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It's about that time of year when homeschoolers start assembling their resources for the upcoming school year. I often have people ask me, "Which curriculum do you recommend?" The answer is, "It depends." It depends on your goals, your teaching style and your student's learning style. Homeschooling curriculum and methods are so personal. Some families prefer a structured style of homeschool others are more free-flowing, most of us fall somewhere in-between.

To give you a little peek into the homeschooler's thought process, I've asked a few experienced homeschoolers to answer the question:

## ***"How do you choose your homeschooling resources?"***



I have three children whom I have taught from birth. They are now 21, 17 and 15. I piece together curriculum based on my child's learning style, my teaching style, my educational goals for that year, and my child's interests. I reference Cathy Duffy's book, *102 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum* (<https://cathyduffyreviews.com/102-top-picks-for-homeschool-curriculum>), Robin Sampson's, *What your Child Needs to Know When*, and Debra Bell's, *The Ultimate Guide to Homeschooling*, among others. I start out by making a list of the 11 required subjects for compliance with Washington State homeschool law. \* I then take one at a time, starting with the core subjects, and decide what methods and resources I am going to use to teach that subject. I prefer to be able to look at the resource in person if possible. I like to see how the text flows and look at the layout to see if it's a good fit. Homeschool conventions, used book sales and the Homeschool Potpourri bookstore in Kirkland are good places to look through homeschooling resources. I also view online where I can usually get a feel for the author's approach.

Throughout our homeschooling journey, much of our learning has been done through discussions. Whether we were on a hike talking about why some plants grow close to the ground and other reach up into the sky or watching the presidential election discussing how the electoral college works, our lives have been filled with opportunities to learn. My primary educational goals for my children are to love learning and to know where to go to find answers to their questions. I have non-educational goals which I also consider. For example, being able to work both independently and as a team, being willing to be flexible, being hard-working and considerate are all important life skills. These are things that we, as homeschooling parents, get to address daily.

### Elementary Years:

This is such a fun time of learning. In the younger years, much of our learning was experiential. I would select the field trips we would attend and then get a book and/or movie to go along with that topic. For example, we went on an Argosy Cruise field trip where the focus was on the waters of the Puget Sound. Prior to our trip, we learned about that area, the water cycle and creatures of the Sound. Afterwards we would discuss what we learned. We used this approach for tours of manufacturing facilities, nature walks, museums, zoos and plays creating indelible learning experiences and beautiful memories. Of course, we didn't go on field trips every day. I believe that having a solid education in the Maths and Sciences is important; therefore, we worked progressively in those areas. All three children had different math curriculum which I chose based on their learning styles. In the beginning it was a bit of a hit-and-miss process, but they eventually settled into the curriculums that fit them. Science: Although I usually had a spine or text I used as a reference, much of what we learned was hands-on and interest driven. History was covered primarily with books, usually read alouds, videos and field trips. For literature, I read aloud and we listened to some audiobooks to supplement the child's personal reading. We worked on spelling and handwriting with workbooks, journaling and personal notes. Art and music was covered with activities, concerts, plays and beautiful music in our home.

### Middle/High School Years:

Eighth grade was a high school training year. We focused on preparing to meet our graduation goals. For example, I would ask myself, 'What math does this child need to be through by his/her senior year?' This differed based on each child's career aspirations/area of interest. I have one mathematician, one artist, and one English focused student. I also had my own goals for each of my children as to which math level I wanted them to complete. I used this information to work my way backwards to where they needed to be in middle school. For high school, I require 4 years of math, science, history and English. I research different curriculums and then review with each student, so they can choose which they prefer. The rest of the credits typically fill up quickly based on their interests: karate, art classes, theater, dance, economics, current events, apologetics, etc. We continue to do many field trips which focus on upper level learning. I coordinate many of these myself enabling me to choose areas of interest. I have to say that high school has been some of my favorite years to homeschool. Although upper level teaching can present challenges, I wouldn't trade that time with my kids for the world. We have had so many amazing opportunities for discussions and learning together. I have watched my children develop logical and persuasive positions on a myriad of topics. We have had energetic discussions where each would defend his/her position sometimes convincing, sometimes agreeing to disagree. It's amazing watch your children develop into competent young adults. Even though our homeschooling journey has had its share of struggles, I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to travel this path alongside my children.

Lisa Menday, HSA Public Relations

\* 11 basic subjects include occupational education, science, math, language, social studies, history, health, reading, writing, spelling, and the development of an appreciation of art and music.



I'm an eclectic homeschooler, which means I piece together different elements when I create a course for my child. When my kids were in elementary school, we followed more of a Charlotte Mason approach and planned to study a composer and an artist each term. We'd [listen to music](#) from the composers together and I'd read aloud books about the composers' lives. And my kids took piano lessons, so they could play compositions, too. We'd look at masterpieces in books or online and used a [very simple art book](#) by Evan-Moor to create art portfolios at home.

