering select undergraduate classes online for the first time during the fall 2017 semester. The courses will be drawn from Franciscan's core curriculum, which includes philosophy, theology, literature, and natural and social sciences.

While the online classes are open to all qualified

students, the discount is only available to HomeschoolConnections.com members.

Through the partnership, Franciscan University will become the exclusive higher education sponsor of the HomeschoolConnections.com parent webinars and online conferences, which are offered free throughout the year. Past webinar topics have included college preparation and how to avoid homeschool "burnout."

The partnership is a natural fit for both organizations. Approximately 19 percent of Franciscan University students come from homeschool families, while HomeschoolConnections.com shares a similar mission to the University.

"Our mission is well aligned with Franciscan: academically excellent and passionately Catholic," said Wittmann. "Franciscan University challenges the mind but also the heart and the soul—it just feeds students so completely. It's the reason we're so excited to work with Franciscan."

HomeschoolConnections.com was founded in 2008 in the spirit of St. John Paul the Great's teaching on the domestic church and the new evangelization. Seeking to use technology to enhance the homeschooling experience, HomeschoolConnections.com offers both interactive and pre-recorded online classes on a variety of topics from math to science, literature to writing, and

theology to philosophy. Giving parents the tools to fulfill their God-given vocations as educators, HomeschoolConnections.com also offers free webinars, eBooks, and educational videos.

To learn more about the Franciscan University-HomeschoolConnections.com partnership, visit franciscan.edu/homeschoolconnections.

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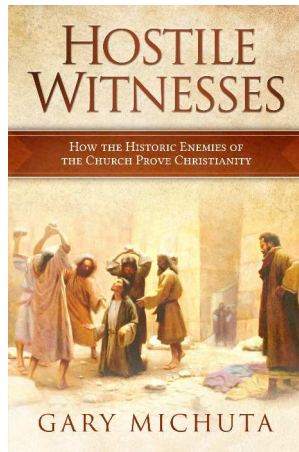
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Using *Hostile Witnesses* in Your Homeschool

In *Hostile Witnesses* (Catholic Answers Press, 2016), Gary Michuta offers a history of the critics against the Christian faith and Catholic church. In doing so he attempts to demonstrate how such critiques inadvertently support tenets of the faith. As Michuta explains in his introduction, "... the curious thing about some of the historic enemies of the Church [is that] when they are confronted with something about Christ or His Church that was too obvious to deny, they were forced to do one of two things: either concede the point and repackage it ...or attempt to explain it away."

Since Michuta looks at critics throughout history, the text is organized in a chronological manner where each section deals with a historical period from "the Later Pagan" to "the Crusades," and "World War II." Indeed, Mr. Michuta packs a great deal of information between the pages (the book totals 248 pages, not including the endnotes). However, he presents the information in a very manageable manner, which allows the reader to immerse in the testimonies and cross examination. The chapter and section organization functions to create something like a court case. Each chapter is broken down as though it were a trial. Michuta begins each chapter with a general introduction giving the context of the witnesses, and then offers the "witness" testimony that is often direct quotation from primary historical sources. Following the "testimony" Michuta gives what could be read as a "cross examination" in which

he begins to reveal the flaws of the testimony. In addition, each chapter concludes with a chapter specific bibliography for those who desire to do more research.

Because of the subject matter and especially because of the ease of the presentation, I found myself thinking time and time again as I read through the book that this would make an excellent resource for a homeschooling parent. The text could easily be integrated into any history curriculum as a secondary text book, or as a primary text in which the book is used as a "jumping off" point for specific historical periods where the students could then do more research on a specific topic in that period. Again, the organization of *Hostile Witnesses* with chapter (and thus, subject) specific bibliographies lends itself easily to such use.

But it is not only the organization and depth of material that makes this book a great option for homeschoolers. The book is exciting!

Especially as a Christian, it can be easy sometimes to read the Bible or recount the story of Jesus and forget that *it is not a myth, but historical fact*. And even more, that this story doesn't end with the death of Christ, or even His resurrection—indeed, the story of our Faith is not yet over. Michuta does an excellent job bringing the history of the Christian faith to life. To see how events like the resurrection or the many

healings impacted the culture and political powers of the time enliven our faith by placing it back in its historical context. Michuta's engagement of the historical critics of the Church bring not only history to life, but our faith as well. As such, I think it would not only encourage an interest in history, but also prepare our children for the critiques and attacks we have faced from the beginning.

Indeed, one of the most enjoyable parts of the book is reading the direct evidence from enemies of the faith about the faith. Though, I must admit, I myself was surprised to read some of the evidence that Michuta has pulled out of the annals of history. I am still reeling by the story of Julian the Apostate and the attempt to rebuild the Temple. Some of the evidence, such as the story of Julian the Apostate may challenge the Christian reader to question, "did that really happen!?" Curiously, no one seems to know this amazing story. However, it's this kind of testimony offered in the book that makes it so compelling for readers of all ages. Over and over, the reader is reminded that both history and our faith are living.

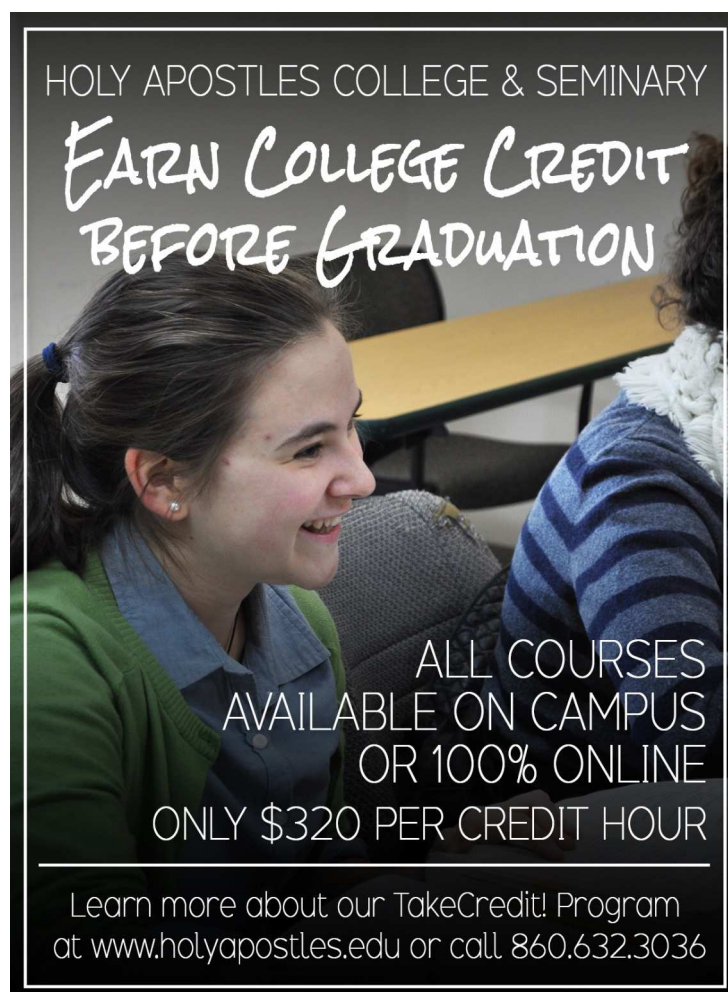
Not only are the historical accounts and testimonies compelling in themselves, but Michuta's treatment of these texts is wonderful. Text after text, Michuta carefully works through the evidence, peeling back layers, and, essentially, reads the text against itself. With each historical document, he walks the reader through how to read the text and teaches the reader and student how to read critically. As such, a parent who may choose *Hostile Witnesses* as part of their curriculum may also consider implementing parts of the text as examples in critical reading and argument building when tackling the subjects of reading and writing.

