

# Common Teaching Approaches

## **Traditional Approach**

In the Traditional Approach, graded textbooks or workbooks follow a scope and sequence that covers each subject in 180 daily increments over a span of 12 years. Teacher's manuals, tests, and record keeping materials are usually available that correspond to each of the texts. Textbook curricula assume you will run your home school like an institutional school.

Worktext programs present textbooks in consumable workbook format. The student learns his lesson, is given assignments, and is tested all in the workbook. The worktexts include tests or checkpoints to ensure that the material in each section is mastered before the student moves on to the next. Worktexts also allow more independent study and require minimal teacher preparation time and supervision.

### **Questions to ask**

- Did my child perform well in a school classroom?
- Am I the kind of person who will follow through with the lesson plans and pace of the course of instruction?
- Does my child read well and have good reading comprehension skills?
- Can my child work well independently?
- Is my child academically oriented?
- Will my child complete assigned tasks with a minimum of prodding from me?

### **Strengths of the textbook/workbook approach**

- Follows a standardized scope and sequence
- Has definite milestones of accomplishment
- Testing and assigning grades is easy to do

### **Weaknesses of the textbook/workbook approach**

- Is geared to the “generic” child. Does not take into account individual learning styles, strengths and weaknesses, or interest.
- Treats children’s minds like containers to fill with information.
- Focuses on transmitting information through artificial learning experiences
- Different aged students study different materials
- Is teacher-directed and chalkboard oriented.
- Discourages original, independent thinking

### Textbook Companies

A Beka Books  
Bob Jones University Press  
Christian Liberty Press  
Rod & Staff Publishers  
Apologia Science  
Saxon Math

### Workbook Companies

Alpha Omega (LIFEPAC & Switched on SchoolHouse)  
Christian Light Publications  
School of Tomorrow (ACE) PACE

## **Non-Textbook Approaches**

Although there are a number of excellent textbook and worktext programs available, many home educators object to the fact that textbooks are teacher-directed, chalkboard-oriented, and seldom take into account different teaching approaches or the different ways children receive and process information.

John Gatto says, “Real books educate. School books school.” With textbooks, parents may feel they are “bringing the classroom home” instead of educating their children in a way that is uniquely home-based. These parents have found alternative teaching approaches that allow them to tailor their home schooling to their family’s particular needs. Here are four most common non-textbook teaching approaches:

### Classical Approach

In Classical Approach, children under age 18 are taught tools of learning collectively known as The Trivium.

The Trivium has three parts, each corresponding to a childhood developmental stage.

*Grammar Stage* focuses on reading, writing, spelling, the study of Latin and developing observation, listening and memorization skills.

*Dialectic Stage* in which the child’s tendency to argue is molded and shaped by teaching logical discussion, debate, and how to draw correct conclusions and support them with facts.

*Rhetoric Stage* seeks to produce a student who can use language, both written and spoken, eloquently and persuasively.

#### **Questions to ask**

- Does my family like to read good literature?
- Are my children intellectually oriented and comfortable with a rigorous academic program?
- Am I a learner?
- Do I like to study ideas that have influenced civilization?

#### **Strengths of the Classical approach**

- Is tailored to stages of mental development
- Teaches thinking skills & verbal/written expression
- Creates self-learners

#### **Weaknesses of the Classical approach**

- Requires a scholarly teacher and student
- May overemphasize ancient disciplines and classics

#### Classical books and companies

The Well-Trained Mind

Teaching the Trivium: Christian Homeschooling in a Classical Style

Introduction to Classical Studies

Veritas Press

## Unit Study Approach

A Unit Study takes a theme or topic and delves into it deeply over a period of time, integrating language arts, science, social studies and fine arts as they apply. Math is usually learned separately. Instead of studying eight or ten separate, unrelated subjects all subjects are blended together and studied around a common theme.

For example, a unit study on birds could include reading and writing about birds and about famous ornithologists (language arts), studying the parts, functions, and life cycles of birds and perhaps even the aerodynamics of flight (science and math), determining the migration paths, habitats, and ecological/sociological impact of birds (social studies), sketching familiar birds (art), building bird houses or feeders ("hands on" activities) and so forth.

Several fine prepared unit study curricula are available, but it is easy to prepare your own unit studies around areas of interest. History is the logical core curriculum to build ongoing unit studies around. History provides a framework for all the other subjects because it follows a progression and covers every other subject (except possibly math), like art, music, science, literature, etc.

### **Questions to ask**

- Am I a creative person?
- Do I like trying to make everything interesting and fun?
- Do I have the time and energy to be the creative force behind the unit?

### **Strengths of the Unit Study approach**

- All ages can learn together
- Children can delve as deeply/lightly into a subject as they like
- Students get the whole picture
- Knowledge is interrelated so is learned easily and remembered longer

### **Weaknesses of the Unit Study approach**

- Hard to assess the level of learning occurring
- Too many activity-oriented unit studies may cause burn-out
- Subjects that are hard to integrate into the unit may be neglected

### Unit Study Publishers

Five in a Row

KONOS

Weaver Curriculum

Sonlight Curriculum

My Father's World

## The Living Books Approach

**The Living Books Approach** is based on the writings of Charlotte Mason, a turn-of-the-century British educator. Miss Mason was appalled by several tendencies she noticed in modern education: (1) the tendency to treat children as containers to be filled with predigested information instead of as human beings; (2) the tendency to break down knowledge into thousands of isolated bits of information to be fed into “container” children; and (3) the tendency to engineer artificial learning experiences.

Mason believed in respecting children as persons, in involving them in real-life situations, and in allowing them to read really good books instead of what she called “twaddle”—worthless, inferior teaching material. She considered education a failure when it produced children able to “do harder sums and read harder books” who lacked “moral and intellectual power.” Children were to be taught good habits, to be involved in a broad spectrum of real-life situations, and given ample time to play, reflect, and create.

Mason's approach to academics was to teach basic reading, writing, and math skills, then expose children to the best sources of knowledge for all other subjects. This meant giving children experiences like nature walks, observing and collecting wildlife; visiting art museums; and reading real books with “living ideas.” She called such books “living books” because they made the subject “come alive” unlike textbooks that tend to be dry and dull and assume the reader cannot think for him/herself.

### **Questions to ask**

- Does our family love to read?
- Do we enjoy the library?
- Will I follow through with teaching my children good habits and character qualities?
- Will I follow through with exposing my children first hand to nature and to great art?

### **Strengths of the Living Books approach**

- Treats children as active participants in the learning process
- Encourages curiosity, creative thinking and a love of learning
- Eliminates meaningless tasks, busywork
- Exposes children to real objects and books instead of interactions with distilled information

### **Weaknesses of the Living Books approach**

- May neglect higher level studies because of its emphasis on art, literature and nature study
- May become too eclectic

## Eclectic or Mixed Approach

A blend of different approaches. For example, they may use traditional math and science textbooks, but build unit studies around historical periods that include language arts, music, art and philosophy.