As my kids started high school, I allowed them more freedom to follow their passions. My eldest was interested in fashion, so I went online and found a college that offered a degree in fashion design. From that, I created my own **History of Fashion** course. Then my daughter took an Interior Design class at Bellevue College. She took measurements, sketches, and photographs of our upstairs playroom, and developed a plan for redesign. She conceptualized a new use for the room with sketches, photos, fabric swatches, and color schemes. She developed budget and defined the most important items for redesign and did a lot of online "shopping" for new furnishings to build wish list. She sorted, organized, and developed a plan for selling, donating, or giving away old toys and "little kid" furnishings. Lastly, she completed in-store shopping at various locations and oversaw delivery setup and final arrangement of furnishings. In addition, she learned how to use Visio software.

One of the most enjoyable curriculum ideas we've use is called **MovieLit**. I've used it for the past three years. It's a college-level English literature program where your student watches a movie based on a classic piece of literature, and answers short-answer questions, short essay questions, and long essay questions about the movie. If you have a student who enjoys movies more than reading, it can be a good fit. The movies are "safe" for the rest of the family, too, for the most part. I wrote a blog post about it [here](#).

For the upcoming year, I have one high school student at home. One homemade course for this year is **Fine Arts**. We'll be attending many great field trips hosted by HSA, including *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Disney's The Lion King* at Paramount Theater and Pacific Northwest Ballet's *The Sleeping Beauty*, among others. I found some curriculum regarding artists and composers online at [Harmony Fine Arts](#). I'll purchase that before we start our year in September.

If you like to mix things up and create your own courses of study, Betsy Sproger is a great resource. I can't tell you how many times I've visited her blog for tips and advice. I especially like her blogpost called [Homeschool High School Creatively with 100 Electives and Activities](#). I've re-read this post several times a year over the last three or four years, and I always find topics to pursue.

Anyway, that's just a snippet of how I create courses and choose curriculum to accompany it. I've been homeschooling for 13 years and have probably been making small changes every year. The key is to follow your children's interests, throw out what isn't working, and enjoy yourself.

--Kelly Malleck, HSA President

I have used a variety of curriculum over our family's 19 years of homeschooling. Boxed curriculum has been my main go to source.



We started with a total kindergarten program from Calvert Education. This included EVERYTHING needed and we loved it, but was not a Christian curriculum. We changed to Abeka for first grade through fifth grade, then we changed to Bob Jones for sixth grade to high school graduation.

For the science requirements we used Apologia. My children did well with workbooks and following the schedule I prepared for them.

I did well with using the already prepared schedules and lesson plans that come with the boxed curriculum.

Tena Cinnamon, HSA Treasurer and Kent Co-Chair

My background is in public and private education. I've worked in alternative public schools and



Montessori schools. I was a Preschool teacher for many years. When I "retired" to have our first child and stay at home, we decided to homeschool when the time came for formal education. I attended a used curriculum sale and began looking for a Kindergarten curriculum. One of the vendors at the sale asked why I was looking for curriculum for Kindergarten. I said that I wanted to be sure my child was learning what he needed to learn and to be in compliance with state standards. She asked if she could give me some advice. I said, "sure." She said, "Don't use curriculum for Kindergarten, find out what your child is interested in and learn

about that together." This was interesting. My background was leading me to follow a pre-planned curriculum, but this experienced homeschooler was telling me to let my child's interest lead the way. How could I know he was doing everything he needed to do and how could I keep track of what he was doing?

I followed the advice of the woman at the used curriculum sale. I asked my son what he was interested in and we ran with it. We were regulars at the local library, we went on field trips related to my son's interests and watched videos together. I kept up with state standards by using the book "What My Child Needs to Know When" by Robin Sampson. I kept a record of what we did in a homeschool planner, "The Homeschool Daily Planner for Curriculum" by Aaron Publishing. Throughout my son's Kindergarten year, we studied lots of subjects, made lasting memories and started traditions that we still do. So glad for great advice!

For 1st grade, I found books here and there (curriculum sales, yard sales, homeschool convention) and we bought ones that looked interesting. I tried to get books for each subject area. My son especially liked A Beka books. As the year went on, my son asked if we could get more A Beka books. This was great because I like the books and they were biblically-based, which was a good fit for our family values. Beginning in 2nd grade, we used all A Beka books. They provided a good challenge, met state standards, were colorful and engaging and were great value for the money.

We continued using A Beka books through 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I began having difficulty teaching the Math concepts. I do not have strong Math skills. I felt I was slow in remembering how to do things and then struggled with how to teach my son how to do them. I came across "A Beka Academy." A Beka Academy was a way to view classes taught by certified teachers at Pensacola Christian School through DVDs or video streaming. This was perfect! My son would get instruction by certified teachers and we could still use the A Beka books! Beginning in 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, we used A Beka books with A Beka Academy/Independent Study. A Beka Academy gives you the choice of enrolling in A Beka Academy which requires you to fill out progress reports, submit some of your student's work to be graded and receive a report card or choosing Independent Study where you do not have to send in progress reports or work.

When our daughter started learning, she wanted to do what her brother was doing, so she has been using A Beka books with A Beka Academy since 1<sup>st</sup> grade. She is now finishing up 4<sup>th</sup> grade and will be starting 5<sup>th</sup> grade in the fall. Our son is finishing up his 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. We decided to enroll him in A Beka Academy in 9<sup>th</sup> grade so that he receives report cards and A Beka Academy provides us with a transcript as well. We plan to continue with A Beka Academy for both our kids through high school. Upon completing their senior year, they will receive a high school diploma and participate in the graduation ceremony at Pensacola Christian School in Florida.