Lastly, while I think *Hostile Witnesses* is essential for any serious Christian, it has appeal for everyone. This broad appeal and easy organization lends itself

nicely to any Christian Catholic homeschooling curriculum, particularly for ages 12 and up. In fact, I think this text would work excellently in a family with multiple ages; though your younger children may not understand everything in each chapter, they can understand the basics, while the older children will grasp more and help the younger.

Young or old, this book is bound to get everyone thinking. It offers excellent counter arguments to many of the popular myths attached to Christianity today, and begins to reveal is how many of these myths date back hundreds of years.

Sr. Theo Kristen Hauck is a Benedictine Oblate and lives in her little hermitage in Maine.



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Does Your Child Have an Attention Disorder?

When a child is having to use too much energy to attend to his work, then that is the area that is a learning block to him. This child often has a body chemistry that is upset, and can be changed with simple methods at home. Other times a parent finds that working with a professional in this area is most helpful.

Often a parent will say of such a child: “He can focus on movies, video games, or Legos for hours, but can't focus on his schoolwork for more than five minutes.” It is important to realize what is going on, so we don't become frustrated with this type of child. Movies, video games, or Legos require little energy because children find them interesting and undemanding. On the other hand, a history or math lesson requires much more effort on the child's part. If the child has an “energy leak” in a certain area, then he will have to work much harder to remain focused. Therefore it is important to distinguish whether a child is struggling with an academic task because of an actual learning block, which causes task avoidance because of its difficulty, or a focusing problem.

Many times these children are struggling with sensory integration issues that make them look unfocused.

The official terms that are often used for children who have difficulty remaining focused on a task that they are capable of doing are Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

ADD refers to a child who is not acting out or moving around, and can even look attentive during a

task, but is generally absorbed in his own thoughts and daydreams to the point that he gets little done in the amount of time allotted.

A child who is thought to be ADHD is generally hyperactive. This child has a motor that is always running that he seems incapable of controlling. He does everything in a hurry, and some part of his body always appears to be moving, which keeps him quite distracted.

The hyperactive child (not just hyper-fidgety), is usually easy to spot in a group. The inattentive child, on the other hand, is not easy to spot. This child just appears to be slow in finishing work, or in following directions. He or she may seem lazy or uncooperative.

In a homeschool setting we do not have to focus on labels, or official diagnoses most of the time. We just need to see if the child we are working with exhibits enough symptoms to warrant further exploration on this topic. In homeschooling we can focus on the solution, rather than a label. Since learning is all about energy output, we ask ourselves why a child has to expend more energy to remain focused on a task than his or her siblings. Once this question is answered, then the action becomes clear.

ADD Checklist

- Distractibility.
- No persistence with a task.
- Inconsistency in performance from one day to another.
- Excessive daydreaming during a school related task.
- Needs to have mom next to him or her in order

to finish work.

- Forgetfulness (of previously learned material, daily plans, etc.).

ADHD Checklist

A child struggling with the more active form of a focusing issue will display some of these characteristics:

- Excess motor activity (something is always moving).
- Impulsiveness (acts without thinking much of the time).
- Insatiability (never satisfied with an activity).
- Poor response to discipline.
- Moodiness.
- Sleep disturbances (very restless sleeper).

Informal Evaluation

The difficulty with determining if your child has a focusing issue is that parents often do not have a strong basis of comparison if they only have one other child at home who is homeschooling. Thus, it is important to solicit information and observations from the other adults in the child's life who works with him in both an academic and non-academic setting.

Remember, that to be a real focusing issue, the symptoms must present themselves in more than one setting. It is important to differentiate between a child whose main problem is focusing, from a child who is exhibiting task avoidance because of academic struggles. For example, if your child's Sunday School teacher says that he or she listens attentively to lessons, and participates lively in the discussions that follow, but "gets silly" or doesn't complete assigned worksheets, you can consider that this child has a learning glitch instead of a focusing problem. The child with difficulty focusing frequently does not attend to orally presented information enough to participate well in the ensuing discussion.

On the other hand, if your child's karate teacher says that he needs to continually redirect your child's

attention during lessons (ones that are very active and hands-on), you may consider that this child is struggling to maintain focus when his peers do not need to expend any energy for this task.

How You Can Determine if Your Child Has a Focusing Issue

- Checklists, such as the one above help identify a child with an issue.
- Pediatricians can help decipher the observations you have of your child.
- Conners Behavior Scale, or BASC can be obtained by your physician. These are informal questionnaires to be completed by parents and other adults who work with your child in an academic setting. The results are calibrated to determine if the child is merely at risk of an attention problem, or actually is showing attention problem symptoms in more than one setting.
- Sunday School teachers, co-op teachers, leaders and other adults who work with your children can help determine if he or she is experiencing a problem.

Resources for Correction

There are two ways that children who have to expend more energy than their peers to focus can be helped. One way is to use compensation, and the other is to employ correction of the problem. Since it takes time for any correctional program to work, we really need to do both procedures. We compensate for the problem, while designing and implementing an effective correctional program.

In determining the best way to correct a child's processing problem that is affecting his ability to focus on a task, we need to consider that this child likely has an upset chemistry. The basis for this assumption is the long history of the use of medication used with children with a focusing issue. These medications are designed to help the child focus with more ease, by making the neurotransmitters responsible for the process of

focusing, more available to the brain and nervous system.

If a parent decides to try some medication for this purpose, then the child's pediatrician is the place to start. Sometimes parents try various medications, only to find the side effects to be unacceptable. So it's a good idea to also consider alternative ways to help balance the child's upset body chemistry.

Other times the parents are not interested in pursuing medication at all, but realize that their child is struggling too hard to focus, so still needs some help in producing and releasing the necessary neurotransmitters. This is when parents often turn to a nutritionist, naturopath, chiropractor, or nutritionally oriented physician to explore alternatives that seem to help so many children.

In this article, we will explore both compensations and corrections for these struggling children. In homeschooling we have a unique opportunity to help the child learn how to control his own behavior, through gentle behavior modification. We also have the opportunity to give this child more time and attention, taking the burden off of his focusing system. We can plan schooling days that help this child gain as much information as possible from the material, without the frustration of always being behind, or not knowing what to do. It is very rewarding to work with these learners in the home setting.