In retrospect, I would say that we didn't choose our curriculum, our curriculum chose us. We happened to run across a book we liked, and it developed from there. I'm thankful for the great advice I received when I was first starting out. We have incorporated it every year to the present. Both our children still like to research subjects of interest to them in addition to enjoying their academics through A Beka. It is essential to allow your children to play a major role in choosing curriculum. After all, it is their education and they will be the ones to do the work.

Terri Hartzell, HSA Secretary and Renton Chapter Co-Chair

From an Unschooler's perspective:



Based on my child's interest, I seek out various activities - field trips, movies, games, books, etc. From that, they pick and choose what to use and to what extent. I aim to be a facilitator, rather than director, of their growth and learning.

Debra Greywolf, Unschooling Advocate and Special Needs Support



My family is unique in that I want to combine study subjects with culture, our community and our personal family values. In the beginning of the year I outline our family goals with my son's learning in mind. I personally tend to focus on college preparation skills. I draft a proposal and pitch it outlining all the 11 areas of study in a bigger family conversation and we change it depending on my son's interest and husband's goals. Then I set desirable outcomes for each the subjects. Then I find specific programs, classes, books, videos online that fit out overall goals. Each study subject is different based on the interdisciplinary subjects I combine. Last year for example my son didn't like writing, so I combined it with comic book art. Then I couldn't get him to stop writing. Some things I use a more formal curriculum like math u see, but I combine it a lot with online videos from Math Antics. My son is still in elementary school, so we also rely on his Royal Rangers program for some of his learning. I also regularly search for materials at the learning stores, videos to give him a global advantage in his learning. His learning also incorporates his Grandpa's construction projects because we value him learning about trades work too. My son is a visual kinesthetic learner. I adapt as the year goes on based on what is available in community class, Grandpa's projects and my son's interest.

Onion M. Carrillo Norman, MSW  
HSA Burien Chapter Chair



Before we started homeschooling (about fifteen years ago), my husband and I attended the Washington Homeschool Organization's large convention in June. I wandered the aisles, feeling more and more overwhelmed as I wondered, "How in the world will I know which curriculum is best for us? How am I supposed to decide?" Now that I've been homeschooling for a while, I've heard this same question so many times from many new homeschoolers. If this is the question you've been asking yourself, know that you are not alone!

I don't remember how I discovered Susan Wise Bauer's *The Well-Trained Mind*, but at some point after the convention (after lots more reading and research), I decided that the classical method of education was definitely what I wanted to do. I ordered the books she suggested and followed her recommended plan, and we got started. It took a couple years of struggling before I admitted to myself that it just wasn't working. It took many more years for me to realize that the way I learn and the curriculum I enjoy wasn't necessarily what was going to work for my kids.

I still love Susan Wise Bauer, and I've used many of the curricula she's written, but we have shifted our method of homeschooling drastically over the years (I believe Susan Wise Bauer would say she has, as well). I still recommend reading about the many philosophies of education and finding which you find yourself most aligned with as a starting point. That can help to narrow the endless choices of curriculum that continues to grow every year.

I have one child left at home, and it is more of a team effort now rather than me telling him what he is going to learn (although I do have a couple subjects that I require). I spend a lot of time observing what makes him excited and what he naturally gravitates toward, and he knows that if he

expresses an interest in a particular area I will do my best to find materials or classes to learn about that subject. I have also spent a good deal of time thinking about what my own educational goal is for my child - to be an independent learner who is curious and craves knowledge and wisdom, and more practically, to be able to communicate effectively and think critically. So now, how do I achieve those goals?

Once I have my list of subjects that we're going to tackle for the year, I also like to consider the ways that my child learns best - is it a class offered in the community, a class offered with other homeschoolers, an online class, reading a book, using a textbook/workbook, watching movies/documentaries/YouTube channels, playing games, hands-on projects, a live event (plays/performances), private lessons, an apprenticeship? Then I start Googling, scouring the Rainbow Resource Center's website or catalog, asking for suggestions in the various groups I'm part of, and checking out way too many books from the library to find what I think will most ignite my kid's interest. I have joined many Facebook and Yahoo groups over the years because those have been my most successful sources of finding the best curriculum. The collective homeschool mind is the best resource I can recommend.

Curriculum is not limited to a workbook or textbook. We live in a time when the resources available to us are nearly unlimited. Use every resource that you can find, don't be afraid to change if something isn't working, ask other homeschoolers lots of questions, and regularly celebrate the growth and learning that's happening in both you and your children.

To summarize, the basic outline of how I choose my curriculum is:

- 1) Set goals (both mine and my child's)
- 2) Make a list of chosen subjects for the year based on goals
- 3) Research (read, Google, ask questions)
- 4) Make final decisions of which resources I'm using
- 5) Implement, but allow for adjustments when necessary
- 6) Document and celebrate successes!

Julie Fecarotta, Federal Way