Compensations

Employ one-on-one tutoring. Children with attention problems thrive when an adult works one-on-one with them. These children struggle to complete work on their own, and find the frequent reminders to hurry up and complete their work debilitating. (See "Managing the Homeschool Teaching Day with a Struggling Learner" at https://www.hslda.org/strugglinglearner/sn_teach.asp to

learn how to get this important time with your child, while still working with your other children).

Read the article "Reading Comprehension: Converting Words to Pictures" by Dianne Craft (<https://www.hslda.org/strugglinglearner/CraftDocs/ReadingComp.asp>)

Read the article "Reading Comprehension Strategies" by Faith Berens (<https://www.hslda.org/strugglinglearner/CraftDocs/ReadingStrat.asp>)

Choose a curriculum that does not require mainly independent work (such as a computer curriculum program, or a self-paced program).

Reduce workbook exercises and busy work, such as copying and repeating math problems, as much as possible.

Buy good quality earphones for this child. He could use them to block out distracting noise, or you could have him listen to classical music softly while working on assignments.

Keep this child close to you throughout the day. Your proximity makes a big difference in his ability to focus. You do not always have to be interacting with him. Just be near him. Even when you are teaching another child, this child can be next to you with his earphones on, completing his work.

Group assignments. When approaching a math page with many problems on it, put a star by the ones you want him to do in that sitting period. If you are only having him do some of the problems on the page, not all, then he can put a large "X" over the ones he doesn't have to do. This is very satisfying for the child. If you can't do that, then use construction paper to cover the problems on the bottom half of the page so he doesn't have to see them when he is working on the top half.

Focus on study skills. If your child is prone to make mistakes when doing math problems, have him mark all the similar problems with red, and do them first. These children don't transition well, because transitions require more focusing power. Doing all like problems together greatly decreases their need to focus, ensuring few errors on a page.

Take breaks. Many little breaks, versus one big break, helps these children stay on task.

Involve dad. Assign one subject for dad to do with the child in the evening when he is home. Dads often have a different approach to teaching, and the child gets the important one-on-one time that helps him be successful. Make sure that dad knows the chunking approach, and how to reduce mundane, repetitive tasks.

Use more right brain strategies, since these employ color, humor, weirdness, etc., to put "Velcro" on the information presented. These children may not necessarily be right brain learners, but the engaging aspects of right brain strategies keeps them interested, and uses less focusing energy. For example, when explaining a new concept or showing how to memorize material, make it fun by having your child help you draw sketches with colored markers.

Adjust your expectations. Your other children may complete tasks without constant reminders, or may actually be able to perform chores without your intervention. If your special needs child could do that, he gladly would. He wants to please also, but does not have the physical ability to bring this about. He is as disappointed in himself as you are. If you have asked him to do three things, and he completed just one, and comes to you, think about saying, "Let's do the other two tasks together." This takes such pressure off the child, and models how to get several tasks done in a row, without the feeling of failure.

If your child had a disabled arm or leg, it would be so much easier to adjust your expectations without feeling that you weren't teaching him how to be responsible. This child has as real a disability, but because it is not visible it can so easily be seen as sloppiness, irresponsibility, or laziness. God will help you find the right way to work with your child.

Corrections

Medications: Even though most homeschooling parents are not interested in the use of medications to help their child focus, the discussion is warranted here, since there may be times when it is necessary, even if it is only for a short period of time.

- Serotonin boosting medications:
- Ritalin (short release time)
- Concerta (sustained release time)
- Antidepressants (Zoloft, Prozac, Effexor, Wellbutrin, etc.)
- Stimulants:
- Adderall (amphetamines)
- Dopamine boosting medication:
- Strattera

All medications come with the risk of side effects, of course. Parents must weigh the potential benefits against the potential risks before deciding whether or not to use medications.

Diet: It has been known for over 20 years, first starting with Dr. Feingold and his famous Feingold Diet, that by reducing sugars, colorings and preservatives, children with attention disorders have a much easier time focusing.

Many parents report that when they change the diet of all children at home, that they see a tremendous difference in learning ability and behavior. Some of the diet recommendations that seem to be the most effective include:

Reduce sugar intake. It's the hidden sugars that get us in trouble, such as the sweeteners in fruit juice,

boxed cereals, granola bars, fruit rollups, soft drinks, chocolate milk, pancakes, waffles, etc. Remember that a Snickers candy bar has about 30 grams of carbohydrates, and 35 grams of sugar. When you add the two together, you get 65 grams. Without realizing it, we often feed our children this same amount of sugar by just giving them juice and a bowl of cereal. For many children, consuming this much sugar contributes to their difficulty focusing and controlling their moods.

Increase raw fruit and vegetable intake. As we know from the research in books such as *Children with Starving Brains* by Dr. Chandless, many children are low in essential vitamins, minerals and fatty acids. These children either are not getting the daily nutrients they need for their brain to function well, or they are eating the correct foods, but are not absorbing the nutrients found in the food.

The enzymes contained in raw foods greatly assist the digestive system in absorbing nutrients. This can make a huge difference with some children. To make this difference, parents always had grapes, apples, bananas, watermelon, cantaloupe, and other fruit around to eat, and made sure the children had three servings a day. These parents also kept a plate of raw vegetables such as carrots, celery, broccoli, cauliflower, and green pepper strips along with plenty of ranch dressing around for lunch.

Use less processed food. As the pioneering Dr. Feingold, and many of the researchers following him found, when food is boxed, it is filled with preservatives. Those preservatives can be very toxic to a child's nervous system. Processed food also has no life in it. The rule of thumb for brain-healthy eating is to shop as much as you can in the periphery of the grocery store, where the plugs are in the walls. Buying food that is refrigerated in the store ensures you that the life-giving nutrients are still in there. When it is canned or boxed, the live nutrients, such as the fats that are good for the brain have been removed so that they do not go rancid on the shelf. Of course, there are some good brain fats that are not refrigerated such as cans of tuna or salmon, and mayonnaise.

Increase water intake. Children are often tired because they are dehydrated. They do not drink enough water during the day. A great book that details all the symptoms of being low in water intake is *Your Body's Many Cries for Water* by Dr. Batmanghlidj. He recommends that children drink half their weight in ounces of water. Making adequate water intake during the day a family priority is very helpful for many families. Water helps eliminate histamine and other toxins from the body.

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Does Your Child Have a Hard Time Writing?



One of the most common processing glitches to affect children is an interference in the writing system (spatial, visual/motor, or sometimes referred to as grapho-motor). When the process of writing has not become automatic, taken over in the right hemisphere of the brain, the child has to expend much energy to write. This processing glitch greatly impacts students because writing is involved in so many learning activities and areas. Often, parents and other adults report that the student appears lazy, uncooperative, and/or unmotivated. Take a look and see if your child is exhibiting many of the following symptoms which may indicate stress or disruption of the writing system:

- Reversals in written letters both laterally and vertically, six months after being taught to write them correctly if written daily.
- Reversals in written numbers.
- Poor spacing in writing.

- Difficulty copying from book or board.
- Resistance to learning or writing cursive.
- Displaying awkward writing posture, with eye and hand very close together.
- No “helping hand” used when writing despite being instructed to do so.
- Failure to complete written assignments despite performing well on tests.
- Spaces math papers poorly.
- Tells great stories orally, but writes very little.
- Leaves out letters in a spelling test, but could spell the word orally correctly.
- Wants to do all math “in his head,” no matter how long the problem is.

Informal Evaluations

Check your child’s eye/hand dominance: Tear a hole in a piece of paper that is the size of a dime. Have the child stand five feet in front of you and

When the process of writing has not become automatic, taken over in the right hemisphere of the brain, the child has to expend much energy to write. This processing glitch greatly impacts students because writing is involved in so many learning activities and areas.

hold the paper with arms extended, in front of him. Ask him to look through the hole and find your nose. As he is looking at your nose through the hole in the paper, you will be able to see his dominant eye.

Now to see if he is using that same eye for close-up work, place a small, round object on the floor about five inches in front of the child's feet. A toy construction cone is good. Ask the child to hold the paper at arm's length and look through the hole at the object on the floor. Tell the child to "freeze" his hands when he has sees the object. Then get behind him and cover one of the child's eyes with your hand. Ask the child if he can still see the object, or if it disappeared. Do the same with the other eye, making sure that the child does not move his paper. The object should disappear when you are covering the child's dominant eye.

We always use only one eye when looking through a small hole, and we use our dominant eye. If the child found that the object disappeared when you covered his right eye, then he is right-eye dominant. If he is also right-handed, then we call that "uniform dominance." The brain finds it more efficient to be uniform dominant.

If the object disappeared when you covered the child's left eye, then he is left-eye dominant. If the child is also right-handed, then he is considered "mixed dominant."

Being mixed dominant can be very helpful in sports, such as baseball and golf, but is less efficient for writing. However, if a child has good brain hemispheric integration, then it is not very bothersome for him. If the two hemispheres of his brain are not communicating well for the act of writing, then the writing has not transferred into the automatic hemisphere, and the writing process can be very laborious.

Make a note of whether the child is uniform or mixed dominant. This gives you a clue as to one reason why your child has been struggling with writing. Many times these mixed-dominant children do not develop a hand dominance until they are 4 or 5 years old, as opposed to other children who develop a hand dominance earlier.

Clockwise or counterclockwise circles? Have child write a word with the letter "o" in it, or just write the letter "o." Watch to see if he writes this clockwise or counterclockwise. If a child is hard-wired to be right-handed, he should be making all letters counterclockwise. If a child is hard-wired to be left-handed, he will tend to make his letters clockwise.

We only are concerned when a child who has chosen his right hand to write with, but is making all letters clockwise like a left-hander. This

creates great stress in the child's writing system. Make a note of this, because there are specific exercises that can be done to take the stress out of this system. We do not have to change a child's handedness.

Bottom-to-top letter formation: Ask your child to write the alphabet in lower-case print. When we write letters against the flow, writing is laborious. Observe, but don't correct. Does the child's writing seem to flow effortlessly or does it seem laborious, slow, and difficult? See if the child makes letter bottom-to-top, which is considered a vertical reversal. See if the child finds it difficult to remember the next letter to write. See if the child writes a mixture of lower-case and upper-case letters. Watch for clockwise letters, and letters that do not go below the line. These are all signs of stress in the child's visual/motor/spatial system. Make notes. These problems can be corrected, and the stress taken out of the system.

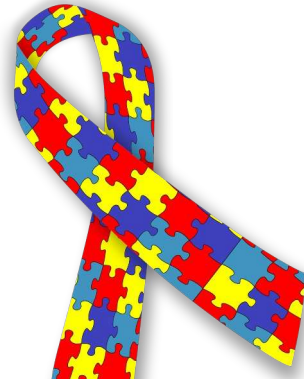
Please note: As young children are learning to write and read, it is not unusual for them to experience confusion concerning print directionality as well as reversals. Some of this is developmental. However, if after direct instruction and training you continue to see letter reversals, problems with directionality, and poor or incorrect letter formation, then there may be cause for concern. Our department would recommend having your child evaluated by either (or both) a reading specialist and occupational therapist.

Resources for Correcting Writing Dysfunction

- When teaching, have the child answer many questions orally, reducing the need to write until you can take the stress out of the writing system.
- Eliminate copying tasks because of the labor involved until the child's writing improves.
- Do timed math tests orally if possible.
- Do the Writing Eight Exercise designed by Dr. Getman, to encourage the child's kinesthetic midline to function well, eliminating both lateral and vertical reversals. This daily exercise, when done in a deliberate, monitored manner, will convert the writing process to the automatic hemisphere. The exercise is described in the manual *Brain Integration Therapy for Children* by Dianne Craft.
- After the child has a strong midline, then you can use the writing program *Handwriting Without Tears*.
- Teach your child keyboarding to encourage computer use for longer papers. Keyboard Classroom is one keyboarding program (<http://www.keyboardclassroom.com/>)
- LinguiSystems has several books that talk about writing issues, such as the dysgraphia described in the characteristics section.
- "Smart Kids Who Hate to Write" by Dianne Craft (<https://hsllda.org/strugglinglearner/CraftDocs/Writing.asp>)

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Can You Homeschool a Child with Autism?



by Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur

In some ways I was fortunate. We received the diagnosis that my son has Asperger's Syndrome, a high-functioning form of Autism, after we had already been homeschooling for two years. Therefore, I never had to wonder if I could homeschool a child on the autism spectrum – I was already doing it! A diagnosis merely gave me more understanding and tools to work with.

For those considering homeschooling a child with autism for the first time, however, I can certainly understand how the thought of taking on such a challenge could be intimidating. Making the decision to take the path less traveled and homeschool a “normal” child can be scary in and of itself. Homeschooling a child with special needs definitely adds some complications, but it unquestionably can be done, and in many cases, may be the best parenting decision you make for your child.

Homeschooling the Child with Autism: Answers to the Top Questions Parents and Professionals Ask is a

very helpful book for anyone considering traveling down this road. Written by Patricia Schetter and Kandis Lighthall, two teachers with Master's degrees and expertise in special needs, it explores the positives and negatives associated with this decision (the positives vastly outweigh the negatives). A general discussion of homeschooling is included, as well as an exploration of different teaching strategies, transitioning back into a traditional school environment or into college and preparing for life after school. They also offer suggestions for dealing with executive functioning difficulties and managing meltdowns. They also interviewed several parents who are homeschooling children on the spectrum. Schetter and Lighthall write:

Autism impacts a child's ability to think and learn in a typical way. A host of challenges present themselves in a traditional school program, including sensory, social and communications challenges, along with struggles accessing the necessary academic accommodations. . . . Families indicate that

homeschooling decreases the external stressors the child is exposed to in traditional school settings, and it relieves much of the anxiety . . . Homeschooling allows parents to directly address the core deficits of communication, social skills, social understanding, and organizational thinking, while providing functional academics that are real-world and experientially based.

Those who do choose to homeschool will most likely need outside help of some type – whether that be behavioral counseling, speech therapy, physical therapy and/or other needed assistance. Every child is different and the needs are different. It is possible to get the help needed and to incorporate it into one's homeschool life.

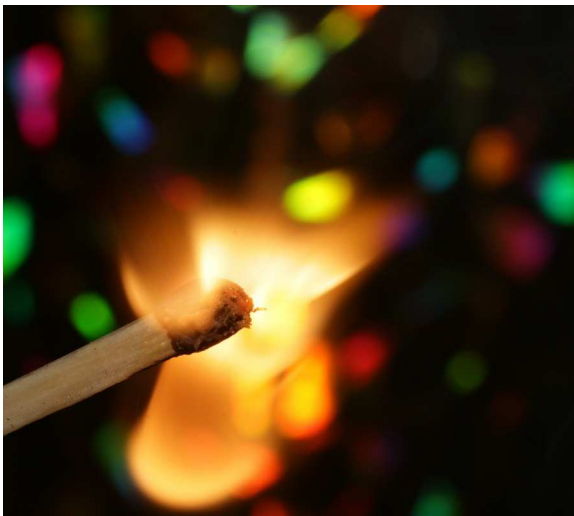
It is also possible to arrange for appropriate social interactions – whether these be with other homeschoolers, who are usually very tolerant of children who are different in some way, classes at a library or community center, or other extra-curricular activities. Of course, there are also the very important social interactions that take place within a

family, especially if there are siblings and grandparents involved.

An educational program can also be devised that meets the particular strengths and weaknesses of the child involved. Those on the higher end of the Autism spectrum may need only minor modifications to a traditional academic program, while those who suffer with more advanced communication challenges may need to focus on practical life skills. The beauty of homeschooling is that there are an infinite number of options as to how an academic program and schedule is constructed. It can truly meet the needs of the child.

Deciding to homeschool a child on the autism spectrum can be a difficult decision to make, and it isn't for everyone. But, if it is something you are considering, it definitely can be done and done with remarkable success!

Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur is a homeschooling mother of three and editor of TodaysCatholicHomeschooling.com



*“Education is not the
filling of a pail,
but the lighting of a fire.”
William Butler Yeats*

Pictaplan – The Role of Art as a Planning Tool

by Joan Prowse

Pictaplan came about as an answer to a busy home educating mum struggling to draw stick pictures to produce a daily schedule. She approached me as an artist and asked me to see what I could produce that was both beautiful and functional and so the Pictaplan planning system was born.

As well as being an English artist, I have worked with young adults and children with learning disabilities for some years and began to realize the impact that art can have on their lives. As a Christian, I was always looking to use the things I had “in my hands” to benefit others, and I discovered that I could use art to bring calm, reassurance, expression and familiarity to an otherwise sometimes confusing and threatening environment.

After observing aggressive and hostile behavior for seemingly no apparent reason, I began to realize that these outbursts were far from random and often came about because the child/person didn't understand what came next. As I devised more Pictaplan cards, I began to see the effects for families who didn't necessarily have a diagnosis of any disorder of their children, but who realized that their child functioned a little differently.

I have always believed that each is an individual and created as such. One shoe does not fit all, and just because one person doesn't quite “get” something doesn't mean they should be branded with any label,

but just means that they see things differently. It is a passion of mine to reach those individuals and help make the world a more understandable place for them.

Not everyone responds to the written or spoken word, but a common theme I have found in those people who don't is that they can relate well to images and artwork. Contrary to popular belief that children who are on the autism spectrum can't process complicated images, I have discovered time and time again that it is the degree of engagement with the image rather than its simplicity which is the important factor. I realized that the fascination that many such children have with shopping catalogues means that they process numerous complicated images over and over again and gain a great deal from them.

If you can engage the child in the artwork or imagery so that they identify with it, then you discover a totally different aspect of their character and a way that they can not only express themselves, but also understand and take part in the process of planning and anticipating their day. The use of imagery in the planning system means that it becomes a thing of fun and interaction rather than dread and apprehension. Not only that, but because the system is so flexible and appeals to both children and adults, its use can be easily adapted to individual needs.

Families with several children of varying ages can use the same system which pulls the whole family together and creates an initial planning activity that

celebrates commonality, not differences, which is often so important among siblings of different abilities. Imagery is not age related and while words may not be understood by the youngest members of the family, images are, and create an atmosphere of inclusion and equality rather than hierarchy and exception.

In conclusion, when using artwork within the homeschooling environment, it is not only important to encourage your children to produce artwork, but it can also be used to enhance communication between you and your child, as well as within the family unit.

Artwork and imagery is so much more than just a fun thing to do – it has a valuable and informative role to

play when raising any family and is an untapped resource for the home educating parent. Even if you are not artistic yourself, Pictaplan does the artistic bit for you so that you and your family can simply benefit from the advantages of using imagery to plan your day.

Joan Prowse was born in Leamington Spa, England and spent her early childhood growing up in Switzerland. After graduating in her early twenties with a degree in 3D design, she spent some time living in France where she renovated furniture and expanded her artistic experience. She worked as a Christian activities coordinator with young adults with learning disabilities for 5 years. She now develops ideas, tutors and uses her artistic gifting to share the Christian message and benefit others. An enthusiastic musician and songwriter, she has led worship regularly at her local church.

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Help for Homeschooling with Dyslexia

by Christine Capolino

What are *some* of the signs associated with dyslexia?

- Difficulty learning to speak
- Trouble learning letters and sounds
- Difficulty organizing written and spoken language (expressive)
- Trouble memorizing number facts
- Difficulty reading quickly enough to comprehend
- Trouble persisting with and comprehending longer reading assignments
- Difficulty spelling
- Trouble learning a foreign language
- Difficulty with math operations

Many still falsely believe that dyslexics are slow learners or, even worse, are behavior "problems." Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, dyslexia affects people of all intellectual backgrounds and dyslexic symptoms, though they are very hard to specifically diagnose, are exhibited by 1 in 7 people. For more information, please visit the *International Dyslexia Association* (interdys.org).

Knowledge is key around the symptoms of the learning difference that dyslexia is. From day to day and from individual to individual, dyslexia manifests itself differently.

That is, of course, one of the most frustrating and challenging aspects of dyslexia....the diagnosis....As well as moving forward with suitable-for-your-child intervention and ongoing remediation using tools that enhance not frustrate.

I'm not an expert in the field. Though I did earn a Master's Degree in the Diagnosis and Remediation of Reading Disabilities and taught for many years, I feel I have gained most of my knowledge in this area homeschooling my son, who is honestly a brilliant, kind and creative child. I have read extensively on the subject so as to help my child succeed. Perhaps through this article you might gain a little of the insight you've been searching for, too.

What Dyslexia is Not

1. *Dyslexia is not the reading and writing of letters backwards.*

Writing letters backwards is something that many kids do when they're first learning to write, whether they have dyslexia or not. Even among educators—including university faculty, special education teachers, and speech therapists—70 percent believe[i] that reversing the order of letters is a defining feature of dyslexia. Rather, dyslexia is marked by, among other things, difficulties in the processing of written language.

2. *Dyslexia does not occur in any one type of learner, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background IQ level.*

Rather, dyslexic symptoms manifest themselves in all people in every walk of life. In fact, conservative estimates suggest that 5 to 10 % of the entire population may be dyslexic.

3. *Dyslexia is not accompanied by behavioral and attention issues.*

Dyslexia is a severe reading problem of neurological origin. There are no physical, medical, or psychological conditions which account for the language processing deficits. Of course, if a dyslexic child is inattentive in class, I maintain that this is due to his inability to focus on the concept being taught due to the limitations placed on him because of the dyslexia. Sort of the chicken or the egg syndrome. Why is it that so many dyslexics also have ADD?

However, you might find interesting that dyslexia is a registered disability under the Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons' Act of 1970, Education Act of 1993 and the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995.

4. *Dyslexia is not a condition which affects "slow learners."*

In fact, dyslexia indications are found within students of average and above average intelligence.

5. *Dyslexia is not caused by "bad" or neglectful parenting.*

The dyslexic person uses his right brain hemisphere instead of his left to process language, thus requiring the use of different neural pathways ("detours" if you will) than the non-dyslexic person. Additionally, dyslexia is thought to be genetic and occurring in families.

6. *Dyslexia is not "curable."*

Dyslexia is not a disease. There is no "cure."

However, with appropriate and early diagnosis and suitable remediation, intervention, patience, love, encouragement, support from teachers, family and other individuals in roles of guidance, dyslexics can thrive in school and beyond, even achieving high levels of success. Don't forget that fellows such as Pierre Curie, Albert Einstein, Alexander Graham Bell and good ole Tom Jefferson were dyslexics.

I wouldn't go so far as to say that my son wears his dyslexia as a badge of honor, but he is no longer as uncomfortable about it when situations arise and it is apparent that he has a language issue. He is in fact, thrilled to be in the company of such accomplished individuals.

Dyslexia takes so many shapes, manifesting itself in a myriad of ways. It "looks" different from person to person and even within one individual from day to day. At seven, your child may have the oral/aural vocabulary of a college student (mine did) and at eight, he be able to memorize with ease 200+ lines of unabridged Shakespearean script for his roles as three different characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (again, mine did), yet cannot read Dr. Seuss or *Magic Tree House* without repeated stumbling and requests for assistance. Text conquered masterfully yesterday may look alien today or even in fifteen minutes.

Dr Blake Charlton, medical doctor, author and a dyslexic, speaks to this specifically in a NY Times op-ed piece, "Defining My Dyslexia"[ii], when he ponders if dyslexia IS a diagnosis at all. Is labeling dyslexia "pathologizing a normal variation of human intellect?" Further, for insight into cognitive strengths that accompany reading difficulties Mathew Schneps' research in Scientific American, "The Advantages of Dyslexia"[iii] is the place to start.

Resources

As for the practical aspects, though, of intervening during youth, to develop, own, and master reading and writing skills, I've found the following materials invaluable.

1) *Blast off to Reading*

by Cheryl Orlassino

Consistent phonemic introduction, practice, review. There's a listening/dictation, writing component as well. This book is touted as following an Orton Gillingham model of remediation. I agree with that to a point. I do add in my own "version" of the multisensory component in a variety of ways, such as the tracing of each letter or whole words in sand, with colored/chalk/markers on a chalkboard/whiteboard. In this way phonemic patterns are learned through VAKT (visual, auditory, kinetic, tactile means). We spent ten minutes every day on activities in this book.

2) *Recipe for Reading Resource Book*

by Nina Traub with Frances Bloom

Includes Phoneme Sequence Chart - A check off list and solid method of keeping track. Each phoneme and common words where they appear are listed within as well as strategies for teacher and student to make these phonemes their own in practical usage.

3) *Recipe for Reading*

by Nina Traub with Frances Bloom

This is the series that grew out of Nina Traub's *Recipe for Reading* (at #2). This series takes the multisensory approach from Blast Off (#1) and adds a pinch of the spelling activities you'd see in "traditional" spelling workbooks, such as rules for adding suffixes.

4) Franklin Spell Corrector

Let's face it, spell check is a way of life for all of us, not just those who struggle with print. It has the capacity to be an amazing safety net, right? However, when writing with pencil and paper and without such aid as provided by a Word doc, this gadget is the ultimate go-to.

It contains over 100,000 words as well as a section on what is called "confusables"—Those words which might be homophones and spelled correctly but not used correctly within this specific context.

5) Two fun online spelling "game" sites my son enjoys from time to time to sort of mix things up a bit.

Big Brown Bear (<http://www.bigbrownbear.co.uk/demo/prefix.htm>)

Word Central (<http://www.wordcentral.com/games.html>)

6) *Homeschooling with Dyslexia*

Absolutely don't miss this amazing site invaluable for parent/teacher/student (<https://homeschoolingwithdyslexia.com/>)

Please don't be discouraged if you're parenting a child who struggles with the processing of print. The right method, through trial and error, will present itself over time. That plus patience, consistency and prayer goes a loooooong way.

Christine Capolino is a wife, mom, writer, teacher, traveler, party giver, and encourager. She blogs at <http://campfiresandcleats.blogspot.com/> and can be contacted at campfiresandcleats@gmail.com.

[i] http://www.psychologicalscience.org/media/myths/myth_17.cfm

[ii] <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/23/opinion/defining-my-own-dyslexia.html>

[iii] <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-advantages-of-dyslexia/>

Resource List

Please note that inclusion in this list does not imply endorsement. This is also not an exhaustive list. Please use it as a starting point to investigate homeschool options for your child. Additional information about many of these programs and others may be found at TodaysCatholicHomeschooling.com.

Homeschool Academies

Angelicum Academy

Literature based comprehensive Catholic homeschool program with emphasis on Great Books at the high school level.

angelicum.net

Grace Online Education

Rigorous online Catholic education

gracecatholic.org

Kolbe Academy Home School & Online Academy

Incorporates classical educational theory and Ignatian methodology

kolbe.org

Memoria Press Academy

Online Christian classical education / also offers classical materials for use at home

memoriapress.com

Mother of Divine Grace

Classical at-home Catholic education

motherofdivinegrace.org

Our Lady of the Rosary

Traditional Catholic education at home

olrs.com

Our Lady of Victory

Traditional Catholic education at home

olvs.org

Queen of Heaven Academy

Online classical Catholic education for grades 4 – 12

Queenofheavenacademy.org

Regina Caeli

Classical hybrid education in the Catholic tradition

rcahybrid.org

Rolling Acres School

Catholic classical liberal arts online academy

www.rasonlineacademy.com

St. Thomas Aquinas Academy

Liberal arts education for the Catholic family

staa-homeschool.com

Seton Home Study School

Offers both traditional at-home Catholic materials and online classes

Setonhome.org

Veritas Christi High School

Online Catholic special needs high school

veritaschristi.com

Multi-Subject Curriculum Materials/ Classes

Catholic Heritage Curricula

Materials and lesson plans for solid, complete, family-friendly Pre K – 12 Catholic education

chcweb.com

Catholic Schoolhouse

Designed for group meetings held once a week / classical approach

catholicschoolhouse.com

Classical Academic Press

Materials and online classes for classical education

Classicalacademicpress.com

Classically Catholic Memory

Memory work program focusing on religion, Latin, history, science, math, timeline, and great works
ccmemory.com

Homeschool Connections

Live and recorded classes for Catholic middle and high school homeschoolers
homeschoolconnectionsonline.com

Mater Amabilis

A Charlotte Mason curriculum for Catholics
materamabilis.org

The above sources offer many quality curricular options for individual grade levels and subjects. The following lists include materials offered independently of those options.

Preschool

ABCatholic

DVDs, CDs, books, dolls and much more designed to touch the lives of little children with the faith
abcatholic.com

Catholic ABC's

Twenty-six lessons, one for each letter of the alphabet with craft, bible verse, and saint of the week
catholicicing.com

Little Saints

Manual includes bible stories, saints and feast days, illustrated literature, poetry, learning games, songs, and art projects.
catholicpreschool.com

Art

Art Achieve

Art lessons inspired by art from around the world
artachieve.com

Art Box Academy

Projects based on famous architects and artists are designed to expand ability to create, invent, and discover new things.
theartboxacademy.com

The Animation Course

Online drawing and animation course
theanimcourse.com

Foundations in Architecture

Architecture courses for grades K – 12
fiaacademy.com

Foreign Languages

Duolingo

Free online language learning program. Many languages available.
duolingo.com

Getting Started with French, Spanish, or Latin

Individual books and accompanying mp3 recordings designed for homeschoolers beginning a new foreign language
gettingstartedwithfrench.com
gettingstartedwithspanish.com
gettingstartedwithlatin.com

Learnables

High school classes in Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Hebrew, and Russian. Classes include CD-Rom and textbook.
learnables.com

PowerSpeak12

Online courses in Spanish, French, Chinese, German, and Latin for all grade levels
power-glide.com

Rosetta Stone for Homeschool

Self-paced interactive complete language-learning experience. Many languages available
rosettastone.com/homeschool

History

Connecting with History

Integrated history and literature based program designed to be used with entire family.

rchistory.com

The Story of Civilization

www.tanhomeschool.com

Bethlehem Books

Historical Fiction and Biography

Bethlehembooks.com

Language Arts – Handwriting

Handwriting Tree

Multisensory approach to handwriting

handwritingtree.com

Handwriting Without Tears

Complete handwriting curriculum for both print and cursive

hwtears.com/hwt

Language Arts – Literature

Catholic Teen Books

Exciting, well-crafted books that raise the heart and mind to God and reflect the fullness and beauty of the Catholic faith

catholicteenbooks.com

Excellence in Literature

Classic literature study guides for grades 8 - 12

excellence-in-literature.com

Language Arts – Reading

All About Reading

Complete, phonics-based reading program

allaboutlearningpress.com

Hooked on Phonics

Phonics-based learn-to-read program; available in print or digital

hookedonphonics.com

Little Angel Reader Catholic Phonics Series

Phonetic readers and coordinated workbooks

Stonetabletpress.com

Phonics Tutor

Teaches students common sounds for an extended set of Orton-Gillingham phonograms with spelling rules.

Includes CD-Rom and workbooks

phonicstutor.com

Progressive Phonics

Free program for teaching phonics and reading

progressivephonics.com

Language Arts – Spelling

All About Spelling

Multi-sensory program teaches spelling through sight, sound, and touch

allaboutlearningpress.com

Phonetic Zoo

Phonics-based program uses auditory input to ensure correct spelling of each word is absorbed by the brain.

iew.com

Touch Type Read and Spell

Multi-sensory course that teaches touch-typing skills to help improve reading and spelling

readandspell.com/us

Language Arts – Writing

Brave Writer

Self-teaching guides and online classes

bravewriter.com

Cover Story Writing

Takes middle school students on a guided tour through the universe of story through the process of creating content for their own magazine

coverstorywriting.com

Institute for Excellence in Writing

Video instruction, workbooks, and online classes

iew.com

One-Year Adventure Novel

Guides grades 8 – 12 through the process of writing a structured, compelling adventure novel over the course of one school year

oneyearnovel.com

Writing Strands

Complete language arts program

Writing-strands.com

Math

HomeschoolMath.net

Free worksheets on math topics from addition to pre-algebra

homeschoolmath.net

Life of Fred

Each math text is written in the style of a novel with a humorous story line. For 1st – 12th grade.

lifeoffred.com

Math Mammoth

Workbooks for grades 1 – 12 available as downloads or print versions

mathmammoth.com

Math-U-See

Four-step approach to learning math including videos, manipulatives, writing and talking through concepts

mathusee.com

Singapore Math

K – 8 curriculum focused on problem solving with pictures and diagrams.

singaporemath.com

Teaching Textbooks

Combined text and computer program for 3rd grade – pre-calculus .

teachingtextbooks.com

Music

Catholic Hymn Study

Learn one traditional Catholic hymn or chant each month

traditionalcatholicliving.com

Hoffman Academy

Free online piano lessons

hoffmanacademy.com

Making Music Praying Twice

Fun and faithful Catholic music program for young children designed to increase music aptitude

makingmusicprayingtwice.com

Piano Nanny

Free online piano lessons

pianonanny.com

Religion

CatechismClass.com

Online classes for children and adults
catechismclass.com

Didache Series for High School

Presents life and doctrine of Catholic Church
utilizing Catechism, Scripture, Saints, and Doctors
and Fathers of the Church
theologicalforum.com

Encounter the Saints Series

Biographical chapter books for ages 9 - 12.
pauline.org

Faith and Life Catechetical Series

For grades 1 - 8.
ignatius.com/promotions/faithandlife/

The Story of the Bible and Catholic Courses

tanhomeschool.com

Tiny Thomists

Free religion lessons for young Catholics.
dominicaninstitute.com/tinythomists/

Vision Books Lives of the Saints

Biographical chapter books for ages 9 - 12
ignatius.com

Science

ACS Middle School Chemistry

Free downloadable lesson plans
middleschoolchemistry.com

The Homeschool Scientist

Experiment ideas, curriculum choices,
and science resources
thomeschoolscientist.com

Home Science Tools

Lab kits and science supplies
hometrainingtools.com

NASA Science Resources

Weather and meteorology
scijinks.jpl.nasa.gov
Space
spaceplace.nasa.gov

Quality Science Labs

Lab materials for middle
or high school science
qualitysciencelabs.com

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Homeschooling Product or Service on
TodaysCatholicHomeschooling.com?

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“You must pray...without prayer, all the schooling in the world will not produce the effect God wants homeschooling to give.”

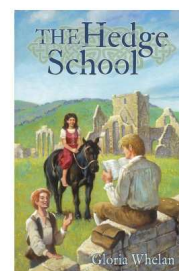
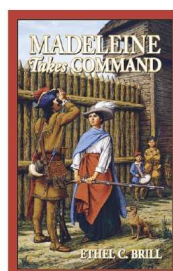
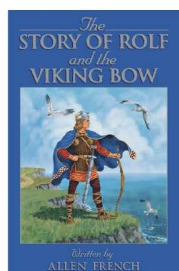
Fr. John Hardon



The following books contain positive Catholic references, settings, and/or characters:



• Around the Year Once Upon a Time Saints	14.95	• The Mitchells: Five for Victory	15.95
• Augustine Came to Kent	12.95	• More Once Upon a Time Saints	11.95
• Beorn the Proud	14.95	• My Heart Lies South	14.95
• Betsy's Up-and-Down Year	12.95	• Nacar, the White Deer	10.95
• Between the Forest and the Hills	12.95	• Once Upon a Time Saints	11.95
• Beyond the Desert Gate	13.95	• Pegeen	15.95
• Big John's Secret	12.95	• Philomena	12.95
• Canadian Summer	15.95	• Red Falcons of Tremoine	13.95
• The Cottage at Bantry Bay	15.95	• Red Hugh, Prince of Donegal	14.95
• A Day on Skates	19.95	• The Rose Round	11.95
• Door to the North	15.95	• Saints and Heroes	15.95
• First Farm in the Valley: Anna's Story	12.95	• The Saving Name of God the Son	9.95
• Francie on the Run	15.95	• The Small War of Sergeant Donkey	11.95
• Friendly Gables	13.95	• Son of Charlemagne	14.95
• The Hedge School	14.95	• Spring Tide	12.95
• The Hidden Treasure of Glaston	15.95	• The Story of Rolf and the Viking Bow	15.95
• The Ides of April	13.95	• That Girl of Pierre's	11.95
• If All the Swords in England	14.95	• The Weka-Feather Cloak	4.95
• The Kitchen Madonna	14.95	• Willow Wind Farm: Betsy's Story	12.95
• A Long Way from Welcome	4.95	• Winding Valley Farm: Annie's Story	12.95
• Madeleine Takes Command	13.95	• The Winged Watchman	14.95
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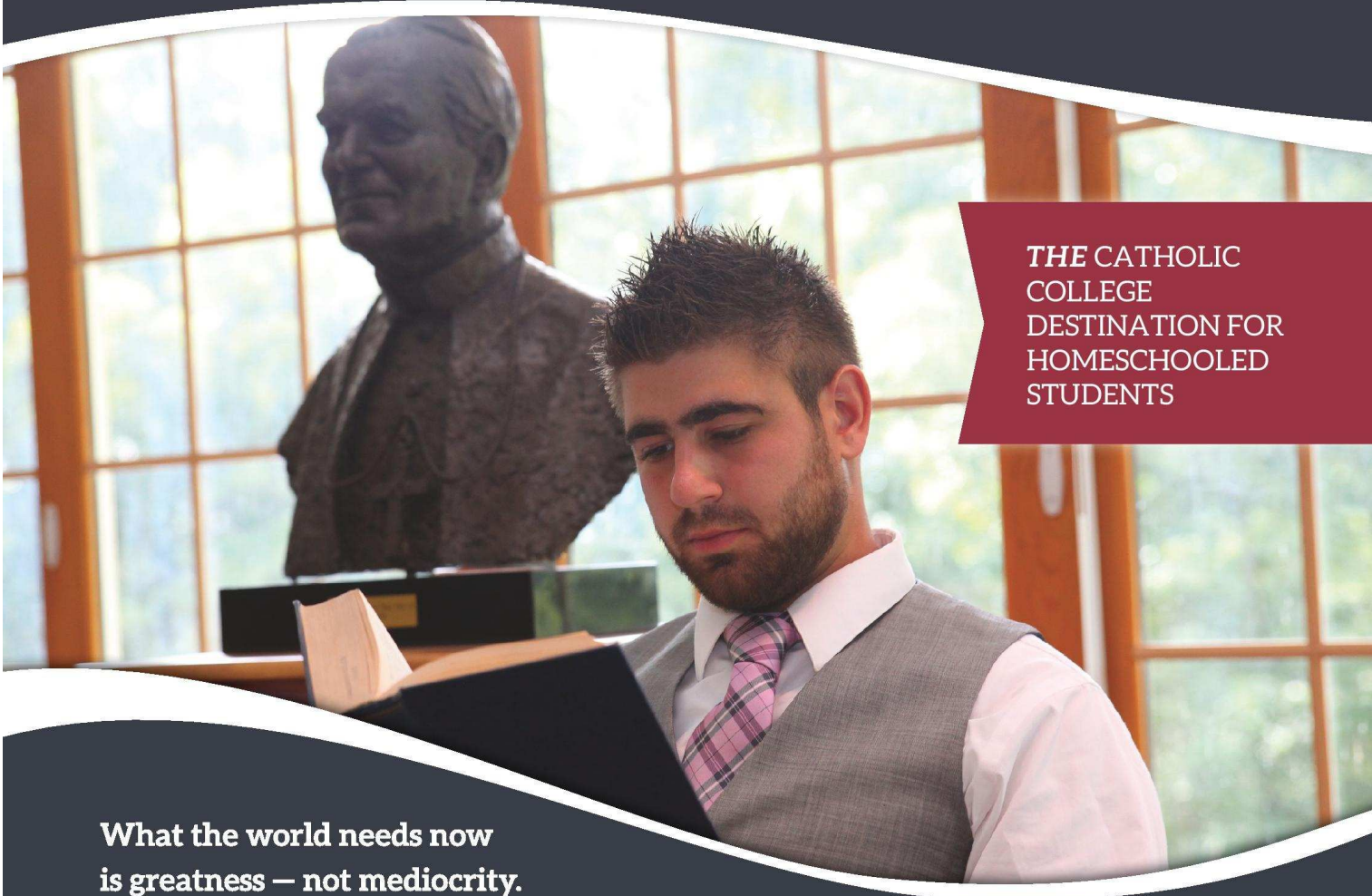
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